

April 9, 2015

The Board of Finance Public Hearing was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman, David Shippee. Other members present-Robert Lassar, Bruce Lindberg, Dale Clark, Neil Cook, and Neil Delmonico. Staff present-Joyce Gustavson.

If the proposed budgets were passed as they are submitted tonight, it would represent a 1/10th of a mill increase, bringing the mill rate from 31.50 to 31.60 due to budget increases and loss of state revenues. The increase is equivalent to about \$10 per \$100,000 evaluation.

D. Shippee welcomed everyone to the hearing and explained that personal attacks on anybody will not be tolerated as this is not the place. The purpose tonight is to answer questions and find out if you want anything added or subtracted from the budgets. If a personal attack happens, that individual will be asked to leave and if they do not the meeting will be closed down. Please limit your comment(s) to three (3) minutes and state your name and address for the record. You can come back to the podium if you do not have time to ask all of questions. D. Shippee also explained that slips are available for anyone who wants to sign up to receive emails for Town happenings.

D. Shippee introduced the members of the Board of Finance.

D. Shippee stated that the Board of Selectmen will present their proposed Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Budget first.

Item 2: Itemized Estimates for Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Board of Selectmen Budget: R. Gray introduced the Board of Selectmen and gave a PowerPoint presentation on the 2015-2016 proposed Board of Selectmen Budget.

Items Covered: Anticipated revenues have decreased by 3.9%. Anticipated expenses remain the same as last fiscal year. He also explained the components of the Grand List, stating that 63.7% of tax revenue dollars is generated from residential, followed by 10.5% for motor vehicle, 10.3% for personal property, 5.8% for commercial/industrial, and 9.7% for other, which consists of farm land and forest. R. Gray also explained the projects that went out to bid, who was awarded the bid, and the cost of the project; school expenses that are included in the Selectmen's budget; and the proposed library and recreation budgets.

R. Gray asked if anyone had any questions or comments.

Jim Schrader, 378 Pine Hill Road asked why the Recreation wages increased from \$29,200 to \$39,000.

J. Gooslin, Recreation Director explained that the summer recreation program is increasing from five (5) hours per day to six (6) hours per day.

J. Schrader asked if R. Gray is the highway manager.

R. Gray responded, yes.

J. Schrader stated the plowing of the Town roads, especially Pine Hill Road, was the worse it has ever been where two vehicles could not pass. The contractors did a bad job, they did not push back the snow and it is your job to be watching them and I asked you when we spoke on the phone, what you can do to the contractor who does not do a good job and your comment was, I take who we can get.

R. Gray stated that is not exactly what he said. The project goes out to bid and we pick from the bids that are submitted. This year, a plow truck went down at the beginning of the blizzard, putting us down a truck.

F. Bood, 230 Harris Road, stated that the Board of Selectmen's budget carries over one million dollars (\$1,000,000) in budgetary needs for the school; do these dollars count toward the MBR.

D. Shippee stated no.

J. Schrader stated that the day you sent the snow plow trucks home early because the roads were not that bad, why did the Town Hall close that day giving employees another day off.

R. Gray stated that the trucks were out that morning, it was snowing heavy, they plowed the roads, pushed the snow back, sanded the roads and then the snow lightened up, so I sent the trucks home. The roads were bad at opening time.

D. Shippee stated that this has nothing to do with the budget. This is something you should take up with the Board of Selectmen. The Selectmen are going out to bid on this again next year. Things happened this year. We are not the only Town in the State of Connecticut that had bad roads.

J. Schrader stated that his other concern is the invoice for the snow and ice removal from the Town Hall Municipal Building.

R. Gray stated it was not a good choice to pay what we did for the snow and ice removal. The Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments, who had their roof shoveled, gave me the contact information for the licensed and insured contractor who they used. That was the name that we had to work with, we were unaware of anyone else in Town, I would have called you if I knew you were available to come down and do the work.

J. Scharder stated there are contractors in Town who are licensed and carry insurance.

Leatrice Shippee, 911 Gibson Hill Road asked if some of the recreation programs are self-supporting.

J. Gooslin stated yes, some of them are, but the summer recreation programs are not. We are working hard to make them self-supporting.

R. Choquette, Margaret Henry Road, asked why Town Hall Expenses, Maintenance, shows an increase of \$1,000 and what does this physically entail. What are you referring to as part of maintenance; the outside of the building, the inside of the building.

