

Public Hearing
April 2rd, 2014 8:00 PM
Weston Middle School Cafeteria

Summaries of the budget are available at the Public Hearing and from the Town Clerk after the hearing. A copy of the detailed budget is also available for public inspection in the office of the Town Clerk.

Present: Board of Finance Chmn Steve Ezzes, board members Michael Carter, Jerry Sargent, Allan Grauber, David Finkel and Melissa Koller. Donna M. Anastasia, Clerk of the meeting. *Not attending Dick Bochinski*

Also present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein, Selectman Dennis Tracey, Town Administrator Tom Landry, Donna Anastasia Clerk of the Meeting, Dr. Colleen Palmer Superintendent of Schools; Town Hall employees and Department Heads; members of the Board of Education; several School Administrators, teachers and personnel. There were approximately 40 others present and Patty Gay from the Weston Forum.

This Public Hearing was called to order by Chmn Ezzes at 8:00 PM

The call of the meeting is made part hereof;

Legal notice is hereby given of the Public Hearings of the Board of Finance of the Town of Weston on Wednesday April 2, 2014 and Thursday April 3, 2014 (if necessary), at 8:00 p.m. at the Weston Middle School Cafeteria, 135 School Road, Weston, CT for the following purpose:

To discuss the proposed budgets for the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Education, Capital Improvements and Debt Service as submitted to the Board of Finance for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2014. Said budgets are as follows:

BOARD OF SELECTMEN’S BUDGET	
General Government	\$6,356,864
Public Safety	2,560,772
Public Works	1,781,736
Sanitation, Health & Environment	349,241

Human Services	634,723
Parks & Recreation	<u>383,732</u>
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET	12,067,068
BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET	47,494,856
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET	1,261,745
DEBT SERVICE BUDGET	6,487,869
GROSS TOWN BUDGET	67,311,538
Less Estimated Revenues	(2,928,112)
NET TOWN BUDGET	64,383,426

Dated at Weston, Connecticut
This 20th day of March, 2014

Steve Ezzes
Chairman
Board of Finance

Chairman Ezzes welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the Public Hearing. He advised that the board will be accepting comments and questions on the Town Operating budget followed by the Board of Education budget.

First Selectman Weinstein thanked everyone and asked that the board support the Town budget as presented. In addition she would like everyone to support the 15K to be used for the Senior Center. She noted that the budget was prepared responsibly and supports the needs of the community.

Amy Sanborn, Old Hyde Rd Chm Library Board Ms. Sanborn stated that this is an exciting time for the library. We have launched a new website at no cost to the town, we have embarked on the planning for space project and our library is evolving. However we would like additional staff now as our current staff is stretched to capacity. We hope the board will consider staffing right now before the project is complete. The town deserves the best library along with the best schools..

Megan Couch, Aspetuck Glen -please support the BOE budget as presented and do not cut staff.

Phil Schafer. BOE Chairman – Mr. Schafer explained that although we would all like to see the number low there have been extra costs associated with this budget i.e. contractual increases for employees and health care costs similar to what other towns face. We have everything to keep the budget down and we are working our way up from zero. Millions of dollars have been saved over the years one being our energy costs. Overall our board and administration has done a great job to keep this budget down, maintain excellent schools offering a quality education.

Mr. Ezzes wanted to inform those in attendance that the budget process begins months before this point in the process. There are tri-board meetings and preliminary discussions and issues that are scrutinized in detail very early in the process.

Mr. Carter wanted the audience to think about two items he is concerned with, 1) any additional information on enrollment and 2) philosophically the concept of a contingency teacher put in the budget.

Woody Bliss, Former First Selectman – Mr. Bliss thanked the board and wanted to talk about an investment the town needs to make; an investment in the Senior Center. The program right now is very tiny compared to what it should be for Weston. Seniors play a very important role in town. Seniors will retire and move away and most likely it will be families with children buying those homes. We spend very little on our seniors as compared to other towns. For example Westport currently is open 50 hours a week and they have put in for another 22 next year. Towns smaller than ours like Redding and Easton have a much larger budget for their seniors than Weston. Please consider not 15K for our seniors but 50K which compared to the BOE is a very small request.

