

**BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING
April 22, 2012 – 7:30 PM**

The public hearing was called to order by Chairman Lila Ferrillo at 7:30 p.m.

Present: Chairman Lila Ferrillo, Jack Kiley, Nancy Schmitt, and Bob DeBisschop. Absent: Tom Kelly and Richard Burke. Also present: James Hliva, Finance Director.

The Public Hearing is being held for discussion of the proposed budget for FY 2013/2014.

Chairman Ferrillo indicated that the budget will be in four parts which are the municipal budget, Board of Education budget, capital non-recurring expenditure budget and road improvements budget. She noted that the Board worked hard to come up with a zero budget but unfortunately the Grand List has not grown and the economy is poor. Funds that came to the Town as one-time funds (such as FEMA money from storms) can be used for one-time expenditures such as those shown in the capital non-recurring budget. Chairman Ferrillo invited anyone with questions or comments about the budget to come forward.

Ann Crane, 411 Mulligan Drive asked about grant funds of that are expected in the amount of \$5,422,652 and asked where the funds will go. She was told to look at each line item which shows what the money is for.

Gerard Carbonaro, 14 Country Farm Road thanked the Board for having the public hearing. He spoke of the Board of Education budget and indicated that he is on the Finance Committee. He noted that the Board of Education passes a budget that contains the lowest rate of increase (2.45%) that has ever been submitted. He commented that the Board of Finance made a cut to the budget of \$100,000 and that proposed playscape is not in the budget. There is a pending settlement for the oil tank remediation case. He requested that the Board use some of the settlement funds to be used toward the playscape when the settlement is done. Lila noted that she is sorry for the cut of \$100,000. She noted that the Board of Education budget was well done. She reminded him that they are trying to come up with no increase to the mill rate. She noted that the Board cannot take into consideration any funds that have not been received, such as settlement funds. She noted that the Board of Finance has the duty of keeping the Town fiscally sound and they are doing their best. Regarding the playscape, Lila noted she asked the Town's grant writer, Kathy O'Neil, to look for grants for the playscape (not done by the building committee). Fundraisers also need to be done for the project. Lila noted that items in other budget were not granted either.

Jack Kiley noted that the Board of Education came in with only 2.45% increase. He noted that it was very unfortunate that the Board of Finance had to cut the budget by \$100,000. He noted that the Board of Education turned in \$300,000 as surplus last year which went into the Town's General Fund.

Susan O'Brien, 8 Country Farm Road noted that the Elderly Commission has increased 13% since 2011 and the Board of Education budget increased only 5%. She was reminded that their budget is small compared to the Board of Education budget and the Senior Center is open five days a week now and that their budget received cuts also.

Scott Pelletier, Fire Marshal, 222 Christian Street spoke about vehicles for the Fire Department and indicated that they prepared their capital plan so that replacement of vehicles and apparatus would be spread out. He commented that the pumper that is being requested (taken out of the budget) could be leased and asked that the Board consider this which would keep the mill rate down.

Jerry Schwab, 264 Quaker Farms Road, asked the Board of Finance to consider a lease purchase program for the vehicles requested by the Ambulance Corp., Fire Department and Public Works Department. He spoke about financing vehicles being done by most people for their personal vehicles and commented that interest rates are very low for financing at this time. He thanked the Board for including the ambulance in the capital plan. He asked (for the third year in a row) that a fourth employee be added to the department who will teach an EMS course at the high school and be able to help staff the second ambulance during the day. He spoke of the increase in call volume in Town and the need for the extra staff and asked that it be put back in the budget.

Jack Kiley noted that a small utility truck and a small dump truck with plow are in the budget for the Public Works department. Two years ago a large dump truck with plow was purchased two years ago and a backhoe was also purchased at that time. The only truck that was not approved is the large truck with sander for the department.

Dave McKane, 11 Tram Drive thanked the Board of Education for their effort in preparing a very good budget. He noted that leasing vehicles would be a way to reduce the cost per year. He asked that Jim Hliva comment on the cost for leasing of vehicles that were requested. He noted that he is a member of the Public Works department and is thankful for the new equipment that is planned to be purchased. He noted that they did get a John Deere tractor a couple years ago and they have two new dump trucks. However, the newest truck after that is over twenty years old and winter storms were difficult to handle with the old equipment.

Jack noted that the only other piece of equipment that was not approved for the Public Works department is the large dump truck.

Lila commented that leasing causes payments for five years. The problem is that debt is being increase. She noted that vehicles will be purchased as the Town can afford them. She also commented that the Ambulance Corp. and other departments have requested additional staff which has not been approved in an attempt to keep the mill rate down.

Sharon Scinto, 51 Highland Road asked that the Board reconsider the hiring of a third full-time employee for the Tax Collector's office. She noted that the office is small with a big task and talked about the needs of the department and the need for the third employee.