R. Gray stated outside and inside.

J. Firlik stated general building maintenance.

R. Choquette asked if this has to do with all the leakage that we have had this year, inside the building, do you feel that this is going to happen next year or is there something we are going to do about that to discover why it was leaking as much as it was, specifically in the Library, the Children's room, etc.

R. Gray stated that the roofs leaked because of the ice buildup, the ice dams at the edge of the roof was backed up under the shingles causing the problem.

R. Choquette asked about the wages. The majority of employees are receiving a 3 percent raise, while others are receiving quite a bit more; the Building Official is getting a 9.99% raise, why? Has his job changed that much; and there are other building inspectors around.

J. Firlik stated that the Building Official was at one point paid a significant amount more, there were some issues in the Town Hall which caused his salary to drop significantly. It appears that the things he is doing is in line and dropping him down to this amount was not really fair and the Board brought him back up to an intermediate level. The Selectmen have looked at the list and no one was interested.

R. Choquette stated that the General Office Assistant position which was recently created was advertised to work as the Tax Collector's Assistant, the Economic Development Assistant, the Town Clerk's Assistant and R. Gray's assistant.

R. Gray stated correct.

F. Bood asked what happened to the letter that was sent to the Building Official two and half weeks ago, did that letter make any sense.

R. Gray stated that he received the letter.

F. Bood stated that obviously he is not doing his job, there are other situations like that in Town, so why do you feel it necessary to give him a raise, I cannot even fathom that.

J. Firlik stated that the issue of what he does or does not do properly in the Town is something that we are addressing. There are a lot of things that he could be doing that he is not, but there are a lot of things that he is doing that we need to have done. The Selectmen have looked at the list of available building inspectors and we contacted three or four and not one of them was interested in coming here

and being of any assistance to us whatever. Overall, he seems to do a decent job, we do not get a lot of complaints, he is not perfect, but we are working on the issues. What we did to him a while ago was not right; it is like if we cut your salary fifty percent less for no decent reason and now we are trying to bring that back to something that is fair and equitable and your concern is about his personal performance on a few specific issues and we are dealing with them.

R. Choquette asked if the General Office Assistant is going to be doing many different jobs, why do we still have the Economic Development Coordinator's position at \$18,352, with the understanding that the Coordinator will be leaving, are we going to hire another person, is that why it is staying at \$18,352.

R. Gray stated that the Board of Selectmen are waiting for the results from the Employee Classification and Compensation Study. It has been suggested that the Town not hire an Economic Development Coordinator, but no decision has yet been made.

J. Firlik stated that if the Economic Development Coordinator stays on, we have to pay her.

R. Choquette stated that the Clerical Assistant was in last year's budget for \$31,182 and this year in the budget for \$1 and moved to the position of Administrative Assistant to the Selectmen with a 15.875% raise. It is her understanding of that job that it was split between two people; one as the Clerical Assistant and the other as the Treasurer, so why is this position getting at 15.875% raise when that person is not doing the whole job because it was split between two people and the Treasurer is getting a 3% raise. What is the position of the Administrative Assistant doing that warrants a 15.875% raise.

R. Gray stated the Board was trying to move it up to the same level as the Revenue Collector and the Town Clerk. We kept it down because we knew that you would be tonight hollering at us. The Administrative Assistant is doing the job performed by the previous Administrative Assistant.

R. Choquette stated that she is not.

C. Donall asked how do you know what she is doing.

N. Cook stated that the time is up, and does anyone else want to speak.

R. Choquette stated that when the responsibility level of that position is less than what it used to be, and the more responsible job going to the Treasurer why is she only getting a 3% raise.

R. Gray stated that the former Administrative Assistant (J. Lincoln) had an assistant, the current person does not have an assistant and is doing a lot of things that the previous assistant did not do; for example, the Power Point presentation, invoices to gravel operators for inspection fees which was never sent out before, as well as invoices for subdivision fees.

J. Firlik stated that this is a little too much detail, but the fact is that the current Administrative Assistant is doing what she was doing before and is also doing some of the things that J. Lincoln was doing and that is considered a classification change. The level of responsibility is different. You said before it was less, the Selectmen do not agree, we think that her responsible level has gone up and we think the pay should go up.

R. Choquette stated that she feels the Treasurer should get a 15.875% raise also because that person's job was realigned like the Administrative Assistant.

J. Firlik stated that this is a personnel issue and the Selectmen are working on it and like R. Gray mentioned we have a Classification and Compensation Study that we are looking at and until we can make heads or tails out of it, we are not sure what the Treasurer's position is worth.

