

February 13, 2012
Board of Selectmen reviews First Selectman's budget

Present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein; Selectman David Muller; Selectman Dennis Tracey III; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Administrative Assistant Judy DeVito; Finance Director Rick Darling; Department heads; residents and members of the press.

This meeting was recorded and videotaped. The tapes are available in the Selectmen's office.

Ms. Weinstein called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

Pledge of Allegiance-

Board of Selectmen reviews First Selectman's Budget – Ms. Weinstein made a presentation which is attached to the minutes.

Administration and Finance: Mr. Muller noted that the First Selectman's salary remained flat.

Mr. Muller asked if the Selectman expenses reimbursement was a new category. Ms. Weinstein said no, she does not put in for expenses but if there was a new Selectman that came in and wanted to put in for expenses it is appropriate for them to do so.

Mr. Muller asked who the overtime budget covered. Ms. Weinstein said the Administrative Assistant gets paid for the Board of Selectmen's meetings and also the people who do weekend cleaning, building checks on weekends and snow removal at Town Hall.

General Administration: Mr. Muller asked about the postage cost since there is so much email now. Ms. Weinstein said that there are big mailings that still go out. The dog licenses, Town wide mailings etc.

Mr. Muller asked about the Community Grants account and did we fully utilize the grant line item. Ms. Weinstein said that we did but we had decreased it a few years ago from \$30,000 to \$25,000.

Ms. Weinstein said that when she put the budget together they were anticipating a 10% increase in health insurance but they still have to wait and see because it might be slightly higher. There may be a change from when the Board of Selectmen vote to when the Board of Finance votes. Workers Compensation is going up 11.7%.

Mr. Tracey asked about the 7% decrease in liability insurance coverage. Mr. Landry said our rate is about the same and there is no decrease in coverage; rather there is a shift from what the school, fire, EMS is paying compared to the Town.

Information Systems: Mr. Muller asked when we used part-timers. Ms. Weinstein responded that this covers the summer interns that we use.

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Election/Registrars: Ms. Weinstein said this budget is up 10.9%. Printing, Binding and Advertising is going up because of the redistricting. Primaries and Referenda are up because it is an election year and we know we are going to have a Republican primary. We will probably have State primaries for the Democrats and the Republicans, and the ATBM is included in the budget.

Board of Finance: This budget is being reduced by \$2,600 for contractual services which is for the audit. The Board of Finance is retaining the current audit firm and the cost will remain the same as last year.

Tax Collector: Ms. Weinstein said after the budget was put together we got the charge from DMV which was \$2,326 and we had budgeted \$2,370. Mr. Muller said since we have the accurate number we should use it.

Legal Counsel: Ms. Weinstein said that she is increasing the litigation expense from \$150,000 to \$160,000. Mr. Muller said he would like to move \$2,600 from Board of Finance to Legal Counsel to make it \$162,600. Mr. Tracey said he did not feel that was close to an accurate number. Mr. Muller said he did not either, but if we try to keep the overall budget number the same as proposed, that is one way of transferring from one item to another and have it be budget neutral. Mr. Tracey asked if we the law firms have estimated the cost of litigation for 2012-13. Ms. Weinstein said she would ask that question before our next meeting.

Conservation Commission: Ms. Weinstein said they looked at what the anticipated expenses are and the number of ongoing cases. The legal notices are tied to the number of permits and those have been going down. If activity goes up she will come back to the board but right now that looks like a good number.

Volunteer Fire Department: They have requested a 5% increase. Ms. Weinstein said she was comfortable giving them ½ of what they asked for.

Fire Marshal: Ms. Weinstein said we increased the overtime amount because the overtime amount has been utilized. Mr. Muller said the Fire Marshal is at 19 ½ hours now and there was a request for 32 hours. How did we end up where we are, and is there flexibility in that number and if so how much flexibility? Mr. Landry said that position is in the bargaining unit. At 20 hours, those positions get full health insurance. The extra hours cost a lot of money because it triggers in other benefits. It's not a threshold that they cross lightly.

Animal Control: Ms. Weinstein said this is not a 14.6% increase. In the past we have been able to use the dog registration fund to offset the budget as an above the line revenue, however new GASB regulations changed the way we can utilize certain funds and we had to eliminate that as an above the line revenue. Other than that, the budget is the same. Mr. Landry said those revenues will still be used to offset the mill rate.