Jack noted that the Tax Collector's office currently has two full-time people and a part-time employee. He noted that the office is behind in the use of technology. There will be a focus to advance the office with the use of technology which will adjust the need for a third full-time employee.

Lila spoke about the needs of the Town on a long-term basis. She noted that we all admit that there will be a need for new school in the near future. She commented that if we build the debt so much, there will be a problem when bonding needs to be obtained. Bonding will also be necessary when the library is approved.

Linda Czapliski, 30 Freeman Road, spoke about the employee benefits budget and noted that there is a significant increase for workers' compensation and life and disability insurance. She asked for information. Lila noted that workers' compensation is driven by how many people are insured. There are people out of work who are collecting from this insurance. Lila noted that life and disability insurance is a contracted item that the Town has no control over.

Diane Saracco, 17 Laura Lane spoke about the pending settlement from the oil spill at Quaker Farms School and noted that she understands that we cannot count money that we don't have. She asked that the Board consider restoring the money back to the Board of Education when it does come in.

Mike Lyona, 76 Old Country Road, noted that he is a father and owns a business in Town. He commented that he feels the additional staff and ambulance for the Ambulance Corp. is an important thing. He noted that he has had the ambulance respond to his home on numerous occasions and spoke of the importance in quick response time. He spoke of the high amount in the vehicle maintenance line item which shows the need to replace the fly car. He feels that the Fire Department's request for an additional truck is important. The first priorities in town should be EMS, Fire Department, Ambulance Corp. and schools.

Ed Belinsky, Captain of Riverside Fire Company noted that the goal is for a 0% increase in the budget. He spoke about the problem with the pumper truck that needs to be replaced. He noted that funds are wasted every year to repair and maintain the pumper that should be replaced.

Lila noted that members of the Board of Finance went to Riverside Station to see the pumper that needs to be replaced. She commented that the equipment is taken care of well and the Fire Stations are maintained well and that she is proud of the department and noted that they are volunteers. She noted that there are five pumpers in Town that are available to respond to emergencies. She agrees that safety comes first but that the Board needs to look at the needs of all departments in Town. She commented that the pumper may need to be replaced at a later date.

Keith Nelson, 80 Coppermine Road, and a member of Riverside Fire Company spoke about the problems with the pumper.

Dan McCreary, 22 Rolling Hills Dr., and a member of Riverside Fire Company noted that the pumper that needs to be replaced has an open carriage where the firefighters ride which does not meet current NFPA standards. He noted that the pumper needs to be replaced this year.

Dave McKane, 11 Tram Drive asked again that the Board of Finance consider leasing vehicles that have been requested by departments in Town.

Paula Guillet, 175 Good Hill Road noted that the Board of Education prepared a fiscally responsible budget and asked that no more cuts be made. They have done their due diligence. She spoke about the effort to bargain with unions regarding contracts and the need to meet current State mandates and requirements.

George Temple, 2 Jensen Farm Road spoke about the issue of security in the schools. He noted that a portion of land will be sold by the Town and the proceeds will be available for uses such as school security. He thanked the Board of Education for their responsible budget. He commented that he supports the Public Works Department's request for new equipment and that he is in favor of leasing vehicles. He spoke about the playscape project and noted that he

supports the project. LoCip funds are available which can be used for the playscape or road improvement projects. Regarding the Tax Collector's office, he requested that there be a third full-time employee funded. He noted that there are four employees in the Assessor's office and the third full-time employee is needed in the Tax Collector's office. He noted that he supports the hiring of an additional full-time Public Works employee which was not approved by the Board of Finance. He noted that the Town should not be in a position to replace a pumper when one was replaced last year. This is not the fault of the Fire Department. There needs to be a long term plan for replacement of vehicles.

Lila noted that the fund balance is 10% of the budget. She noted that funds spent from this fund should only be used for one time purchases (such as a boiler for a school) and should not be used to offset taxes, as suggested by First Selectman Temple. She agrees that long-term planning is necessary. She noted that the surplus (taken from the fund balance) was put toward one-time expenses for the next fiscal year. She noted that anticipated revenue had to be adjusted to be put in the budget as a realistic figure.

Maura Satkowski, 246 Quaker Farms Road, noted that the Board of Education budget was cut by \$100,000 which she does not agree with and that it should not have been done prior to the public hearing. The Board of Education has proven to be frugal and honest and returned \$300,000 last year. She asked for clarification as to why the cut was made.

