

**Town of Simsbury Board of Finance
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Thursday, April 6, 2017 at 6:00PM
Simsbury High School – Amphitheatre
34 Farms Village Road, Simsbury, Connecticut**

PRESENT: Robert Pomeroy, Jr., Jeff Blumenthal, Kevin Prell, Linda Schofield and Moira Wertheimer (via phone).

ABSENT: Derek Peterson

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Lisa Heavner, Selectmen Elaine Lange, Mike Paine, Cheryl Cook, Sean Askham and Chris Kelly; Finance Director Sean Kimball; Board of Education Chairman Tara Willerup; Board of Education members Tom Doran, Tom Frank, Jeff Tindall, Lydia Tedone, and Todd Burrick; Superintendent of Schools Matt Curtis; Town Engineer Jeff Shea and other staff and interested parties.

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Rob Pomeroy called the meeting to order at 6:00PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Everyone present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Before opening the public hearing, Mr. Pomeroy reviewed the budget process. Mr. Pomeroy described how the Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen and Board of Education, all work together through the budget process. He presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining the responsibilities of the Board of Finance as well as the particular challenges that are being faced this year. Mr. Pomeroy reminded those in attendance of the estimated impact from the governor's proposed budget including the increases to Simsbury's Municipal Revenue Sharing (\$200K) and Special Education Grant (\$1.1M) as well as the impacts associated with the \$2M Cut to Education Cost Sharing and the transfer back to the town of \$3.6M in the teacher pension proposal. He noted that these items from the Governor's proposed budget result in \$4.3M in additional costs pushed back down to the Town to bear.

Board of Education Chairman Tara Willerup presented a PowerPoint presentation on the Board of Education Budget adopted February 28, 2017 and subsequently moved by the Board of Finance on March 21, 2017 to this meeting. Her presentation included information on the major cost drivers as well as contextual factors impacting that Board's operating budget. Ms. Willerup noted that the BOE has proposed a budget with a 2.4% increase that includes the elimination of 5.6 FTEs. She also noted that declining enrollment will continue to be monitored. Ms. Willerup reported that Special Education needs have increased in recent years.

First Selectman Lisa Heavner shared a PowerPoint presentation on the Town's Proposed FY2018 operating budget with a proposed increase of \$702,361, 3.6% over last year's budget, which maintains existing services including an additional dispatcher for public safety and additional staffing hours in the building department. Ms. Heavner also commented on the unique circumstances this year associated with the State's proposed shift of the teachers' pensions to municipalities. She noted that the budget anticipated to be ultimately passed by the

State Legislature will likely look vastly difference but towns will not know until the end of April 2017.

Board of Education Business Manager Burke LaClair reviewed the two Board of Education projects that are part of the Town's overall capital improvement projects: the Henry James Middle School Phase III Project (\$22,824,407) and Simsbury High School Tennis Court Replacement (\$740K).

Town Engineer Jeff Shea reviewed the Town's proposed Capital Non-Recurring Projects including the following: baseball infield conditioner (\$20K), a utility vehicle for Culture, Parks, & Recreation (\$25K), purchase of three police patrol vehicles (\$95K), Improvements at Town Hall (\$49.5K), Public Works 50% Highway Mechanic Truck with Utility Body (\$36.75K), Plow Truck for Public Works Department (\$155K) and Town Hall upgrade to the HVAC Controller Modules (\$35K). Mr. Shea also reviewed the Capital projects planned for FY18.

3. OPEN THE PUBLIC HEARING ON OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGETS:

Ms. Joan Coe of 26 Whitcomb Drive initially addressing the Board of Selectmen's budget, spoke in favor of regionalization for the proposed cyber security \$150K appropriation. She opposed the use of capital expenditures for Simsbury Farms Golf Course, citing that half the revenue generated stems from nonresidents. She also recommended contracting out the management of the golf course to a private entity such as Arnold Palmer or Billy Casper management teams.

Mr. David Bush of 4 Katherine Lane, Chairman of the Parks and Recreation Department, spoke about how reasonable the proposed budget is, noting that many items were not even put forth due to the impacts from the State's budget presented this year.

Ms. Kim Kennedy of 2 Riverwalk Drive shared her concerns about a possible increase of almost 9% should the proposed Town budget, Board of Education budget and State's proposed budget all be accepted in their current form. Ms. Kennedy suggested that the Town ought to consider switching to a low-cost, employee funded, consumer driven health plan, reducing employee retirement pension matching contributions, dismissing unessential and overlapping staff, instituting salary, bonus and hiring freezes across the board, spending improvement freezes unless absolutely vital or self-funded with grants and/or donations, moving less popular electives from the curriculum, and increasing classroom sizes for electives only (not core classes).

