

June 25, 2014

The special Board of Finance was called to order at 8:24 p.m. with David Shippee, Bruce Lindberg, Neil Cook, Dale Clark, and Neil Delmonico present. Absent-Robert Lassen. Also present-Russell Gray, Lincoln Cooper, John Firlik, and Judy Lincoln.

A motion was made by D. Clark, seconded by N. Cook, to reinstate all cut positions, extend J. Lincoln's insurance to 1 year upon retirement when the budget passes so that the mill rates stays at 31.5 mills. Discussion was held. The total budget would be \$2,702,580. All voted in favor of the motion.

A motion was made by N. Delmonico, seconded by D. Clark, to submit the Local Capital Improvement Program Plan & Budget as previously submitted. All voted in favor of the motion.

Attest: Judith K. Lincoln  
Judith K. Lincoln, Administrative Assistant

June 25, 2014

The Board of Finance Public Hearing was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman David Shippee. Members' present-Neil Cook, Bruce Lindberg, Dale Clark, and Neil Delmonico. Member absent-Robert Lassar.

Chairman Shippee asked the First Selectman to outline the changes made to the Board of Selectmen Budget.

First Selectman Russell Gray noted that three assistant positions (Assistant Town Clerk, Clerical Assistant & Assistant Revenue Collector) have been eliminated and they increased the percentage paid toward insurance to 15%. The Unemployment Compensation line item will need to be increased \$21,000 to cover the eliminated positions.

Dana Morrow of Gibson Lane commented on the elimination of the Clerical Assistant position. He noted it is ridiculous to think that once the Administrative Assistant retires someone can just drop right in. This action ties the hands of the Board and Commissions that rely on the work performed by these positions.

Michelle Chappell of Pine Hill Road agreed with D. Morrow that the Clerical Assistant needs to be reinstated. She could also learn the job in the Tax Collector's Office and the Town Clerk's Office. She could be a floater along with her other tasks. She is a valuable member of this town, she puts her heart and soul into this job and the job should be reinstated and wanted to make a motion to that affect.

Chairman Shippee noted that no motion could be accepted only written or verbal comments..

R. Gray stated it would be up to the Board of Finance to make that decision.

Maggie Camplin of Pine Hill Road agreed with what M. Chappell said about Joyce. M. Caplin didn't see why Joyce should be the one to leave; she is very qualified. There are other things on the agenda that should be able to make up the money. The First Selectman should take a cut.

Ruta Parker of Jared Hall Hill Road stated that funds should be put back for all three positions, Joyce especially. By eliminating these positions you are stripping the town hall of all back-up, you are handicapping the taxpayers when no one is available to serve them. Looking at the budget I figured how much I would get for cutting these people. For cutting three people I would get \$60.00, less than 20 cents per day. I don't want that 60 dollars. I am ashamed and don't want the \$60.

The Town should keep it and fill some potholes and let people keep their jobs. I can't support this budget. I have always supported them because when on the Board of Finance I saw that this town did not squander money. These people are there for a reason.

Richard Wood of Newport Road thought that Joyce should be reinstated. She is a very active person in the town hall helping other people. Judy gets five weeks vacation and there will be no backup here to help people who come in. She should be put back in.

Anna Gagner Revenue Collector suggested that Rosalind Choquette be reinstated as Joyce is not qualified to handle the position because it warrants schooling and she won't be able to do it all on her own and will have to close the office to balance out the books every day and make deposits. It is a bad mistake because the office door will be closed when people come in when doing deposits. Also there will be no checks and balances if she is alone.

Barbara Reilly of Margaret Henry Road asked if the Selectmen had a plan in place for how to deal with the problem of eliminating these positions. Who is going to double up on a job? Are you going to cross train people? What was your thinking about this?

R. Gray-At the last public hearing and town meeting the most I heard was about the overstaffing of the town hall.

B. Reilly noted that he was correct. The Selectmen did everything that was asked for at that meeting. They asked if you specifically needed an assistant to your assistant. That is what they

didn't like. They didn't say anything about the Tax Collector or Judy in the office. They talked about your assistant to the assistant. It was you needing two assistants that set up the red flags to everybody. I was the one that said to pay 5% toward healthcare is unheard of today. So that increase to co-pay insurance is fair. Is it fair to eliminate positions? Not if you really need it but if not needed, yes you have to say it is fair. No one is looking to chop heads off. They are looking to be fair, looking to try to help the town come up with a plan so that some of these people aren't going to lose their homes. Do you know how many houses are up for sale in our town? My house is up for sale and I have lost two sales. You know why? They can't afford to pay the taxes. I pay \$7,500 and don't have a lot. I have property, privacy and a nice small town that I love but I can't afford to live here. So do you have a plan in place? When you stand before a room of taxpayers do we have any volunteers that would come in and help Anna out?