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Communication Center: Ms. Weinstein said we increased the revenue offset. The Tower account has a very healthy balance so we felt that we could use a little bit more than we used last year to offset the budget.

Police Services: Mr. Muller asked with regard to overtime, was this a realistic outlook with current staffing. Chief Troxell said that they are proposing a realistic budget under ideal conditions. He said Sergeant Ferullo will be back, Officer Cascone will be on the road and they will be at full staff going into the new fiscal year. The number for mile of safety will go down because we will have three man shifts during the day.

Mr. Tracey asked about the increase in contracts for technology support. Chief Troxell said they leaned on Sgt. Brodacki for tech support and they have been trying to take a lot of that responsibility off of him. They have someone that they want to hire who has agreed to cover them for \$21,000 to take the burden of off Sgt. Brodacki. Chief Troxell said he did not think that they would have to use that entire number.

Ms. Weinstein said the police put in a request for a Tahoe and a Silverado. The Capital Committee decided to support the Tahoe but not the Silverado.

Public Works/Highway: Ms. Weinstein said we increased the paving budget by \$10,000 which is flexible. Given the condition of some of the roads and the rising cost of asphalt she felt the increase was warranted.

Solid Waste Disposal : Joe Lametta said the \$24,000 is income from recycling. Mr. Tracey asked about the decrease in contractual services. Mr. Lametta said less garbage.

Westport/Weston Health District : Ms. Weinstein said the Health District asked for a 3% increase. This a regional service that we share with Westport and in the past number of years, Westport has not agreed to the increase. If Westport does not agree to the increase then Weston does contribute an increase.

Human Services : Ms. Weinstein said that Suzanne Friedman's hours were increased slightly after Wendy Petty moved to Senior services. Suzanne helps with a lot of the seniors so she felt justified in keeping Suzanne up in that level.

Youth Services: Last year, the Youth Services Director's hours were divided up into 3 days a week for Youth Services and two days a week for Social Services. This budget reflects three days a week for Youth Services. We have eliminated the two days a week that was Youth/Social Services going forward. Grants and receipts off set this budget.

Library: Ms. Weinstein said the one change is we had a below the line revenue which came from the Library overdue book fines and we have agreed to allow the library to purchase new books and electronic resources. We are taking it out of the revenue side and allowing them to run that fund separately.

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Parks and Recreation: Ms. Weinstein said this budget is not seeing a decrease of 9.4%. They are looking at the funds that are generated from this department in the recreation enterprise fund and we will use that to offset the budget. \$20,000 is something that we feel confident taking from the fund this year. It is the first year that we have used this fund to offset the departmental budget.

Parks and Fields: Ms. Weinstein said the difference in this budget is because instead of the Town providing the services and the school paying 70%, they handle the work in house and we now pay them 30%. The estimated budget is reduced from what they had anticipated last year.

Municipal Debt (interest): The interest on municipal debt decreased by 12.9%. We had a settlement from a US Government enforcement action which returned \$167,000 to us. This was a result of a bond issue in 2004. Ms. Weinstein is requesting that we use the settlement offset to reduce our debt since we obtained it from a debt related issue.

Municipal Debt (Principal): This is going up to 6.2%.

Town/School Capital Budget:

Town Vehicle Sinking Fund- This is something that is being proposed this year and has been vetted by the Board of Finance. The procedure will be that if a department needs a vehicle, they will come to the Board of Selectmen who will make a recommendation to the Board of Finance. There is money in the budget this year for vehicles that they are anticipating needing next year. What they are hoping, if they can push off the purchases for 6 months or a year on the long side of that you will be pushing future expenses off as well. There is the added benefit that if a vehicle dies before its life expectancy, we now have money in the sinking fund to replace it. Capital Committee voted to include \$50,000 in the fund this year but she cut that in half to \$25,000.

Town Bridge Repair- the Pent Road Bridge is failing. We put money in the bridge account every year and we are planning on doing this bridge next year. Mr. Muller asked if there were sufficient funds in the account to meet payments for Pent Road Bridge. Mr. Landry said we would not award the contract until a year from now when that Town Meeting and referendum has the done the final appropriation.

Assessor- We will have to do a revaluation next year. The \$60,000 is the first of two parts. This reval, they do not have to go into the homes. The work will be done over two years and it will be an additional appropriation in the following Capital Budget.

