

Public Hearing
March 23rd, 2010 8:00 PM
Weston Middle School Cafeteria

Present: Board of Finance Chairman Mike O'Brien, board members Jerry Sargent, Michael Carter, Steve Ezzes, Bob Atkinson and Patty Kopas. *Ms. Koller did not attend.* Also present First Selectman Weinstein, Selectman David Muller, Selectman Dan Gilbert, former Selectman Glenn Major, former First Selectman Woody Bliss, Town Administrator Tom Landry, many Town Hall Department heads and employees, members of the Board of Education, School personnel including School Administration, Patty Gay from the Weston Forum and approximately 75 residents.

Meeting called to order at 8:00 PM by Board of Finance Chairman Mike O'Brien.

Ms. Weinstein welcomed everyone to the public hearing and stated that the budget was prepared with the community's values in mind. With varying interests in health care costs, OPEB contributions and escalating pension costs the budget came under careful scrutiny. In addition to climbing costs the Town anticipates a decrease in State funds. A zero based approach was used to prepare this year's budget.

Call of the Meeting

Legal notice is hereby given of the Public Hearings of the Board of Finance of the Town of Weston on Tuesday March 23, 2010 and Wednesday March 24, 2010 (if necessary), at 8:00 p.m. at the Weston Middle School Cafeteria, 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, 2010. Said budgets are as follows:

BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET	
General Government	\$5,507,769
Public Safety	2,388,478
Public Works	1,761,375
Sanitation, Health & Environment	346,338
Human Services	577,420
Parks & Recreation	<u>386,805</u>
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S BUDGET	10,968,185
 BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET	 44,697,023
 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT BUDGET	 732,200
 DEBT SERVICE BUDGET	 6,924,936

Lyons Plains Fire House	300,000
GROSS TOWN BUDGET	63,622,344
Less Estimated Revenues	2,473,166
NET TOWN BUDGET	61,149,178

Dated at Weston, Connecticut
This 11th day of March, 2010

Michael O'Brien
Chairman
Board of Finance

Superintendent Jerry Belair stated that the Town of Weston's budget for the BOE was the lowest in the area except for New Canaan with a 1.93% growth rate. The budget was a "Needs based" budget. Weston students achieve at or at the top academically; our athletic program is outstanding in the state; arts and theater have always been at or at the top with many students pursuing careers in that area. Weston is noted as one of the top schools in the nation. The school budget is also sensitive to economic climate and we are facing reductions in grants and reimbursements down from 90% to 60% from the State.

We worked closely with neighboring towns, reassigned staff, offered a new course, revised job descriptions. There is a special assignment being considered of delivering Special Education in our own schools.

70% of our computers will be 6 years old by September. We will need a replacement plan in place for the upgrade.

Mr. Belair concluded by commenting on these very challenging times and the budget has been prepared to sustain the integrity of our programs and keep our traditional excellence in education.

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Chairman O'Brien opened the floor to questions/comments

Comments made from the floor are not direct quotes

Andrea Chase, High Acre Rd –supports the education budget and is very pleased with the effort that was put into it.

Frank Billone, Curiosity Lane- why stretch the Town budget and not the School budget?

Bob Machson, White Birch Ridge - If we spend more or less it would not make a difference. Product that comes out of our schools is not a result of spending a little more. Today a unit of our Town employees (Highway and Communications) filed a grievance for a day off because the Governor declared a day of mourning. This is wrong. In the face of all of these costs I make this suggestion – BOF BOS must consider an Ad Hoc committee of what the town can do, consolidation, use of resources etc.

Hal Mathews, Treadwell Lane- Concerned that funded Debt service for the schools is included in the Selectmen's budget and not the school's budget. Citizens are getting a skewed picture of the school budget. Other towns include it in their school budget. Ms. Weinstein explained the summary and that Debt Service is treated as one cost. Mr. O'Brien also explained that it is a town obligation and is included.

Frank Billone, Curiosity Lane – regarding the Debt service; the BOE said they have zero Capital budget but that is because of what we passed tonight. The Internal service fund, if used does not show up in the budget. Would like to see unbundling and details of ISF. From a business perspective the information should be displayed.

Carolyn Mulcahey, Godfrey Rd- regarding the Town revenue summary, losing state aid, losing interest; given the state of our economy, I see a problem having tax payers make up that gap. It is wrong for tax payers to mitigate a shortfall.

Nina Daniel, Goodhill Rd- 17K is the per pupil cost and if you add debt it is over 20K per pupil which is more than the cost of tuition for a Uconn student. Last year the BOF recommended a zero increased budget. Why do we not have a 3 or 5 year budget plan?

Dana Katz, Hart Lane- In support the budget and would like to thank the BOE.

Martha Diamant, White Birch Rd- My children graduated Weston schools. The country and the State of Connecticut are in economic turmoil. The BOE salary line is over, for

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example the Selectmen's salary line. We must address union contracts. I would like to see trimming in the BOE budget.

Kathy Green, Pheasant Hill- would like to thank the BOE for cutting costs and not services.

Harvey Bellin, Maple St- would like to thank the BOS and for their budget. Last year everyone reacted in a sensible way with Town employees making sacrifices. But the schools are not as motivated. We need 100% participation for example in health insurance HSAs and buy out plans. Savings in the health insurance and cutting the BOE a little will safe guard in people losing their jobs.

Eileen Brostow- Silver Ridge Common- supports the BOE budget.

Laurie Ann Sharp, Old Mill Rd- has been to many BOE meetings. Our Schools win countless awards and the BOE is working to cut where possible.

Neil Horner, Catbrier Rd- I would ask that we get a firm commitment for an Ad Hoc committee and get to work on a 5 year plan. We need creative, strategic thinking. Planning committee should be put together immediately so we don't continue to come to these meetings and hear how bad the economy and costs are.

Bill Brady, Deer Run Trail- Uncollected taxes, I would like that explained.

Rick Darling explained that the number is an estimate. Under Selectman revenue, that is our estimate of what we will collect. The only items that are written off, is a fifteen year (limitation) and suspense tax accounts (rendered uncollectible)

Mr. O'Brien added that Weston has a very high tax collection rate.

Laura Smits, Birch Hill- congratulated all boards for working so hard together (BOE, BOS BOF) and is not sure another committee is needed.

Chairman O'Brien asked for any further discussion, hearing none the meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted

Donna M. Anastasia, Town Clerk