

From: SimsburyCT Postings April 2, 2012 12:41:56 PM
Subject: Board of Finance Minutes 03/27/2012-Public Hearing
(Operating)
To: SimsburyCT_FinanceMin
Cc:

BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING - OPERATING BUDGETS - 8:00 PM
MARCH 27, 2012

CALL TO ORDER

Paul Henault, Chairman, called the Board of Finance Operating Budget Public Hearing to order on Monday, March 27th, at 8:04 PM, in the the Amphitheater of Simsbury High School, 34 Farms Village Road, Simsbury, CT. The following members were also present: Nicolas Mason, Peter Askham, Kevin North, Jeff Blumenthal, and Barbara Petitjean. Also present were Mary Glassman, First Selectman, Mary Ann Harris, Finance Director/Treasurer, Diane Ullman, Superintendent of Schools, Erin Murray, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Burke LaClair, Board of Education Business Manager, Lydia Tedone, Chairman of Board of Education, Leslie Faraci, Commissions Clerk and other interested parties.

Mr. Henault began the meeting by explaining the process and procedures of the Public Hearing. He then introduced the speakers for the evening for the topic of Operating Budgets.

Ms. Glassman began by telling the pubic audience that the entire budget is posted online for their review and then gave a brief overview of the Budget Process. Ms. Glassman said the budget that came to her office reflected a 3.63% increase from last year's budget, but considering the current economic conditions, she reduced that increase down to 0.69%. At that point, Ms. Glassman continued, the Budget went back to the Board of Selectmen for review and they added some items back into the Budget that they felt were necessary, which resulted in a total budget increase of 0.99%. She mentioned this is the fourth (4th) year in a row that Simsbury has presented a Town Budget that reflects an increase of less than 1%.

Ms. Glassman began her presentation with some Operating Budget highlights, specifically about improvements and additions that would be accomplished with the approval of this budget. The next slide Ms. Glassman presented was a graph representing the change of the Selectmen's Budget over the past ten

(10) years. Ms. Glassman then showed a slide that broke down the expenditures, noting the biggest cost is employee costs (our benefits and insurance). She then spoke briefly about Special Revenue Funds; comprised of Simsbury Farms Complex, Water Pollution Control and Residential Rental Properties. The next slides were regarding the Capital Non-Recurring Fund (CNR) and showed the requests vs. proposed. She highlighted the reductions made from the requested to arrive at the proposed. Ms. Glassman then highlighted some of the completed projects including; Memorial Field Parking Lot, Hopmeadow Streetscape and Firetown Road Box Culvert. Then she mentioned the large current project of Simsbury Farms Complex.

Mr. Henault then introduced Lydia Tedone, Chairman of the Board of Education to carry them through the main portion of the Board of Education budget.

Ms. Tedone began by thanking her fellow members of the Board of Education for their continued work on the budget. She began the presentation with an overall picture of the Budget showing a total budget of \$63,916,112. She mentioned that 61 out of 75 major accounts are at 0% increase, or reduced, from 2011-2012. Ms. Tedone then moved onto speak about the major budget drivers and how they ultimately came to their 1.78% increase from last year. Ms. Tedone showed a budget increase history, noting that in the last four (4) years, they have come in around the 1% increase range. She said our budget increases have consistently been in the lowest 25% in the state. Ms. Tedone then moved onto a slide illustrating per pupil expenditures with some comparative data. She then spoke about the high return on investment provided in Simsbury. Ms. Tedone then went over some comparison testing statistics, showing the high performance levels of Simsbury students. She then spoke about class sizes and said the current proposed budget will keep all K-6 classes within the class size guidelines for the next year. The next slides were about recent program improvements (8-period day and Simsbury Reading Intervention Program). The next slide was regarding K-12 Enrollment History, showing a 5-year decline in student population. Ms. Tedone spoke about the K-12 Staffing History and then pointed out the decrease, corresponding to the decrease in students. Ms. Tedone then spoke briefly about the ongoing efforts to contain costs and improve programs, specifically mentioned the Henry James Boiler Project that will result in an annual savings of \$33,000 due to increased efficiency. Ms. Tedone then showed a slide on State and Federal Restricted Grants, noting that these are not included in the Operating Budget, and then she explained how these grants work. Ms. Tedone referenced the Open Choice Grant Funds, which, she said, Dr. Ullman would speak about next. Ms. Tedone said all of the budget documents are posted online and urged those interested, to go online and look at the documents.

Mr. Henault then introduced Dr. Ullman, Superintendent of Schools. Dr.

Ullman said she was here to specifically speak about the proposal to fund a new full-day kindergarten program through Choice Student grant money. Dr. Ullman started by giving a timeline of when this process started and how they got to the point they are now at, which is planning to start full-day Kindergarten in September 2012. She said it would have been adopted within past years, but there has not been a time when it could be funded. She explained that after looking at the three (3) available options, it seemed that the most attractive option, in the Board of Education's opinion, was to increase Choice enrollment to the 3% threshold, bringing additional grant funding to the district. After this option was presented to the Board of Education, they asked Dr. Ullman to gather community input to gauge the general feel of the parents with regards to full-day kindergarten. She explained the results were overwhelmingly positive, with 90% of parents being in favor of the change. Dr. Ullman communicated those results to the Board of Education and on March 9th, they told the parents they could move forward with the program. Dr. Ullman then went on to explain why the Board of Education thinks this full-day program is necessary and spoke about how the majority of comparable districts either have the program or are moving towards it in the near future. Dr. Ullman then went on to explain how this program will be funded, explaining that the change to full-day K does not impact the Operating Budget. She spoke about projected enrollment and how there is currently space for all of these students at a full-day schedule. Dr. Ullman broke down how the grant funds will be allocated. Then Dr. Ullman addressed the questions regarding the security of the funds and spoke about how Choice funds have been available since 1966 and she has been assured, at a State level, that there are no plans for the funds to go away anytime in the near future.