John Richard - Mr. Richard asked about the proposed increase in the mill rate.

First Selectman Weinstein explained that a revaluation and a drop in the Grand list are the causes.

Dawn Watson, Walnut Lane- Ms. Watson explained that her child is in private school and her decision to bring her child back into the Weston school will be based on decisions made regarding the BOE budget.

Bob Ferguson, Hickory Lane – noted that the main topic at “Speak Up” was the Senior Center. The idea of 15K for the seniors while we increase the school budget 2M is a travesty. Mr. Ferguson would like the seniors to receive 50K.

First Selectman Weinstein commented that Wilton and Redding went through a revaluation last year and what we saw is that housing has gone up 3-4%; our prices are in line. The Senior Center plans are still not finalized. If for example we build a new play area the parking for seniors will increase. And if the BOE offers additional space I will ask for a supplemental appropriation.

Margaret Wirtenberg, Wilson Rd – we need to do something now for the Seniors.

Woody Bliss, Grays Farm Rd – we came up with 50K by totaling extra hours to five days a week instead of three and some additional programs. This figure does not reflect any cost for space.

Mr. Ezzes commented that he felt the 50K was premature and would like to see a concise proposal on the table. He added that he was on the Board of Finance in Westport when that Senior Center was built.

Chairman Ezzes asked if there were any further questions/comments on the Town Operating budget and with none he asked for public comment on the Board of Education Budget

Nancy Cohen, Hillcrest Lane- thanked the BOE for all of the work on the budget. I support the Senior Center and the BOE budget, we should have both

Michael Schlechter, Woods End – the cost per taxpayer for the BOE request would result in about .96 cents per resident. The impact is tiny.

Sarah Schlechter, Woods End – I support fully the BOE budget.

Ann Troxell, Lyons Plains Rd – support the BOE budget and supports the performing arts- k-12.

Namuk Cho, Walnut Lane – noted there has only been a small drop in home values. Families move to Weston for the schools. He does not want requests lowered and also feels 15K is too small for the seniors.

Frank Billone, Curiosity Lane – noted we are facing high tax increases. Weston must increase home values. We looked for a rural community with good schools but people are now looking for other things as well. Spending is too high. Most homes are selling below 1M and in two cases the homeowner sold at a 40% loss.

Dan McNeil, Hurlbutt PTO President- pre funding a teacher is a very good move. Competition for good teachers is fierce. We would not have to wait and risk losing good people if the fund were available.

Rose Horowitz, Silver Ridge – I've lived here for 20 years support the seniors and also the need in the performing arts. –

Lee McKay, Ravenwood – fully support the school budget. There are certain reasons why there are increases some items being essential. Personally support seniors and ctr.

Harvey Bellin, Maple St – would like to congratulate Steve Ezzes as Chairman and acknowledge Patty Kopas and Mike O'Brien for all of their work and years on the Board of Finance. He also thanked Dr. Palmer and Gayle Weinstein on their continued work.

Regarding the contingency teacher I would like to say that any BOE increase is always cumulative and permanent. Most importantly as we go into union contract negotiations a permissive attitude will devour us.

Dr. Palmer – regarding the Performing Arts if you did not see Carousel it was wonderful. We did acknowledge when we went into discussions that we did desire funding for a supervisory arts teacher. We try to bring the most accurate information as possible to the board. Also as an update the issue of a contingency teacher could be perceived as always being in the base – we have had an agreement and it is agreed to roll it over and if the teacher is not needed.

Chmn Ezzes asked if there were any further comments or questions before the Board and thanked all who attended the Public Hearing.

Having no further business Mr. Ezzes adjourned the Public Hearing at 8:58 PM

Respectfully submitted

Donna M. Anastasia
Town Clerk