R. Choquette asked why the Town Clerk's position is getting a 15.875% raise.

N. Cook said that is a schedule.

R. Gray stated that is according to the Employee Handbook.

J. Gustavson stated that when the Town Clerk was hired, the pay scale was documented in the Selectmen's minutes.

R. Choquette asked why two (2) janitors for one building are listed in the budget.

R. Gray responded that beginning the first of May we will have one janitor in the building; up until the first of May one janitor took care of one side and the other janitor took care of the other side of the building. As of May 1st, one janitor will take care of the entire building.

R. Choquette asked don't you think that budget should be realigned to read as such so people will know that we are not paying two (2) janitors.

R. Gray stated that the adjustment can be made.

J. Firlik stated that is a good comment, a constructive comment.

N. Cook asked if anyone else would like to speak.

L. Cooper stated that for the issues regarding S. Chviek (Economic Development Coordinator, Asst. Town Clerk, and janitor) this budget was made up when the Selectmen were not at all sure when she was leaving. Some of these figures reflect, just in case. We were not sure if she was leaving May, June or whenever and some of these, like her salary had to carry over because we did not know when she was leaving.

R. Choquette commented on the Recording Secretary wages being \$5,500. She doesn't believe that the Administrative Assistant to the First Selectman should be paid to cover the Selectmen's meetings. One person covers all the other meetings for the Commissions and if that person is getting paid from the Recording Secretary account then why is that person typing the minutes during Selectmen time and getting paid out of the Administrative Assistant salary.

J. Firlik stated that the Selectmen did address that and if you are at a meeting for two or three (2/3) hours and have taken notes and you have enough information so you can go through and type the minutes and do it during working hours, it is not a problem. Most of the time we have a meeting and the minutes are done immediately thereafter.

C. Donall asked if the former Administrative Assistant got paid the same way when she was the recording secretary.

J. Firlik said of course. It is time, time that the recording secretary has to do. There are not many people in this world that want to work from six to eight o'clock and not get paid; plain and simple.

J. Gustavson stated that in the past three (3) people pulled from that line item and that amount is not completely spent. The amount is put in to cover special meetings and public hearings so we do not go over on the budget.

J. Schrader asked how voters can vote on a budget when you do not know what you need.

J. Firlik responded that we have a good idea. What we have in the budget is what we think we need. What we do not know is what each position technically should be doing, responsibility wise and salary wise, but we have been getting along with what we have right now.

J. Schrader stated that don't you think you have a staffing problem and that the Town Hall is overstaffed.

J. Firlik said he does not.

J. Schrader asked why the Highway Crew cannot do the plowing for the Town and why we can't buy two (2) additional trucks so.

R. Gray stated it is a safety issue.

D. Shippee asked if anyone else had any other questions or comments. There were none.

D. Shippee asked if anyone had any other questions or comments and if not the Board of Education would present their proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2015-2016. There were no other questions or comments.

Item 1: Itemized Estimates for Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Board of Education Budget:

Chairman of the Board of Education, Renee Theroux-Keech introduced the Board of Education and Brenda Needham, Superintendent presented the PowerPoint presentation for the 2015-2016 proposed Board of Education Budget.

Items Covered: Mission statement and vision; School Board Goals – culture, connections to the community, communication and the achievement of the students. Anticipated expenses have increased by \$107,861, a little over one percent (1%) due to increases in personnel, utilities, health insurance, etc. B. Needham stated that fiscal responsibility and stability are important so that budgets are not continually going up and down. The makeup of the budget consists primarily of salaries and employee benefits. Employee benefits have decreased a little due to personnel changes and most of the employees co-pay is about twenty percent (20%) which is higher than many communities. School enrollment and the pupil cost comparison was also explained.

B. Needham asked if anyone had any questions or comments.

R. Lassar, 88 Gibson Hill Road, asked if we have 180 days of school and is every day a teaching day.

B. Needham replied 181 and every day is a teaching day.

R. Lassar disagreed that every day is a teaching day and stated that the school has many days off and he feels that is wrong. Students should be learning more than the three to four (3/4) hours per day and that they are being short changed.

B. Needham stated that in Connecticut we have 181 student days and 187 teacher days. For a variety of reasons, schools have half days and that is considered a full day in reaching the 181 student days. Some adjustments have been made to next year's school calendar.