Jack Kiley, liaison to the Board of Education, spoke about how he helped negotiate contracts with the teacher's union and administration union. He noted that Rosemary Hanson is an asset to the Town. He commented that the Board of Finance did not make any cuts to the Board of Education budget during their first review of the entire budget. It was clear that cuts needed to be made when the mill rate came in high and that it was not easy but necessary to cut the budget. \$100,000 was taken from a \$27 Million budget. Within the municipal budget there were personnel and vehicle sacrifices that were made to keep the budget down. Lila noted that the \$300,000 that was given back last year went toward boilers that are needed in the schools.

Ann Crane, 411 Mulligan Drive, made an observation in the budget. She noted that \$634,000 is budgeted for roads and \$259,000 for Christian Street. She agrees that Oxford roads are bad but feels the priority should be in purchasing a fire truck and ambulance. She noted that the total for capital projects is very high and noted that bonds should be used to help the Town afford the debt over a period of time.

Lila noted that the townspeople voted yes to the proposed road improvement project last year. This year there is another proposed road project that the townspeople will vote on. \$100,000 LoCip funds has been put toward the proposed project.

Clare Luce, 75 Dog Leg Court, and secretary at Quaker Farms School and President of Clerical Union commented that the two clerks are needed at Quaker Farms School and Center School. The need is greater now because of added school security which gives the secretaries more work and she asked that they be restored.

Lila noted that the Board of Finance has no control over the Board of Education budget and can only restore the funds but has no control over how the funds are spent.

Steven Brown, 8 Bonnie Lane commented that he feels it is right for the road improvement project to be voted on by the townspeople and would like to see the pumper for the Fire

Department voted on by the townspeople also. He supports the Board of Education budget and feels that the increase of 2.4% will meet some critical demands and hopes that it is maintained.

Paula Guillet, 175 Good Hill Road commented on the real need to restore the clerical positions. She agrees that the Board of Finance has no control over what line items will be affected by a cut in the budget, but the Board of Education has a small number of places where they can take funds from. She noted that the Board of Education has maintained a five year capital plan that is submitted each year.

Andy Coy, 288 Quaker Farms Road, Assistant Chief of Quaker Farms Fire Company noted that the Fire Department submits a twenty year capital plan every year with the budget. The Ambulance Corp. gives a ten year capital plan with their budget. The problem arises when the Town doesn't fund needs because there is a lack of money. This has caused the need for a pumper truck being purchased in the current year and the need for another pumper to be replaced in the next year. He noted that he supports a leasing plan for needed vehicles.

Lila noted that in the last five years, the Town has purchased a large vehicle for the Fire Department each year. She noted that the Board does its best with the funds that are available.

Susan O'Brien, 8 Country Farm Road noted that taxes may need to increase due to the needs of the Town.

Lila commented that a budget with a tax increase is not likely to pass and mentioned that each referendum costs the town money. The Board is trying to present a realistic budget that will pass on the first vote. She has heard that the townspeople do not want taxes to increase.

Janet Barns, 52 Christian Street noted that she has been a teacher for twenty-plus years and was an EMT volunteer for ten years. She commented that the Town needs to support the education system. She drives one hour to work and noted that the Oxford school system needs to be brought up to the twenty-first century standards. Teachers and secretaries need to be supported. She noted that the playground needs to be updated and looking to the PTO can be a way to find fundraising for the project. The need to improve or rebuild Center School is apparent. Looking at the health and well being of the children who attend our school is needed. Other school districts provide more for their children and our children deserve the same.

Amy Cote, 42 Newgate Road noted that she would sue the Town if there comes a day when she cannot get an ambulance in time for her child's medical needs. She noted she loves the Town but is concerned. She strongly believes that the additional ambulance is needed. She commented that too many things on the capital plan get pushed out to the following year and should be funded sooner. She also asked that at least a portion of the \$100,000 that was cut from the Board of Education budget be restored.


Michelle Miller, 20 Punkup Road and a secretary at Oxford High School spoke about an emergency situation with a student at the high school and commented that the response time was way too long for the ambulance corp. to reach the high school. She spoke about the need for the clerical position to be restored at the other schools due to the demands of the job. One person handling the office is not enough in an emergency situation such as the one described above. She noted that the Board has the power to restore funding and not let any cuts be done and asked that they take this action.

Chairman Ferrillo noted that they have no intention to cut any more from the budget but that the townspeople have the power to make cuts at the Town Meeting on May 6. She encouraged all to vote for the budget at the referendum. If it is not passed, the Board of Finance will need to make cuts to the budget before it can go to referendum again. She commented that the Board of Finance will meet again tomorrow night and will review the points that were brought up at this meeting.

Motion to adjourn was made by Bob DeBisschop at 9:05 p.m. This was seconded by Jack Kiley. Motion passes unanimously.

Respectfully submitted, subject to approval


Marni Soss, Clerk

13 MAY -2 PM 4:37
TOWN OF OXFORD, CT

TOWN CLERK