Mr. Henault said he would be going through his presentation regarding the Board of Finance and then they would take public comment regarding the Operating Budget information. Mr. Henault reviewed the role of the Board of Finance and the process of getting the budgets approved and finalized. Next, Mr. Henault spoke about putting the budget into context with what is going on around us. He spoke about the challenges since 2008 including flat Grand List Growth, Pension/Wages/Benefits Obligations, State Aid, Capital Request, and now, new concerns over The Hartford, the second largest tax payer in Simsbury.

Mr. Henault then explained the Operating Budgets 2012 vs. 2013 and changes. Mr. Henault spoke about Restricted Grants and how they are not voted on, as they go right to the Board of Education.

Mr. Henault's next slide illustrated the pie chart regarding the breakdown of the budgets. The next slide showed Estimated Revenue Summary, income from non property taxes sources. Mr. Henault then moved on to Annual Allocation of Budget going back to 2008, followed by a comparison of Key Indicators.

The next slide was regarding Tax Implication Estimates. The last slide Mr.

Henault presented was regarding the current mill rate and new mill rate (increase of 1.98% (as presented)). He then explained some factors that could still change that increase in either direction.

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Henault opened up to conversation to public audience:

Jay Reynolds, 39 Seminary Road, commended the Board of Education and their administration for their budget, and for coming up with a way to provide full day kindergarten without impacting the Operating Budget. Mr. Reynolds said if we are to meet the State curriculum, we must provide a full day program. He explained that the kids have no time for creative play and no recess. He again commended the Board for recognizing the need, addressing it, and at the same time keeping their budget fiscally responsible.

Maria Ecke, 18 Meadowlark Road, read a memo to the Board of Selectmen, from Dennis Desrochers, reflecting his opposition to adopting the all-day kindergarten program.

Joan Coe, 26 Whitcomb Drive, outlined some deficiencies she saw exposed in the audit report and asked how they are being corrected. Ms. Coe then listed specific employee salaries and other expenditures that she thinks should be reduced. She mentioned other overhead expenditures she thinks need to be reduced. Ms. Coe then spoke about Simsbury Farms, saying it is not self-sufficient. She also expressed concern about library budget. Ms. Coe then asked the Board of Finance to review items in the CNR expenditures. Regarding the Board of Education budget, Ms. Coe spoke of dropping enrollment and no reduction in expenditures. She spoke of deficiencies within the Board of Education. Ms. Coe then expressed concerned about the full-day program and future costs. Ms. Coe mentioned again the impact of The Hartford. She said she will not vote in favor of the Operating Budgets.

Mr. Henault acknowledged that everyone is concerned about The Hartford, but he said, there are a lot of unknowns in this situation and these things take time. He said the Board of Finance will recognize the situation and be aware of possible repercussions, but they need to wait for facts, and not just rumors before taking drastic measures.

Melissa Dumont, 112 West Mountain Road, began by saying she has seen changes in the kindergarten program in just the past few years, as her kids move through the program. She said kindergarten has grown too intense for the 2.5 hours they are there. She mentioned there is no time for recess and the kids can't go out unless it is really warm because there is no time to get them dressed in winter gear. Ms. Dumont mentioned there is no creative play. She then mentioned that a half-day of kindergarten consists of 1 hr

and 40 minutes.

Heath Grossman, 3 Mathers Crossing, started by saying she agrees with Ms. Dumont's comments. Mr. Grossman commended the Board of Education for their work on the budget and finding a way to fund full-day kindergarten. He also commended the Board of Finance for their work during the budget process. Mr. Grossman said full day K keeps the town attractive to young families, and we should be finding ways to make the town more attractive to those younger families. Mr. Grossman said he thinks full day K is a huge part of that. He then commented that Open Choice is not just a means to an end, it is something we need to do to remain competitive with other Towns.

John Glover, 25 Squadron Line Road, asked do we need this jump to full day K now, during an already tough year. Mr. Glover asked if we can we really count on the State funding and grants. Mr. Glover said the State has some difficult decisions coming up in the next few years.

Kathryn Anastasio, 8 Field Drive, said she is a full day kindergarten teacher and acknowledged that the half day K teachers have a difficult task. Ms. Anastasio said the kids need the time to explore and learn, and we need to give them a reasonable pace to accomplish given assignments. Ms. Anastasio said the biggest part of learning is accomplished during creative play, which is hard to get in a half day program. She said this new program will attract young families to Town.

Robert Kalechman, 971 Hopmeadow Street, suggested people go down to Eno Hall to see the people going there to pick up food, medicine, etc. He said seniors cannot come up with this potential tax increase and he questioned the stability of the grant money. Mr. Kalechman said the best thing to do is come up with a zero budget.

Mr. Henault took the opportunity to mentioned the recent review and update of the Elderly Tax Relief.

Wendy Kelly, 11 Sachems Trail, said she has gone through the Simsbury school system and has small children currently in the program, one in Kindergarten. She said her daughter's K teacher has 46 students in one day. Ms. Kelly said we need to make the best choice and we need full day program. She said the current program puts too much stress on little kids.

Jeff Small, Madison Lane, said he will have a child in K next year and that if we don't take advantage of this opportunity now, it will become exponentially more difficult to implement in the coming years.

Maria Ecke, 18 Meadowlark Road, continued to read a memo to the Board of Selectmen, from Dennis Desrochers reflecting his opposition to adopting the

all-day kindergarten program.

Mr. Henault closed the Public Hearing.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Henault, Chairman
Commissions Clerk

Leslie U. Faraci,