Town Building Repairs- This is money that is put in every year to cover all the cost of maintenance and repairs etc. on all the Town Buildings.

Space Needs Review- The police department and communication center is in need of major renovation. The rules for holding juveniles have been changed and the room that we have for holding juveniles are not up to code. We need to look at the campus as a

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whole. The \$40,000 is to conduct a study to figure out what we need to do. Because we are considering the communication center as well as the police department, Ms. Weinstein is proposing in this budget to offset the \$40,000 with money from the Tower account.

Ms. Weinstein said that we would discuss the Board of Education Capital request at the Board of Education meeting. One of the items that was discussed was the Hurlbutt parking lots. Some are cracked and need repaving and we would like to pave the lot that is across the street from the Administration Building. Mr. Muller said when he was on Planning and Zoning, and they approved the construction of that parking lot, it was approved on the condition that it not be paved because of surface area and permeability. They did not want an additional paved surface because of ground water. He asked if this would have to go to Planning and Zoning.

Middle School Wetlands Mitigation- The bids came in very high for this project. If the appropriation of 90,000 is approved we will have appropriated \$330,000.

DPW Sprinkler- This is the second year of an appropriation. There have been problems getting water to the building so that has increased the cost of the project.

Turf Replacement Fund- Ms. Weinstein said she was asking for an increase in the Turf Replacement Fund because we are going to come to a point where the fund does not have enough money to replace the turf. The school will be buying equipment to extend the life of the turf, but that fund is still significantly underfunded. She is trying to avoid having to do a huge appropriation one year.

Park & Recreation Bisceglie Infield- This will be for the third infield. They did two last years and one the year before. It actually costs \$15,000 but Weston Little League has agreed to pay \$5,000 toward this. Ms. Weinstein said she is asking for \$10,000, wants to utilize an offset from Parks and Recreation of \$10,000 from the enterprise fund to cover this.

Ms. Weinstein said the Capital offsets and the special fund drawdown comes to a total of \$215,000. \$50,000 of that is from two different funds, the cell tower account (\$40,000) and the enterprise fund (\$10,000). The rest are the capital project close outs that we did this year.

Mr. Muller asked to get the breakdown of what the costs were when you go over 20 hours for the Fire Marshal's budget. He wanted to know how big of an impact it would have on the budget and how many other positions are capped because of the concern about the impact of the benefits contribution.

Mr. Tracey said the increase seems to be modest, but we are in a time of austerity why can't we just reduce the budget? Ms. Weinstein said 50% of the budget is government, insurance, pension and FICA. Most of that is tied into employees. When you look at the budget there really is nothing else, perhaps the Capital Budget but she is feels it's

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important to maintain or improve the infrastructure. She said the budget was built from the bottom up where they justified every item. The operating budget is a 2.2% increase, it doesn't contain any new initiatives or new projects, it does contain some reduction in work force and she feels she crafted a reasonable operating budget.

Mr. Tracey asked if there was any thought of what the least painful way would be to reduce this budget. Ms. Weinstein said we need to put together a budget that is not painful but reasonable and that is what she thinks this budget is. She said the only way you cut budgets is to cut people and in the last three years that is what they have done.

Ms. Weinstein said that we need to start a strategic planning initiative to figure out what we want this community to be. Mr. Tracey said that he agrees that it is very important for us to be looking forward and to do some really deep thinking about how we can turn this around. Not this year but it is possible to think forward, to come up with ideas. They all involve some level of pain, regionalization involve some level of pain, changing zoning involves a lot of pain, there are a lot of things we can do to reduce the tax in this Town that we don't want to do. He said it was up to us to put out there the ways that we can reduce taxes and let the community discuss them. Ms. Weinstein said she totally agreed. Mr. Muller said if anyone has great ideas please let us know.

Ms. Weinstein asked Mr. Tracey what his suggestions were for reducing the budget. He said we should consider investing some money in real advise on how to save money by regionalizing or doing other things that are structural that will not change the budget for this coming year but will in the in the future. Ms. Weinstein said she agreed but did not understand what he meant by investing in advise. He said it would take a consultant to help us to do it, and said we should schedule a joint meeting of the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen to think through how we start that process.

Respectfully submitted

Judy M. DeVito
Administrative Assistant
Approved 3/15/12