Ms. Marianne O'Neil of 4 Meadowbrook Road, Chairman of the Library Board of Trustees, noted the contributions that the Library has made to the community and urged support for the Library's operating budget.

Ms. Kelly Connolly of 16 Saw Mill Road, noting that she is a parent and a teacher, addressed the proposed renovations at Henry James. She noted that some of the spaces at the building have not been updated since 1957.

Ms. Diana Yiesley of 78 County Road, noting that she serves on the Aging and Disability Commission, spoke in favor of the Capital Improvement Projects of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Education.

Ms. Susie Norman of 11 Elliot Drive, noting that she is new to town, explained that one of the reasons that she moved to Simsbury is because of the many things offered here.

Mr. Mike Long of 8 Erins Way, noting that he has resided in Simsbury for forty years and has served on nearly every commission but for the Board of Education, spoke on behalf of the Police Commission to support the police budget put forth as part of the Board of Selectmen's budget.

Mr. David Moore of 18 Bob White Way, noting that he is Vice Chairman of the Economic Development Commission, Chairman of the Board of Ethics, and Vice Chairman of the Democratic Town Committee, explained that his comments were not on behalf of any of these groups. He requested that no budget cuts be made to any of the operating budgets but suggested that some of the capital projects, that have not yet begun, may be areas for consideration.

Mr. Mike Rinaldi of 32 Pinnacle Mountain Road addressed areas of concern with the proposed budgets and past rates of increases, notably when compared to inflation rates. He also noted the decrease in enrollment within the schools over the past ten years. Mr. Rinaldi also shared opinions regarding the Open Choice program within the schools.

Ms. Rebecca Mahoney of 16 Park Road, noting that she is the Latimer Lane School PTO Co-President and was speaking on behalf of many parents who could not make this meeting, spoke in support of the proposed renovations at Henry James.

Mr. Scott Rogers of 15 Croft Lane spoke in favor of the electives offered at the high school and spoke in opposition to allocating capital funds for painting the library.

Ms. Holly Beum of 11 Hallview Drive opined that with the loss of 391 students from the district at a per pupil cost of just over \$15K, a savings of \$5.8M is expected. She noted that she understands the method by which per pupil costs are calculated but is still surprised that the town has never seen a decrease in the BOE budget even after losing that many students. She noted that requesting a cut from the BOE of \$1.5M is not unreasonable.

Mr. Jon Pintoff of 100 East Weatogue Street, noting that he is a dad of a three-year old and a six-year old, explained that he is looking forward many years and has noted that the technology in education in town is somewhat lacking. He suggested that the presentation of the respective boards' budgets ought to share a consolidated vision with similar formatting. Additionally, he questioned whether there could be consolidation in the dispatching allocation.

Ms. Coe returned to share comments regarding the enrollment decline in the districts' schools. She questioned whether the Board of Education would consider reducing their administrative staff. Ms. Coe opined that the money spent with respect to Special Education, addressing the many varied issues that children are faced with, is well spent. Ms. Coe opposed some of the items included in the Capital plan as she indicated that they should be part of the operating budget.

Mr. Rinaldi returned to address his concerns with comments made about the last couple of years having a flat mill rate. He attributed these incidences to raising the assumed collection rate and by tapping into the reserves. Mr. Rinaldi also noted that he is opposed to renovating Eno Hall for the purpose of a Senior Center.

4. CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING:

MOTION: Mr. Prell, Mr. Blumenthal second, to close the public hearing; unanimously approved.

5. MOTION TO SCHEDULE A SECOND PUBLIC HEARING ON OPERATING AND CAPITAL BUDGETS FOR TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2017 AT 5:45PM:

Mr. Pomeroy explained that the Board of Finance will likely have more information from the State by the time of the next public hearing and will provide guidance to the boards in this regard.

MOTION: Mr. Prell, Mr. Blumenthal, to schedule a second public hearing on the FY18 Operating and Capital Budgets for Tuesday, May 16, 2017 at 5:45PM; unanimously approved.

MOTION: Mr. Prell, Ms. Schofield second, to adjourn at 8:23PM; unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

**Pamela A. Colombie
Commission Clerk**