R. Gray-We have trouble getting volunteers for the Boards and Commissions and Anna has stated that someone in her office has to be specifically trained for that office.

B. Reilly noted that the Town wanted Russell not to have two assistants. They didn't say anything about the rest of the others.

R. Gray noted that the assistant is training to take over for Judy.

B. Reilly asked of the people who are losing their jobs, who are going to be there to help in replacement. Are you going to cross train people?

R. Gray-The only thing they could think of was to lock the door if Anna couldn't be there.

B. Reilly asked if Anna needed an assistant all year.

R. Gray said no.

B. Reilly asked when she did need an assistant.

R. Gray noted July and January are typically collection times.

B. Reilly stated that it was Russell's assistant to the assistant that everyone was in an uproar about.

R. Gray-That is the one they are now saying we should keep.

B. Reilly so can she also be trained for other things or is that going to take up all her time.

R. Gray-He imagined she could be trained for other things.

Frank Bood of 230 Harris Road stated it looked like they are stepping over dollar bills to pick up pennies by trying to get rid of people who contribute to this town, not just Joyce, belong to this town. How do you take the secondary person out of the tax office? Checks and balances have to be in place. You not talking about pennies we are talking about 10 million dollars. Common sense and logic dictate that check and balances have to be in place. Has OPM been notified of this? Been asked for their input?

R. Gray-They have not been asked.

F. Bood noted this is something that should be considered. Also there have to be other measures. Look outside the box to see what else can be done. We are spending \$60,000 a year to heat this building and frankly we need to find other solutions and focus on that instead of cutting people. These positions are not paid a lot of money. The taxes are ridiculous there is no dispute about that. There has to be other solutions than taking away these miniscule jobs that are important. I wish someone would focus on that. I commend you for what you did but keep in mind when the people are screaming especially those that are uninformed and don't know what they are screaming about and that's a fact and I will be here all night if someone wants to dispute it.

R. Wood stated that more unemployment taxes would have to be paid.

Jim Schrader of Pine Hill Road asked why Judy is staying instead of Joyce. She gets five weeks vacation and she gets two weeks' vacation. She makes less money, she makes more money. Your saving money by cutting her, she been in town for 33 years, she plays video games most

every day on our time. I've been in there many times. I've talked to you about it. What is your reading on it?

R. Gray-Yes you have. She has information we need that Joyce doesn't quite have yet.

J. Schrader-Put her at 15 hrs a week and no benefits and leave her full-time and get the knowledge from her.

R. Gray-They will give that a thought.

J. Schrader-Why did they cut the Revenue Collector? Why can't she work 15 hrs a week?

You say that Joyce is here to replace Judy when she retires. What happens if she retires tomorrow? All that knowledge and she runs out that door. You are talking out this side of your mouth and you should be talking out of this side. You say this and you say that but we have got to make cuts. You don't need two full-time people. There should be one full time one part time. What is the hard part about that? Another thing, I think you should remove yourself from office because you are incompetent to do the job you were elected for. You don't answer a question and say I'll look into it and you're a moron.

R. Gray-Thank you.

Carol of Sterling Road in Sterling did not agree with the budget and asked questions about Dog Report funds, and NDDH and NECCOG and that some type of explanation should be with the budget to tell exactly what these are. She also questioned the Recreation budget items, Library Staff & Recreation Staff with no numbers as to how many people are being paid. She questioned Economic Development expenses and revenues. It was her opinion that those cut should not have been cut. Who is going to the work if they are not there? Reinstate the people that have been cut.

R. Gray- Northeast District Department of Health and Northeast Connecticut Council of Governments. There are two places for NECCOG is in the budget, Animal Control Services and for membership to the council.

C. Corson of NuStone Manufacturing in Sterling-Thinks it is foolish to eliminate the Admin Clerk position. Joyce is very very efficient. Judy is going to retire one of these days and you will have to have someone to take her place. The town can cut in other ways.

Raquel Chappell of Pine Hill Road-Questioned the \$53,000 heating bill. That is totally outrageous. Boilers cannot be working efficiently. Make cuts there by making the heating for the building more efficient.

R. Gray-That number includes oil and boiler maintenance. We just had a delivery that will last all winter. There are two new boilers that are working ok. The town is forming an Energy Conservation Commission to look into other areas for heating. Frank Bood will be heading that commission and he is looking for volunteers. Anyone interested should speak to Frank.

Steve Davidson of Gibson Hill Road-New to community and the first person he made contact with was Joyce and she was very very helpful and always had the answer. She was extremely helpful. Everyone at town hall was nice. He would like to see Joyce the next time he comes into the Town Hall because she was a very important part of why he was able to move to Sterling.

