

MINUTES
BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING – QUAKER FARMS SCHOOL
APRIL 21, 2014 – 7:30 P.M.

The Public Hearing was called to order by Chairman Jack Kiley at 7:30 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The following members were present: Chairman Jack Kiley, Lila Ferrillo, Tom Kelly, Richard Burke, Robert DeBisschop. Also present: James Hliva, Finance Director. Absent: Nancy Schmitt.

Chairman Kiley read the Notice for the Public Hearing that was filed with the Town Clerk. He indicated that the proposed budget is \$43,972,389 compared to last year's adopted budget of \$42,387,103. The current mill rate is 24.75 and the proposed budget would bring the mill rate to 25.62 which is a .85 mill increase. The municipal budget approved last year is \$14,604,310 and the proposed budget for the new fiscal year is \$15,723,596. The Board of Education budget approved last year is \$27,148,793 and the proposed budget for the new fiscal year is \$28,248,793 which is a \$1,100,000 increase.

Chairman Kiley asked if anyone from the audience had any questions or comments.

The following people spoke at the meeting:

Ed Hardy, 14 Wyant Road is currently on the Oxford Ambulance Association (OAA) Board of Directors and he served eight years on the Board of Finance in the past. He noted that there is a cut in Contracted Services labor budget from \$77,800 to \$25,000 and asked for feedback from the Board. Jack noted that they followed the Selectman's proposal that \$50,000 be taken out of the budget. The funding had been put in the budget for a trainer in the last fiscal year and was taken out in the proposed budget. He noted that the Selectmen's office and the OAA are going through negotiations. In the past, the contract between the Town and OAA has not been followed and the Selectmen are looking to rectify some discrepancies in the contract. He noted that in prior years the Board of Finance did not do their due diligence. The Town has paid more to OAA than is contractually required. Examples include that the Town purchased two vehicles for OAA which is not required under the contract. Ed commented that he disagrees with the statement that the contract was not followed. He noted that Jack may have a point on the vehicles but he believes in other ways that the contract was followed. He commented that the above mentioned line item should be restored, at least partially.

Amy Cote, 42 Newgate Road thanked the Board of Finance for their hard work done on the proposed budget. She encouraged the Board to keep the \$1.1 Million increase for the Board of Education (BOE) to go to referendum and noted that there is not a surplus in the BOE budget this year.

Gerard Carbonaro, 14 Country Farm Road, Chairman of Finance Committee for BOE and a member of the ad hoc committee for full day Kindergarten supports the spending initiatives in the municipal and BOE budgets but feels that the budgets will not pass at referendum. A problem is that there is lack of growth in the Grand List. He wants fiscally responsible spending for items such as fields at Tetlak Park, dugouts at Oxford High School fields and full day Kindergarten and believes we should tie such expenditures to growth in the Grand List. He

suggested that .05 on the dollar from the Grand List next year be earmarked to implement the full day Kindergarten at a cost of \$533,000. He does not support that the funding for this program be added to the budget and be a burden on the struggling taxpayers. He suggests that the Board of Finance focus on a budget that will hold the BOE budget stable for the next fiscal year.

Timothy Lee, 5 Silano Drive commented that he feels the budget that is being proposed is very well balanced. He has spent time at many meetings and he applauds the Board of Finance and Board of Education for their hard work. He supports the BOE budget as it stands now.

Kate Thiboutot, 2 Little Valley Road, commented that the town is being fiscally responsible with the proposed budgets and noted that much of what is in the budget are contractual obligations. She wants to see the townspeople vote on the proposed budgets.

David Stockard, 144 Punkup Road asked that the budgets be set so that there is a 0% increase. He noted that each year there is an increase and that there is never a flat budget.

Chairman Jack Kiley noted that the union contracts for Board of Education and Municipal employees cost for medical insurance, oil, electricity, insurance, and the cost to maintain vehicles all increase each year. If the Grand List does not go up to help pay for the costs, then taxes increase. He noted that 80% of the budget is fixed costs. He noted that there is not much discretionary spending in the budget. The Board hopes that increases in union contracts stay at a minimum and increases in insurances stay low. The town gives out generous benefits and they are expensive. There has been very little Grand List growth.

Susan O'Brien, 8 Country Farm Road commented that she appreciates the difficult job that the Board of Finance has done. She asked that the Board of Education budget be left alone as it stands and it goes to referendum. She noted that the Board of Education worked diligently on the budget and they need the funds that were requested to provide adequate education programs for our children including, but not limited to, a full day Kindergarten program.

Ann Crane, 411 Mulligan Drive commented that she looked at the capital projects including public works trucks and ambulance. She heard that there was a surplus in this year's budget that would provide funding for these items. She also asked on the status of purchasing the pumper for Riverside Fire Station.

Lila Ferrillo, Board of Finance member commented that we don't want to have a credit card mentality and that the items will be purchased with available surplus funds and this will be a one-time expenditure. The funds are close to \$700,000. The Board of Finance will keep 10% of surplus saved. The Board plans to purchase the requested pumper for Riverside if the necessary funds come within the next year so that the townspeople are not taxed for the purchase.

