

TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Public Hearing Minutes
April 10, 2019
Nathan Hale Ray High School
Friedman Auditorium

Mr. DiCristofaro called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members

William DiCristofaro, Chairman
Gregory Lauria, Secretary
Bruce Dutch
Todd Gelston
Tracey Gionta
Harvey Thomas

Others

Emmett J. Lyman, First Selectman
Debra Denette, Town Clerk and Recording Secretary
Bryan Perry, Board of Education Chairman
Brian Reas, Superintendent of Schools
Cindy Varricchio, Finance Director

Approximately 35 staff and citizens were in the audience.

Mr. DiCristofaro pointed out the emergency exits. He thanked the audience for coming.

Mr. Lauria read the legal notice for the Public Hearing as follows:

LEGAL NOTICE TOWN OF EAST HADDAM BOARD OF FINANCE PUBLIC HEARING
NATHAN HALE-RAY HIGH SCHOOL 7:00 PM WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 2019 The Board
of Finance will hold a public hearing to review the 2019-2020 proposed budget for
Board of Selectmen and Board of Education expenses and revenues. A Citizens' Guide
with information on the proposed budget will be provided as an insert in the April 4th
East Haddam News. The proposed budget will be on the town website at
www.easthaddam.org and copies are also available in the Town Clerk's Office or by
calling (860) 873-5022. Dated this 28th day of March 2019 William M. DiCristofaro,
Chairman

Board and Committee members were introduced. Mr. DiCristofaro noted that there is an additional \$124,000 in the budget to address dead and dying trees along the town's roadside, he noted that there is an additional \$100,000 to provide for temporary help in the public works department due to damage sustained to our roads in connection with a September 2018 storm. He noted that there is funding for a School Resource Officer and for assistance with Human Resources shared among the Town and Board of Education, he added that there is the potential that such services will be

outsourced. Mr. DiCristofaro commended staff and volunteers for their numerous hours spent in moving the budget forward.

Mr. DiCristofaro solicited comments from the audience.

Deb Denette, Schulman Veselak Road, thanked the Board for its dedication, she stated that she felt that the budget was thoroughly vetted.

Bill Cross, Alger Road, questioned the difference between two documents on the website. Finance Director Cindy Varricchio provided clarification. Responsive to further questioning regarding salaries, Mrs. Varricchio advised that salaries were transferred out of shared services and put into General Government. She emphasized that it was not an increase, but a shift. Mrs. Varricchio further reported that the budget reflects additional hours for firefighters and a return to a full time Building Inspector. Mr. DiCristofaro suggested that additional information be provided to Mr. Cross regarding salaries outside of the budget hearing process.

David Holahan, Hopyard Road. Mr. Holahan questioned the amount of the budget increase if debt service was taken out of the budget. Mrs. Varricchio responded that she would email the figures.

Joe Zaid, Acorn Drive, expressed appreciation for the work done. He questioned why The Transfer Station budget was increasing by \$100,000. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that last year's budget was reduced by \$100,000 in anticipation of savings that did not materialize. He acknowledged issues with the TRANSFER STATION and advised that small incremental improvements are being made by the Selectmen. He added that the Board of Finance had good conversation with the Director of Public works to understand the challenges. Mr. Zaid stated his opinion that the Transfer Station should be self-supporting.

Susan Link, Beebe Road. Mrs. Link stated that she voted against the budget that the Board of Selectmen brought forward and she thanked the Board of Finance for its additional work on it. Mrs. Link stated that she was not in favor of the \$150,000 allocation for tree removal without a solid plan in place; she further stated that there is generally funding going back into the general fund at year's end and she does not want to see the people over taxed unnecessarily.

Mr. DiCristofaro acknowledged that many of the surrounding towns are budgeting less for tree removal. He noted, however, that East Haddam is unique due to its large size. He stated that the Board recommended resolution over a four-year timeframe. It was noted that a lesser amount could be budgeted for a longer duration.

Mr. Holahan, Hopyard Road received clarification that the \$150,000 budgeted amount is anticipated for each year of the next four.

Michael Callahan, Augusta Circle. Mr. Callahan raised concern with the spending trends over the past three-year period while the median income has decreased. He stated that we should not be asking our residents to pay more than the grand list growth.

Bob Morsch, Landing Hill Road. Mr. Morsch noticed that efforts are in progress, which he was pleased to see. Mr. Morsch inquired whether the Board of Finance reviewed per pupil costs in connection with

the budget. Mr. DiCristofaro responded affirmatively. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that a study was done earlier supporting the three school system. Superintendent Reas noted additional challenges due to special education and the size of our town. Mr. Morsch stated that he understood economies of scale and added that he hoped that the Board continues to monitor as there is a demographic shift. Superintendent Reas responded that the Board has made adjustments that have resulted in substantial savings to the town.

Terry Barr, noted that he has seen his taxes double since he has been here. He noted that he lives on the Moodus Reservoir, which he described as dying. He was advised that the budget supports each lake in the amount of \$7,500 via match. The Moodus Reservoir Preservation Group is anticipating the purchase of an eco-harvester for which there is \$15,000 in town funding.

Mr. Cross, Alger Road. Mr. Cross returned discussion to salaries. He noted that even with the shift of items the cost of the benefits seemed excessive.

Mr. Morsch inquired how overtime was managed. He was assured that there are controls in place.

Mr. Callahan noted that the student population is down to 1,009 students. He stated that the per pupil cost of our cohorts is \$16,000 compared to our \$19,000. He stated that our test scores do not stand out. Superintendent of schools, Brian Reas, responded that there is more to define a student than test scores. He further stated that students have been making steady growth.

Linda Stuhlman, Palmer Martin Road. Mrs. Stuhlman stated that every year there is always a budget increase. She stated that she did not understand why this had to be. She noted that with the current unstable economy, perhaps raises could be curtailed. She also inquired about the status of the second police car. Mrs. Stuhlman was advised that due to significant cost savings, two police cars will be purchased, and one car will be moved down to the Building Official.

Mr. DiCristofaro solicited comments from the Board. Mr. Lauria expanded on the enrollment study and stated that enrollment is expected to be relatively stable over the next decade.

Mrs. Gionta questioned the position of \$75,000 for the SRO. It was noted that it is in the Contingency budget, until the position is negotiated with the police union and then it will be transferred to that line.

Motion was made by Mr. Thomas to close the Public Hearing at 8:03 pm. Mr. Gelston seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra Denette