

Special Board of Selectmen's Meeting

February 15, 2011

Present: First Selectman Gayle Weinstein; Selectman David Muller; Selectman Dan Gilbert; Town Administrator Tom Landry; Administrative Assistant Judy DeVito; Finance Director Rick Darling; Superintendent of Schools Dr. John Reed; Finance Director JoAnne Keating; Member of the Board of Education; 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- Phil Schaefer led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance

Board of Selectmen review of the Board of Education Budget – Ms. Weinstein welcomed Dr. Reed back to Weston.

Phil Schaefer, Chairman on the Board of Education said they had three workshops and a fourth meeting where the Board of Education deliberated before approving a budget. The Board of Education has approved a budget for Fiscal Year 2011-12 at 1.27% which they are presenting to the Board of Selectmen. In the DRG A towns and some other towns as well they are seeing proposed operating increases from 2.5% to about 8%. The Board of Education is very proud and pleased that this administrative team was able to bring in such low numbers in response to such adverse economic times. Ms. Weinstein thanked Ms. Keating because she felt she deserved a lot of credit for the savings in the budget.

Mr. Muller said that for him we have crossed a very significant threshold; for the first time, we are in excess of \$18,000 per student. Mr. Schaefer said it is a relative number and they are thrilled that in their DRG, the rate of growth of per pupil cost, except for Darien, is the slowest over the last year or so. Mr. Muller said it is a headline number that we cannot ignore. Ms. Keating said that there is a small group of 30 to 35 students that are in their "high cost category" that represent a very large portion of this number.

Ms. Weinstein said that she had very few problems with this budget but the one issue that she has is the amount of office support in central office. The town has had to make some very difficult decisions over the last three years, and every year we look to see how we can manage more efficiently. Last night, the Board of Selectmen had a discussion about cutting the land use department down to four days a week. Ms. Weinstein said that was the one area that she did not feel had been addressed on the school side.

Mr. Schaefer said the Board had a presentation from the administration and they explained their need and what their administrative assistants do, and why they are important. The parallels may not be same. If there was a diminishing load of work that

these people are doing, or the State or Federal government said you do not have to submit as many reports, he assumes the administration would look at it.

Ms. Keating said they have done some major restructuring of the staff, especially in her area to streamline functions and to become more efficient. By doing that, it has enabled them to do their jobs and save all this money. The benefit has been there and the restructuring has taken place. It is very different now than it was five years ago when she first started there. Ms. Weinstein said she was there the evening that the job descriptions were discussed. On one hand they were talking about how specialized everyone was, and on the other hand they were talking about everyone being cross trained. She asked that they take one more look at that area.

Mr. Muller said he had very few questions about the educational component of the budget. We have the best product that you can generate in the State. The education that is provided is superlative. He agreed with Ms. Weinstein that the one thing that is lacking is a look at the efficiency contribution that can be wrung out from the administrative side of the business. In bringing his work experience into this position, we are not doing what a good investor does which is to look to be as efficient as possible and to stretch where possible. He feels that is the one area that needs to be put under the microscope.

Dr. Reed said it is very hard to make analogies between different functions and different enterprises. His staff functions at a high level, they are in the schools. They are doing things that require initiative and effort. He is sure that the Board will go back and think about the suggestions that were made and look at that for the future.

Ms. Weinstein asked, since we now have security cameras in three out of the four schools do they still feel the need to have full time security guards. Ms. Keating said yes because of the model that they have. They have very specific responsibilities in each of the schools in terms of keeping the school monitored throughout the school day. They are also instrumental in our traffic control.

Mr. Gilbert asked how reworking the bus routes have worked out for them.

Ms. Keating said that the routes are shorter and more children are taking the buses. It has saved them hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Ms. Weinstein asked about the Short Wharf expenditure of approximately \$23,000. She asked why we can not get the parents to volunteer their time, the way parents volunteer their time in other aspects of the school and committees. Mr. Bray said they have to give preference to staff because it is Union work. This is something that the school will explore.

Ms. Weinstein said she asked Chief Troxell what he thought was responsible for the increase in cost for the Mile of Safety this past year. He thought the request to have an officer on campus from 7:00am until 4:00pm for the first five weeks of school was a significant driver. Additionally, there has been a manpower deficit due to several line of

duty injuries and an officer on light duty due to maternity. Both the Chief and Sgt. Brodacki are confident that a lot of these issues will be resolved shortly. They felt a more realistic number would be \$35,000. She asked that the Board talk to them and revisit that number.

Ms. Weinstein said they had savings in this year's fiscal budget to purchase equipment for mowers as well as two type two vehicles. Even though she would have probably done the same thing, she wished that Ms. Keating had come to the Capital Committee, Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance to discuss prior to making that decision. That money could have been returned to the Town and there should have been a conversation on how that money should be spent. Ms. Keating said that since she has been here, their capital budget has not consisted of equipment.

Mr. Gilbert asked about the Internal Services Fund. He felt that the Fund was too high and they should consider using the excess to fund a Community center for the Town. Mr. Gilbert asked them to take a look at this reserve and whether or not there is money in this reserve where they could satisfy all their short term needs and still be able to use some of the reserve to refurbish facilities to get that done. Mr. Schaefer said that there are very specific uses for what the money can and cannot be used for.

Ms. Keating said that they have RFP's out for health insurance and they are seriously looking at going back to self funding at this point. The balance sheet in the revenue expenditure statement that has been presented does not include any rate increases. The statements will be revised once the RFP is opened, analyzed and they decide which way they are going to go. Mr. Gilbert said that it is unhealthy from a public policy standpoint to use a reserve like this to pay off running expenses.

Ms. Weinstein thanked the Board of Education for the good job that they had done and said she would still like them to take another look at the central office administrative structure.

At 9:55pm Mr. Muller made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Gilbert seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted

Judy M. DeVito
Administrative Assistant
Approved 03/31/11

