

BOARD OF FINANCE
February 25, 2009
Town Hall Meeting Room 8:00 PM

Board of Finance reviews Board of Education Budget

Meeting called to order by Chairman O'Brien at 8:02 PM.

Present: Board of Finance members Chairman O'Brien, Vice Chair Sargent, David Muller, Bob Atkinson, Michael Carter, Melissa Koller and Patty Kopas. Secretary Donna M. Anastasia by channel 79 broadcast. Board of Education members, Chair Ellen Uzenoff, Dr. Jo-Ann Keating, Superintendent Jerry Belair, Town Administrator Tom Landry, First Selectman Woody Bliss, Kim Donnelly of the Weston Forum, several residents, committee members and employees in attendance.

Ms. Uzenoff made opening remarks regarding the budget workshops and the opportunity for all parties to collaborate and work towards a zero based budget. She acknowledged the clearly outlined budget document prepared by Dr. Keating and stated that the board has worked very hard trying to reduce costs where possible and maintain the quality of education for Weston. Ms. Uzenoff went over the Internal Service Fund, the self insured/fully funded plan and the OPEB payments. She stated that programs have been tightened, staff reductions have been made and some class sizes are up. She explained that the final budget is not yet complete until all bids are in.

Mr. Belair commented on the importance of collaboration with the community, with an expanded team and working with other schools to share ideas towards a fiscal plan keeping in mind the state of the economy. Mr. Belair feels the budget was prepared with balance and restraint.

Dr. Keating went over the Internal Services Fund which was established in 2006 in the event claims were excessive. There was discussion regarding the use of a portion of these funds to cover increased costs budgeted for next year. Four carrier bids are in (Aetna, Anthem, Signa and Healthnet) Mr. Carter suggested a consultant 'second opinion' of the current health benefit package for the BOE. Dr. Keating said it would take approximately 3 weeks for the final decision regarding the carrier choice and actuals.

There was discussion regarding salaries and step increase particulars from Mr. Belair. Mr. Sargent suggested a salary freeze for both union and non-union staff. The BOE agreed to review this however Ms. Uzenoff noted that if a salary change is to be revisited you open all areas of the union contract. Mr. Sargent felt that an overall freeze would also allow people to keep their jobs. Mr. O'Brien would like to the salary increases as a whole to 'slow down' as these numbers drive the budget upward for the next two years.

The BOE has reduced staff by seven people including benefits.

There was some discussion regarding summer school and associated costs. Mr. Belair said the BOE is exploring initiatives with other school districts to possibly centralize.

There was discussion regarding the PPC and the factors that go into this cost. Mr. Belair noted that the BOE met with other schools last summer and have analyzed the costs that drive up the PPC factor. Weston ranks 1 in DRG PPC; Mr. Belair noted that the percentage increase PPC is less than the state average of some other schools in the area. Mr. Belair went over the costs that drive this number upward such as employee salaries and benefits, instructional supplies purchasing services and plant services. Plant services encompassing grounds maintenance, the Middle School pool, mile of safety, energy costs and the Zenon plant. He also stated the district size affects overall PPC.

Mr. Sargent discussed the staff costs and this being the driver of the increasing PPC and would like to have a commitment from the BOE regarding possible salary freezes and efforts made as to class sizes. Mr. Sargent noted that many towns and cities are targeting these very issues in light of the current economy.

Mr. Muller expressed concern regarding salaries, however he also noted that re-opening negotiations could cost the town 30K.

Mr. Belair discussed the TV studio project; 60 students are currently enrolled in the videography program. The studio could also be used for broadcasting and possibly as a teaching component. Other technology options were discussed such as netbooks and freeware that could possibly bring the costs down of purchasing new computers.

Ms. Kopas discussed 'other duties' of the teaching staff i.e. bus duty, meeting time. She also inquired as to the necessity of expenses associated with conference travel.

Special Education outplacements was discussed regarding grant reimbursements. Mr. Belair stated there is some reimbursement and any stimulus monies received for Special Ed must be used for *new* programs and services.

The board would like an update on the union contract at the next meeting.

The Middle School railings were discussed with Dan Clarke, Director of Facilities. He stated that the Middle school pool stairwell railings were not up to code and the request is for full replacement. Mr. Sargent suggested modifying the railings as opposed to a total replacement. Mr. Clarke will look into pricing alternatives for the railings.

Meeting adjourned at 10:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted
Donna M. Anastasia, Secretary