

TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING
May 10, 2017
Nathan Hale-Ray High School Auditorium

The special meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Raymond Willis at the auditorium of the Nathan Hale Ray High School. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members
Raymond Willis, Chairman
Robert Bennett, Secretary
William DiCristofaro
Bruce Dutch
Greg Lauria
Harvey Thomas

Also present:
Emmett Lyman, First Selectman
Bryan Perry, Chairman, Board of Education
Bryan Reas, Superintendent of Schools
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director
Approximately 45 individuals were in the audience.

OLD BUSINESS

a. **2017-2018 Budget Proposed Budget:**

Review and Discussion:

Chairman Willis thanked the audience for coming. Mrs. Varricchio advised that Board members received revised materials regarding budget reductions made and correcting typographical errors. Mr. Willis inquired if these changes were posted on the website. Mrs. Varricchio advised that some materials were posted others were for Board of Finance members only.

Mr. Willis stated that the purpose of this meeting was to provide opportunity for the public to comment on and ask questions about the budget. He stated that at its last meeting the Board of Finance approved the budget that it will go to referendum with. He requested that speakers keep their comments to two minutes and he requested questions and suggestions on actual budget numbers rather than philosophical statements.

Audience Comments:

Joan Dill, Beebe Road, referenced the Citizens' Guide to the Budget and its statement that the budget reflects it will expend \$284,000 less than the current budget year. She stated that it is allocating \$503,000 less to fund capital and debt service and is therefore misleading. She raised concern that this budget once again kicks the can down the road.

Mrs. Dill also stated that the Board of Finance asked for citizen's comments and suggestions at its last meeting, however, it has not had any public discussion on the comments raised. She again questioned why increased funding for gymnasium staffing could not be done with volunteers. She added that in these volatile times, it is necessary to justify every dollar spent.

Mr. Willis responded that that Board of Finance appreciates what the taxpayers are saying and is doing its best to get the best value for every tax dollar. He added that the Board is pursuing opportunities for cost cutting as well as ways to increase revenues.

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that the capital projects that were delayed within the budget are not projects that have already been approved.

Bill Cross, Alger Road, raised concern with the senior citizen population in town living on fixed incomes. He stated that social security has had zero increases for the past two years, the circuit breaker program is being cut 53%, yet large raises are incorporated within the budget. He stated that this budget will reduce the standard of living for our most vulnerable population. He stated that he felt additional oversight was needed prior to moving forward.

Mrs. Varricchio responded that the cuts to the circuit breaker program are state cuts.

Jeff Bernardo, Daniels Road also expressed concern that suggestions were made at the last meeting regarding areas for possible reduction in cost and that there was no discussion. For example, he noted that it was suggested to cut a secretary, he questioned why the Board offered opportunity for comment when it does not listen to any of it.

Charlotte Gelston, Bogel Road, offered a concrete suggestion. She noted that the Building Inspector position was cut to part-time, she questioned why we still needed a full time Land Use Administrator. She stated reduction of that position would generate considerable savings. Mr. Willis offered Mr. Lyman the opportunity to respond, Mr. Lyman stated that the Land Use Department is still busy. He also stated that the Building Inspector received an offer from another town that was too good to refuse. The part-time is a temporary trial and may or may not continue depending upon how it works. Mrs. Gelston continued that she thought the idea merited looking into and added that lots of time no one is in the Land Use Office.

Mrs. Gelston continued that when the Building Inspector is working for the town they should be in the town. She recommended posted hours. Mrs. Gelston recognized the need to make hard choices, she stated that she is not seeing cuts, but seeing items pushed out, such as bringing the libraries into ADA compliance.

Terry Dickinson stated that the budget brought before the citizens is an embarrassment. She stated that cuts need to be made before it goes to the people for a vote.

Michelle Grant, 40 Sipples Hill Road stated that she is a disgruntled citizen. She stated that she sees waste all over town. She sees road crew personnel standing around on the side of the road and not working and she stated that she did not believe that town personnel should be getting an increase in pay.

Todd Gelston, 50 Bogel Road, stated that he felt three IT positions was excessive for the Town. He advocated cutting one full time employee. He also suggested that hiring a company to maintain the IT infrastructure would be cheaper than the \$180,000 spent in salary. Mr. Gelston continued that the budgetary problems are not going to go away and he suggested a five-year plan. He also reminded the Board that a special assessment may be necessary if towns are saddled with the State teacher's pension responsibilities. He noted that the devil is in the detail.

