

## **Board of Selectmen's meeting**

**February 4, 2009**

Present: First Selectman Woody Bliss; Selectman W. Glenn Major; Selectwoman Gayle Weinstein; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Administrative Assistant Judy DeVito; Superintendent Jerry Belair; Finance Director Joanne Keating; Ellen Uzenoff, PTO President, Members of the Board of Education and Members of the School Administration.

**This meeting was recorded and video taped and the tapes are available in the Selectmen's office.**

Mr. Bliss called the meeting to order at 7:31pm.

Pledge of Allegiance-Jerry Belair lead the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance

Discussion/decision regarding the appointment of Michael F. Bellacosa to fill the vacancy (Helene Weatherill) on the Library Board for a term to expire December 15, 2011- Mr. Bellacosa said that he and his wife have lived in Weston for about 13 years. He left J.P. Morgan at the end of last year, after working on Wall Street for 20 years. He has been a literacy promoter and tutor for many years and libraries are his favorite public building. He has just started a masters program in Library Information Science.

Ms. Weinstein made a motion to appoint Michael F. Bellacosa to fill the vacancy of Helene Weatherill on the Library Board for a term to expire December 15, 2011. Mr. Major seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Board of Selectmen review Board of Education Budget – Ellen Uzenoff said that they have spent a lot of time fine tuning this budget and she has heard from people in Town that the Board of Education is not willing to make change. She said that is a negative, unfair, untrue statement and she disagrees. The budget presentation shows how lines have been adjusted and the presentation shows an extreme effort to be responsive and responsible. The budget was done from the ground up and was done as a district and everyone participated. She said the budget that is being presented reflects a 2.62% increase but she believes there is room for improvement within that.

The greatest stresses in their budget are health care cost and that figure was projected by their consultants. It is not a nailed down cost yet because they have gone out to bid. This is a fluid document until the Town approves it. She said they have had to take into account that the state is talking about a projected 25% decrease in excess cost and budget around it. She said that is the bulk of the increase in education. There were three viable ways that we might off set some of the monies by bidding out the health care and securing the reduction in the projection. They could defray some of the increases by

using some of the balance of their internal services fund. She said that although there was some disagreement that it behooves them to look at GASB contributions.

Jerry Belair said that this is a need based budget and it is one that is driven by data and that is critical. Their goal was to balance the financial condition of the Town with the pressing needs of education. They examined the enrollment projections and also looked at their curriculum development needs. They looked very carefully at their technology needs. They looked at the safety needs of both the health of the students and the security of the students. Another important driver is the facilities and it is critical that we preserve this investment.

Mr. Belair said we have a very modest decline in enrollment in this upcoming year. In year 2007-2008 they had 2,593 students. Projected for next year are 2,585 students. There are 262 students who are currently enrolled in private education. They opened school this year with 62 additional students than they had projected.

Mr. Belair said the priorities that drove this budget are the class size guidelines, the mandates we needed to be compliant, we needed to continue to be innovative to enhance student learning experiences, continue to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in all of the students, keep the five year curriculum revision cycle on track and continue to improve. They have scaled back on the purchase of instructional resources and there is a base implant in this particular budget. They need to revise curriculum in the areas of talented and gifted, physical education and health, kindergarten through grade five language arts and there is some funding to support that. We need not forget that our facilities require upkeep.

They have a number of health and safety issues. They have more students coming to the school with medical needs. They have an increase of a nurse in the budget, but have offset that cost by restructuring. They have also enhanced some security systems within a few of the schools. They have implemented a number of cost efficient measures one being the transportation system going from a three to a two tier system.

The plan they are presenting represents a 2.62% budget increase over the 2008-2009 budget and also represents 3.7% increase in the per pupil expenses. They are looking at 27 fewer students in 2009-2010 than we did in 2008-2009, but 8 fewer students than two years ago. Although the enrollment in 2008 increased by 19 students in the current year budget they are reducing 8.7 staff positions. In the upcoming budget they are decreasing an additional 8.3 staff positions. Weston class sizes will be bigger than other schools in their DRG.