Ann Crane asked if the capital items to be purchased with funds from this year's budget should be taken off the capital list for next fiscal year. She asked where the surplus of \$700,000 is coming from.

Chairman Kiley noted that we have 12% in the surplus account and we plan to use \$773,000 from surplus to buy the capital items. 10% surplus will remain with the town. The use of \$773,000 for capital purchases will be considered a revenue source and will be reviewed at Town meeting.

Tom Kelly noted that we will use a portion of the surplus to purchase the capital plan items but we will not allow the surplus to drop below 10% which is what is asked of us by the funding agencies. He noted that since this is a one-time expense, there is no change in the tax rate. The costs are in the budget and there is a line item to show revenue which will pay for the items. The net effect to the tax payers is \$0.

Ann Crane asked if the \$773,000 includes the sale of 66 Hawley Road.

Chairman Kiley answered no. Tom Kelly noted that the funds have not been received to date and the budget does not reflect receipt of the funds.

Liz Alagno, 16 Macintosh Drive thanked the Board of Finance for their efforts and knows that they spent countless hours on the budget. She stated that she was a member of the Kindergarten ad hoc committee and wants to see the Board of Education budget go forward as proposed. She noted that Quaker Farms School has an outstanding Kindergarten staff but that they have no way to cover the depth of material necessary in a half day program. She encourages everyone to support the entire BOE budget.

Dick Burke, 447 Quaker Farms Road and Board of Finance member noted that there is an increase of \$1.1 Million over the requested budget for BOE. He agrees with Mr. Carbonaro that we can't afford it at this time but he sent it forward for the townspeople to vote. He noted that during the deliberations the figure for full day Kindergarten started at \$800,000 which was reduced to \$500,000 and was again reduced to \$300,000. The Board was told that paraprofessionals were not needed for all Kindergarten classes which helped reduce cost. He noted that the increase to the mill rate is almost one mill and we don't have the economic growth to support the increase. He questioned if people would be agreeing to this type of increase in their own homes and said it appears that since its collective taxpayers it's good. He noted that there should be no need for increase next year to hire paraprofessionals since it was stated that they are not needed. He hopes there is no game being played.

Diane Sarracco, 17 Laura Lane commented that there is no magic involved in creating the BOE budget. Creation of the budget is a work in progress. There are explanations as to why figures change within the budget. The fact that there is one less class and there will not be a paraprofessional in every class. She commented that they have worked hard and spent many hours to create a responsible budget.

Lauren Blair, 6 Little Valley Road thanked the Board of Finance and Board of Education members for their work. She spoke of being fiscally responsible which includes keeping taxes down but also moving the town forward. She commented that the BOE proposed to implement the full day Kindergarten program at a reduced cost and that it appears that they are being penalized for being fiscally responsible. She asked that the proposed budget be sent to the townspeople for a vote.

Cathy Johnson, 68 Dorman Road noted she has lived here for thirty-eight years. She sees that the BOE wants the proposed budget to go to a vote but feels that it will not pass because not all parents are behind it and do not go out to vote. She noted that in past years a referendum to build a high school failed three times and that it cost the town \$10 million more to build the high school when it finally passed. She thanked the Board of Finance for their hard work.

Paula Guillet, 175 Good Hill Road supports the need for the proposed vehicles that have been neglected in the past and noted that she want to see a low increase in taxes. She noted that we

don't need a credit card mentality but we can use short term financing to purchase needed vehicles because interest rates are currently very low. She is in favor of keeping the mill rate down.

Linda Czaplinski, 30 Freeman Road agreed with Paula who does not want to have a credit card mentality. She applauded the Board of Finance for being fiscally responsible and keeping the mill rate down. She commented that the State of Connecticut is not in a good place and it would be irresponsible for us to think things will get better on a short term basis. It is incumbent on every municipality to be cautious with funds.

Lila Ferrillo noted that we are keeping the mill rate down by using the surplus to purchase needed vehicles. She commented that whenever we take out a Note those dollars cuts back on our discretionary funds that we can spend. She spoke of future needs for the town and asked where the money will come from. It is fiscally responsible to purchase the vehicles with surplus funds.

Chairman Kiley spoke of other towns that have a very high rate for debt service. Ours is approximately \$3.2 million. He spoke about the Board of Finance's process of preparing the budget which takes a lot of time and effort. Everything is thought out and they keep an eye on the capital plan as well.

Jennifer Florin, 3 Gem Woods Road noted that she sat in on many Board of Finance meetings and thanked them for their efforts. She noted that some people are looking at what other towns are doing and she noted that they have full day Kindergarten programs. She commented that she doesn't know where the \$800,000 figure came from for the Kindergarten program but she believes the figure started at \$500,000. If the BOE, ad hoc committee and superintendent say the program can be implemented with \$200,000 we should trust them. She noted that she is a teacher in Seymour and they have a full day Kindergarten program and that they do not have a paraprofessional in every class. She feels the taxpayers should decide and vote on the budget.