J. Schrader asked if the bus coordinator was available tonight and asked how many buses go to the Plainfield High School.

B. Needham stated she is not available tonight and we have four (4) buses that go the Plainfield High.

J. Schrader stated that many times he follows three (3) buses on North Sterling Road with seven or eight (7/8) students on them. Why are we paying all those bus drivers to go all the way to Plainfield, all the way back and burning extra fuel? Can we have one bus and merge at the Town Garage on Main Street.

B. Needham explained that she did not have an answer to that. The transportation routes are complicated and that is because some students go to Killingly, some to Ellis Tech, and some to Plainfield High School.

J. Schrader asked why all the buses cannot be housed at the same location and have you considered outsourcing outside of the Town.

B. Needham stated that some Towns do transportation a different way and as we look at the future we need to look at all options. This has been the tradition here in Sterling for the drivers to take the buses home. I have suggested that we look at outsourcing the buses, it might not be what we do, but it is worth looking into.

F. Bood asked how the MBR works. Last year we had 465 children, this year 449 and yet the budget still has to increase with fewer students.

B. Needham explained that it relates to a lot of different things; it relates to personnel, it relates to the kind of program we want to offer, and it relates to increases. It is not a definitive where you have X number of students and it is going to cost X amount.

N. Cook asked if anyone else had any other questions or comments. There were none.

D. Shippee stated that if there are no other questions or comments, then we would move on to the Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget. There were no other questions or comments.

Item 3: Estimate of the Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget:

R. Gray explained that the Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget is money that comes once a year from the State and is approximately \$40,000. The Town keeps a budget five (5) years out on the money with a spending plan. In the past, the money has been used to build a Town Garage, the salt shed, and the dog pound. Also it has been used to pay for some of the bridge work. This year we

plan to use it to pave a section of Gibson Hill Road. The money is not raised by taxes; it is money from the State of Connecticut to be spent on capital improvement projects.

R. Gray asked if anyone had any questions. There were none.

D. Shippee asked if anyone had any questions or comments. There were none.

Item 4: All persons will be heard regarding any item of expenditure they may wish for the Board of Finance to consider for inclusion in the 2015-2016 Budget: There were none.

D. Shippee reported that the Town Meeting for the proposed budgets is scheduled for Thursday, April 23, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. at the Sterling Town Hall/Municipal Building Gym and the Board of Selectmen will adjourn the Town Meeting to a vote by referendum scheduled for Thursday, April 30th from noon to 8:00 p.m. in the gym.

The public hearing closed at 8:25 p.m.

April 9, 2014

Call to Order: The special meeting of the Sterling Board of Finance was called to order at 8:30 p.m. Roll was called: David Shippee-present; Bruce Lindberg-present; Neil Cook-present; Neil Delmonico-present; Robert Lassar-present; and Dale Clark-present. Staff present-Russell Gray, Lincoln Cooper, John Firlik, and Joyce Gustavson.

II. Consider & Act on Public Hearing Comments on the Proposed 2015-2016 Board of Education Budget: N. Cook made a motion, seconded by B. Lindberg to keep the proposed Board of Education Budget as it was presented this evening in the amount of 7,974,898 and not make any changes to it. All voted in favor of the motion.

III. Consider & Act on Public Hearing Comments on the Proposed 2015-2016 Board of Selectmen's Budget: D. Clark made a motion, seconded by R. Lassar to keep the proposed Board of Selectmen's Budget as it was presented this evening in the amount of \$2,702,580 and not make any changes to it. All voted in favor of the motion.

IV. Consider & Act on Public Hearing Comments on the Proposed 2015-2016 Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget: D. Clark made a motion, seconded by N. Cook to keep the proposed Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget as it was presented this evening in the amount of \$250,785 and not make any changes to it. All voted in favor of the motion.

V. Consider & Act on Public Hearing Comments Regarding Any Item of Expenditure to be Considered for Inclusion in the Proposed 2015-2016 Budget: No other items were requested.

VI. Appointment of Auditor for FY Ending 6/30/2015: N. Delmonico made a motion, seconded by B. Lindberg to appoint O'Connor Davies, LLP, 100 Great Meadow Road, Wethersfield, CT 06109 as the audit firm for the FY Ending June 30, 2015. All voted in favor of the motion.

VII. Adjournment: R. Lassar made a motion, seconded by N. Cook to adjourn at 8:32 p.m. All voted in favor of the motion.

Attest: _____
Joyce A. Gustavson, Board of Finance Clerk