Dick Everett, Town Street opined that the budget presented is crazy nuts.

Bill Wamester, Cragmere Road, noted disappointment that despite the apparent purpose of this meeting, the budget seems to be a fait accompli.

Laurie Alt, East Shore Drive advocated for technology at the schools and commended the thankless task of the Board of Finance.

Kate O'Boyle, Main Street, stated that she was inspired by the amount of passion for our municipality and optimistic about its future. She was pleased to see democracy in action and was hopeful that the elected leaders were listening.

Brad Parker, noted that it is very easy to run the town from the grandstands, but much more difficult in actuality. People cannot understand that unless they have done it. He has done it. He further stated that retired state employees are still receiving 3% raises. Mr. Parker thanked and applauded the job of the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen and added that if anyone had a crystal ball, they should go to the casino and donate their winnings to the Town. He added that budgeting is a very painful process and this year has been the worse.

Terry Dickinson responded that as the spouse of a retired state worker, such raises are not occurring. She further added that that she is offended by Brad's comments. She also inquired about tennis courts being refurbished within the budget and stated that such item should be a wish and not a need. Mrs. Dickinson added that state contracts are broken, town contracts can be broken also.

Chris Read, Hemlock Valley Road Extension, commented that the town needs to be prepared for the longer term with less and less reliance on state funding. The increases in taxes for people on a fixed income has impact on their quality of life. He encouraged the Board of Finance to develop budgeting with tiers based on what the state does. He encouraged more community conversation as to what priorities should be.

Sally Merry Willis, stated that she loved watching this debate. She stated that she is married to the Board Chairman and that his philosophy is always a zero increase. The reason that there is a proposed increase is because he has a heart. She noted that the people are the heart of this community and all have needs to make this town great that they are passionate about. She noted the hours and hours her husband spends on the phone working on the budget, and she encouraged more people to be involved. She suggested that ten people meet under the Board of Finance and each have ten more working with them to really delve into items to bring in more revenue and reduce costs. As a group we could accomplish great things. She challenged Chris Read to work with her for long term solutions.

Todd Gelston inquired what the costs are for staffing the police department. Mrs. Varricchio stated that there are four full time officers and three-part time officers. The Police Department budget is \$383,766. She added that capital equipment is not included in that figure.

Mr. Gelston reiterated that he felt that \$113,000 for half a year of operating costs for the new municipal office building is excessive.

Chris Read accepted the challenge posted by Mrs. Willis.

Karin Blaschik stated that a line-by-line review occurs at the subcommittee level of the Board of Education and added that no one ever comes.

Charlotte Gelston inquired where the money has been spent for the vice principal that is referenced in the budget but has not been employed. Superintendent Reas stated that there are not funds for the position in the budget, nor have there been since the position was vacated. He believed that the position is being picked up from the administrator's contract and causing confusion.

Harvey Thomas addressed the staffing in the Land Use Office raised earlier. He advised that there has been a reduction in staffing as the former Zoning Enforcement Officer was not replaced and those duties now fall to the Land Use Officer. He also concurred with the need to develop a methodology for projecting budgets four to five years out. He stated that he believed it would be a very worthwhile exercise.

Lisa Conroy, Westwood Drive, thanked the Board for all of their efforts. She stated that she appreciated the Citizen's Guide; she found it clear and concise.

Mr. Willis closed public comments.

Mr. Willis noted that May 24th would be the town meeting to send the budget to referendum on June 6th. He solicited additional comments from the Board, none were offered. He asked for a vote to reaffirm the budget to move forward.

Vote to Send to Town Meeting:

Motion was made by Mr. DiCristofaro to present to the annual budget meeting scheduled to be called by the Board of Selectmen for May 24, 2017 at 8:00 pm at the Town Meeting Hall a total budget of \$30,915,470 based on the grand list as of October 1, 2016 of \$858,490,432. The budget would require a mill rate increase of .50 mills or a 2.1% tax increase. Mr. Lauria seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Appointment of Auditor:

Motion was made by Mr. Thomas to appoint Blum Shapiro & Company PC as the Town of East Haddam Auditor for the July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017 fiscal year audit. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Mr. DiCristofaro to adjourn at 8:01 pm. Mr. Lauria seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette