

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
BOARD OF FINANCE**

March 12, 2012

7:00 pm

Nathan Hale Ray High School - Cafeteria

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the East Haddam Board of Finance was called to order by Chairman Paul Maxwell on Monday, March 12, 2012 at 7:02 pm at the NHRHS cafeteria.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

In attendance:

Board of Finance Members:

Paul Maxwell, Chairman

Robert Bennett

Harvey Thomas

Bruce Dutch

Susan Link

Others:

Mark Walter, First Selectman

Emmett Lyman, Selectman

Cindy Varricchio, Finance Administrator

Denise Dill, Tax Collector

Deb Denette, Town Clerk and BOF recording secretary

Board of Education Members:

Nancy Haslam, Chairman

Bill Barney

Deb Fiala

Bryan Perry

Susan Taylor

Dr. Ellen Solek, Superintendent of Schools

Robert Carroll, School Business Administrator

David Scata, Director of Pupil Services

Dan Alexander

Approval of Minutes

Motion was made by Mrs. Link to approve the minutes of the February 13, 2012 Regular Meeting as presented. Mr. Dutch seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Correspondence

Mr. Maxwell was very pleased to share correspondence received from the Chain Reaction Club, a Club started at the Middle School in conjunction with Youth and Family Services. The letter thanked the Board of Finance for its diligence in taking care of the Town's money.

Chairman's Report

a. Tax Collector's Monthly Report:

Mrs. Dill reported that the present tax collection rate is at 96.78% and that she is still confident that a 99+% collection rate will be attained by year end.

Mrs. Link questioned the refund issued for the current owners of Shady Brook indicating that it is no longer being utilized as a camp. Mrs. Dill stated that the refund was court-ordered and that the former camp is not receiving 100% exemption, however, selected buildings received court-ordered exemption.

2012-2013 Budget Presentation

Board of Selectmen Budget:

Mr. Walter noted additional challenge in this year's budget due to declining revenues. He added that this year's budget includes the Town's continued sharing of positions with other towns, incorporates cross training made possible through union negotiations and reduces the work force through attrition.

The budget includes funds to continue digitization of Town records, a full-time police officer and expands the hours for the fire department for improved public safety and increases support for the libraries. He added that the budget calls on the Town's reserves in the amount of \$620,000.

Mr. Walter highlighted the following:

- \$15,000 is being requested for supplemental wages at the Town hall for special projects and office coverage for staff absences.
- Funding is included for tuition reimbursement for employees in the amount of \$5,000. The individual reimbursement is capped at \$2,000 annually.
- Agriculture Commission funding to prepare open space fields to be farmed and a well installed. Mr. Walter stated that a grant is being pursued. Mr. Thomas noted that this item will come back through Town Meeting to utilize the fields when finalized.
- Discussions for increased regionalization for Animal Control are being held.
- The Recreation Commission is looking at fee increases. The goal is for this program to be self-sustaining. A survey of area towns indicates that our fees are low in comparison.
- Mr. Walter reviewed the police patrol hours over the past few years, and noted that the increased need is primarily due to substance issues within our Town. (Mrs. Link requested a breakdown of the various calls attended by fire and police).
- \$30,000 has been reduced for heating at the old middle school. Some funding remains for spot heating and dehumidification.
- Bathroom facilities need to be renovated at the Transfer Station
- Costs for cleaning and maintenance at the Senior Center have increased.
- Both the Board of Education and Town have incorporated funds to continue the programs run by the Early Childhood Development Council which was started by a grant through the United Way.
- Debt service was reported down as a high school bond was retired.

- Public works is looking to purchase a mini excavator to assist with storm water management issues.
- The Public Works Administrator and Road Superintendent are both trained, per State Statute, as Tree Wardens.
- Funds are incorporated to update the software for the road maintenance program.

Mr. Thomas questioned the public works piece of the budget, particularly the specifics of the road work. Mr. Walter advised that Mrs. Lunt will attend the March 19th meeting.

Mr. Walter reported that reserves have been set aside for the purchase of a new fire truck, however, the purchase of a different type of vehicle, a combination rescue, ladder, pumper, is being researched which may delay acquisition of the planned purchase. He added that light towers are being systematically installed on all the rescue vehicles.

Mr. Bennett raised question with the \$10,000 budgeted to upgrade emergency management radios. He noted that a large project may be necessary in the future, and he wanted assurance that a radio purchased today would be compatible with the system contemplated for tomorrow.

Mrs. Varricchio provided a revenue summary.

- Property taxes make up 76% of the Town's budget.
- Revenues from Town Aid Road (TAR), Local Capital Improvement Program (LOCIP), casino funds and grants were reviewed.
- Interest Income has been reduced to by \$52,500 due to declining interest rates.