Jennifer Artman, 7 Gem Woods Road thanked the Board of Finance and BOE for their hard work. She noted she has a five year old who will attend Kindergarten in the fall and supports a full day program. She feels it is imperative that children need to start their education with the right program. She noted that her four year old is in a full day preschool program and full day Kindergarten is needed.

Steve Brown, 8 Bonnie Lane supports the budgets as passed by the Board of Finance. He agrees with the priorities and supports the BOE budget. He feels that people will come out in droves to support it and thanked the Boards for their hard work.

Richard Bosco will reside at 506 Oxford Road beginning on May 1. He is a volunteer EMT and is on the Board of Directors of Oxford Ambulance Association and has noted that he has been out of Oxford for two years and sees that the politics haven't changed and that he is not happy about it. He noted that fiduciary responsibility includes saving money but also spending money wisely. Spending money on education and maintaining an ambulance budget is not a poor way to spend money. He spoke of the dangers and risks that volunteers of the Oxford Ambulance Association face while at work. He noted that the OAA was denied a fly car by the Board of Finance and financed it themselves. He noted that democracy thrives on education. He noted that the training budget has been cut and will affect their volunteers. He urges all to push their votes for education and the OAA budget.

Martha Erdman, 424 Quaker Farms Road noted that she was born and raised in Oxford and went to high school in Milford with many educated people. She noted that she is concerned with her daughter attending the school here because she sees that the children in Fairfield County are more educated and educated at a younger age. She wants her children to have the same opportunities and asked that this be kept in mind when decisions are made.

Scott Pelletier, Fire Chief, 222 Quaker Farms Road noted he was told that the money is available for the fire pumper that was requested but there is nothing in the capital plan that reflects what was requested. He agrees that limiting financing is important and thanked the Board for keeping the debt down. He noted that vehicles need to be purchased to keep the fleet up to a good standard. We have an opportunity to finance vehicles at a very low rate and we should take advantage of this. He strongly urged the Board to take another look at this and commented that he finances the vehicles he purchases and that the majority of the audience does the same.

Jerry Schwab, 264 Quaker Farms Road, Director of Oxford Ambulance noted that the board budgeted \$170,000 for the ambulance and noted that this is \$20,000 short from the bids received and asked why. Jim Hliva, Finance Director, noted the bid received was approximately \$199,000. Jerry noted that the town has gotten behind with purchasing vehicles. He noted that the vehicle that the Fire Department requested should be put in the budget. He noted that town tends to get behind on vehicle purchases and it needs to be in the budget in order for it to be purchased. Jerry noted that OAA has asked for the same funding this year for contracted services-labor that was approved last year and that \$50,000 was cut this year. Staff will have to be eliminated due to this cut. The OAA has double the amount of call volume from approximately eleven years ago and they are operating with the same amount of staff. A cut in staff will cause a problem. He noted that the OAA operates under a contract that was written by the attorney for the town. He noted that to the best of his knowledge there are no negotiations going on between the OAA and the town regarding the contract. There have been no meetings or formal communication. He asked that the Board reconsider and restore the budget to the same they had last year.

Cathy Johnson noted she wants to support OAA. The town is growing and we need every EMT we can get. It is very important to keep the community safe. Jerry should have what he needs and it's not too much to ask to have the OAA budget restored.

Stacy Jendron, 54 Highland Road noted she supports the budget as proposed. People in town want a safe environment and good education. She is a teacher and asks that the BOE budget be passed to referendum.

Megan Schrade, 10 Gem Woods Road noted the children of Oxford will be at a disadvantage if half day Kindergarten program remains in the school system. She asked that the BOE budget go to referendum as proposed.

Michael Aiello of Oxford Ambulance asked that the OAA budget be restored. He spoke of call volume increasing in town and the need for education for EMTs.

Andrew Coy, 288 Quaker Farms Road, Assistant Fire Chief spoke about the Fire Department's request for a new pumper. The Board has stated that there is \$700,000 surplus to buy vehicles including Public Works vehicles and an ambulance. The pumper cost \$666,000 alone and asked if there are funds available for the fire truck. If not, he asked that the request be put in the capital project and let the townspeople vote on it.

Jack Kiley commented that if other funds come in that the fire truck is a priority. He noted there is a very good chance that the funding will come through and the order can be done.

Amy Cote, 42 Newgate Road commented that it is critically important that our volunteers are trained properly. She encouraged the Board of Finance to consider restoring the OAA budget so that the training needed can be done.

Chairman Kiley thanked everyone for attending and noted they were a very polite audience.

The hearing adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, subject to approval



Marni Soss, Board of Finance Clerk

14 MAY -5 PM 12:39
TOWN OF OXFORD, CT
Angela A. West
TOWN CLERK