The major increases amount to \$1,638,904. Health Insurance is the biggest driver with almost \$764,000 increase. An 8% projection in the electricity cost for next year and an increase of \$55,000 in their GASBI expenses. There is a net increase \$1.1million, \$974,000 of that increase is related to health insurance, GASB and the excess cost. Without those items, it leaves an increase of \$180,000 in this budget.

If they have no unusual expense they will be returning \$104,000 to the Town, because they did not use the contingency teacher that they placed into the budget. They also saved some money in administrative salaries as well as in non union represented salaries.

Mr. Bliss asked how they arrived at the projection for the insurance reserve. Ms. Keating said the first five months of the year there experience was high, much higher than they had originally forecasted or experienced last year. She said she looked at the last two years where she has a month by month accounting of their claims experience and looked at the first six months and then looked at the second six months and they are almost within a \$100,000. If that consistency held for another year their claims would be more like 6.9 million rather than 7.3million that was projected for this year.

Mr. Major said when he looks at the budget we did not have to spend all of the dollars that we taxed the residents for. He said our per pupil cost continue to go up with a declining enrollment the jumps are even more significant. Mr. Belair said that was not true, because there growth was at a lesser percentage. Mr. Major said he was hoping to see in both the Selectmen and Board of Education budgets no increase moving forward. He said he would have expected a decrease in the Board of Education budget of \$1.6 million.

Mr. Major said that there appears to be a number of single year savings, where we are going to get bit by what we have done this year. Class sizes have long term budgetary effects where many of the changes done this year really affect a single budget. Mr. Belair said that they also anticipate that they will have some additional cost savings in a few areas.

Mr. Major said it was absolutely staggering the increases that were given and when the Board of Education is negotiating subsequent contracts they cannot lose sight of step increases. He said he was very concerned with the benefits that are going along with salary increases.

Mr. Belair said in the initial proposal to the Board of Education the he was recommending the elimination of both the wrestling and the gymnastics program. During the budget deliberations they looked at alternatives to maintain the program at a lesser cost. They will be co-opting the wrestling program with another district and they have revamped how they would fund gymnastic so they were able to hold on to both programs, but the bottom line for the athletic budget did not change.

Ms. Weinstein asked if we get a booster barn were they expecting any kind of monetary reward from that. It will increase what they make in the concessions, but they were not expecting any gate receipts.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the 42 laptop computers for special education students. Eric said that they were looking at student and staff and some of the computers would need additional hardware.

Ms. Weinstein asked if the ratio of administrative to clerical and support. Mr. Belair said yes and they were below the DRG average in both the building and central office level. Mr. Major said that historically that is an area that has continued to grow.

Mr. Major asked about a list of new initiatives for this year. Ms. Weinstein said that she understood about the academics and having to keep up with the state framework and she agrees that we need to move forward and grow, but it is very hard to justify a TV production studio when we have people who are having their oil tanks drained. Mr. Belair said that this was more than a TV production studio that it relates to having a cable access channel.

Mr. Belair said prior to the construction that they had access to that. During the construction project it took a while to restore the hook-up. The channel became live again last spring, but all the equipment was removed during the construction project, so this is to activate the studio, and have it go beyond cable access, and get the word out about the public schools and other programs. It is also now making a connection to the curriculum. They are looking at a cost of approximately \$150,000. The Education Foundation is taking this on as a primary fund raiser. Ms. Weinstein said this would be the perfect thing to privately fund raise for. Ms. Uzenoff said it is our curriculum to the schools.

Mr. Major said at some point we cannot have every bell and whistle, and we just have to say no. Given the cost and the number of students that it would serve in a school year, it seems like a real luxury. The initial cost for the foundation is \$35,000 and Ms. Uzenoff said she understood the significance of the \$35,000, but that this was not a new initiative. This has been in plan since the beginning of the concept of the renovation of the High School. She said they have now secured a partnership, and this is the beginning of the revitalization. Mr. Major asked if they were going to be looking at another \$35,000 next year and they said no.

Mr. Major asked that if there is an increase in the money coming back from the state that they not just absorb it into their budget. He said he wanted to be sure that the public understands that it does not just get absorbed into the budget.

At 10:00pm Ms. Weinstein made a motion to end the meeting. Mr. Major seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted

Judy M. DeVito  
Administrative Assistant  
Approved 5/7/09