Board of Education Presentation

Dr. Solek presented the Board of Education's budget request of \$18,712,790, representing a 2.01% increase over last year's budget and an increase of \$369,157 over last year. She stated that the budget proposed was based on the following five goals:

1. Accountability and achievement
2. Scientific research based interventions
3. Alignment with district plans
4. Collaboration and fiscal responsibility
5. 21st century technology integration

Dr. Solek stated that the Board of Education is supporting full day kindergarten in this budget. She stated that the staffing changes involve the transfer of 1 FTE teacher and 1 FTE paraprofessional and the hiring of a .5 teacher and .5 paraprofessional. She noted that additional staffing costs are offset by the reduction of the mid-day bus run.

She reported that salaries were noted to be the largest part of the budget and are fixed costs according to contract. The contract increases and steps were briefly reviewed. State funding was reported to be remaining level.

Several newer mandates and responses to them were discussed, particularly Scientific Research Based Interventions and a new mandate that requires assessment similar to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) utilized in special education to be required district wide for

each student. She stated that creative staff, technology and time will be required to accomplish individual student success plans.

Dr. Solek reported that per pupil costs have increased from 2006-2007 at \$11,188 to \$13,563 in 2010-2011. Mrs. Link noted that is a 21% increase. Mr. Maxwell noted that there has been a large decrease in enrollment over the past few years. He inquired as to why the same work force was still necessary.

Dr. Solek responded that recent budgets have eliminated a health teacher, a world language teacher, this current budget transfers two personnel to kindergarten from other areas that will have reduced sections. Mr. Maxwell requested additional documentation to see areas where attrition, cuts and reassignments have occurred to address the decreased population. Dr. Solek stated that she will endeavor to get documentation to him prior to the next meeting.

Discussion was held regarding the proposal for full day kindergarten. Dr. Solek advised that there will be an option for parents to pick up their kindergarten children mid-day should they not be in favor of having their child attend a full day program. Dr. Solek noted that state expectations continually rise and kindergarten students are now required to perform to the prior standard of a first grade student.

Mr. Maxwell inquired about the true cost of a full day program. Dr. Solek responded that it would be \$474,334. She further stated that the traditional program which includes mid-day transportation would represent a reduction of \$71,178. It was noted that if the staff were reduced and not transferred and the traditional program were run, it would represent a much larger figure. Mr. Maxwell stated that he keeps hearing that full day kindergarten is only going to cost \$14,000. He stated he would like to see the figures. He requested Dr. Solek to provide those figures on Monday as well.

Mrs. Haslam noted disappointment with the questions regarding full day kindergarten as clearly the benefits are so well documented. She stated that she was very disappointed with the focus.

Mrs. Link added that once the Board of Finance provides the funding to the Board of Education it can spend it where it wishes. She stated that the Board of Finance may choose to cut a dollar amount of a specific program; however, if the Board of Education believes in it, it may fund it anyway.

Mr. Maxwell stated that some students may not have the attention span at that age, however, that it is for the Board of Education to decide; he stated that he just wants to know more about the costs.

Dr. Solek stated that of the 80 families identified to have students attend full day kindergarten, 70 are in favor of expanding the program to full day, 10 are not.

First Selectman's Report

Mr. Walter reported that there have been continued reports of mountain lion sightings in the area.

Finance Administrator's Report

a. February YTD Budget Reports:

Mrs. Varricchio noted that we are tracking well for both revenue and expenses.

b. 2012-2013 Budget Meeting Schedule:

The budget workshop schedule was reviewed—Monday, March 19, Tuesday, March 20 and Tuesday, April 3 are scheduled meeting dates for budget review and discussion. The Board discussed the departments that they wished to meet with further.

Liaison reports

Nothing noted.

Audience

No comments.

Unfinished Business

Mr. Walter noted that bids were opened this afternoon for a replacement generator at the Town Garage and that NorPro of East Haddam was low bidder at \$19,300. Bids ranged up to \$40,000.

New Business

a. Wheelchair-Accessible Motor Vehicle (Senior Bus) Grant:

The Town is receiving a 2008 Senior Bus for no cost from the DOT. The bus once belonged to the Red Cross and is no longer needed by them.

Motion by was made by Bruce Dutch to recommend that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for the acceptance of a 2008 Ford Wheelchair-Accessible Motor Vehicle for Services to Elderly and/or Disabled Persons. Mr. Bennett seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Bennett raised concern that the bus is in good working order before the Town accept it. Mr. Walter advised that the Town can return the bus if it no longer wants it. Mr. Thomas reminded Mr. Maxwell that they had yet to vote on the motion on the floor.

Motion unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Mr. Dutch to adjourn at 9:15 pm. Mrs. Link seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Deb Denette