Jim Schrader of Pine Hill Road-Why doesn't the town hall open another hour each day and punch out for lunch? Open the town hall for 35 hrs, get paid for 35 hrs but they all take a lunch time. If they all punched out for the hour everyday you would gain 8 hours of productivity. To be closed on Friday and Saturday is ludicrous. A lot of people cannot be there during the week and want to come in on Saturday.

R. Gray-It is open until 6 on Wednesdays.

J. Schrader-Some people have Saturday off, some still work a five day work week. The Transfer Station is not open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday right? They are open Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday more convenient for people to pay taxes and to use it. So why

wouldn't the town hall be open Wed, Thurs, Fri, & Sat for the convenience of the residents? Not many people get a paid lunch. Most town and state employees don't get a paid lunch. You would be gaining another hour of productivity from each employee with no paid lunch.

Bonnie Deojay of Sterling Road-It is a tough world and a lot of people are out of work right now and they are struggling and I think it is a shame for someone to be let go right now. One thing people are struggling with is paying their insurance bill. When I started my job 35 years ago the company paid for my insurance and it was good insurance. Today I'm paying half of the bill and it keeps going up and up. I don't know what you folks pay but I would think there is an opportunity there to increasing the co-pay to save some money that way. I just don't understand why you would want to let two valuable employees go, it doesn't make any sense to me. I really think we should all work together in this.

R. Gray-Bonnie, I agree with you and we didn't want to let those people go. At the last public hearing that is what I heard, get rid of the extra people in town hall, the assistants. We did what they asked.

Scott Blinkhorn of Woodland Road-So you let these people go and what are you going to save? \$100,000 out of the budget? There are 4500 houses in town roughly, so realistically you are going to save \$35 or \$40 average per resident and devastate the town hall. I don't think that is very smart.

Rick Deojay of Sterling Road-Cut where it needs to be cut. What you are doing to us is slapping us in the face by not paying attention to what we said. Russell, we said, Judy Lincoln when you walked into town hall is playing games. A hundred people have told me you don't listen. It is her you have to get rid of, not the assistant. The assistant is doing a great job. Judy Lincoln, I thought she just didn't like me for the last 20 years. Come to find out she doesn't like 90% of the town and they don't like her! Get rid of her! It is time! That is that. Rosalind, the only reason you really got rid of Rosalind is because she is opinionated and she is a Democrat! That is the only reason! When it comes right down to it because that is why you kept Judy, because she is a Republican. And that's the way it lines up right along. Everything you do in town, everybody that you help, it is along the party lines. That is just what you do and in this budget that you are proposing does just that! It screws us and helps you! That is just wrong! What are you thinking? I'm dumbfounded by it!

R. Gray-I am too, to think you would even think that way Rick!

R. Deojay-I do!!! Honest to god. I have seen it work, I have seen you do your business and I am pissed!! That is why I ran against you because I am pissed at the way you are doing things.

R. Gray-Did I not have you twice work for the town repairing walls? I'm going to ask you two times. Did I hire you two times to repair walls for the town? You're a Democrat.

R. Deojay-You hired me and I was a Republican.

R. Gray-Sorry about that.

R. Deojay-Because of how you run your politics is why I am not a Republican. Rosalind, who does so much and is so good at her job and because she is opinionated you want to get rid of her and you hang on to Judy. That's crazy! You have things in here at the last meeting that said you are getting \$125,000 grant to do paving. But yet in the budget you are asking for \$125,000.

R. Gray-We are. The grant was written, by Joyce, for \$500,000 to replace culverts and overlay Gibson Hill Road in its entirety. We have not been awarded that grant. We might find out in July or in September.

R. Deojay-What are you going to do with the \$125,000 in the budget if you don't use it?

R. Gray-Gibson Hill Road isn't the only road that needs work in this town.

- R. Deojay-At the same time, how much money do you have in the "Rainy Day Fund"? You don't know! You don't want to tell us!
- R. Gray-We don't have a Rainy Day Fund. I think you mean Fund Balance Rick.
- R. Deojay-How about the Rainy Day Acquisition fund? How much is in there?
- R. Gray-That is money that was put in there generated from.....\$81,000
- R. Deojay-What do you plan on doing with it?
- R. Gray-Nothing at the moment.
- R. Deojay-Last time a friend of the town government made a killing selling a piece of land, 40 acres that was worth about 80 grand went for \$425,000.
- R. Gray-Oh, good for him.
- R. Deojay-That's what I'm saying and that's politics in Sterling. It has got to change! We need somebody for oversight, a Board overlooking everything that goes on in the town. We don't need a manager, that is what they elected you for. Elected you to manage the Town. We don't need another manager. If you can't do the job you should step down. That's what they will be going after, the Finance Board, is some answers. That is what you were elected for.
- R. Gray-They are not looking for a Town Manager they are looking for a finance director or thinking about.
- R. Deojay-What are you going to do?
- R. Gray-I don't do finances.
- R. Deojay-Do you have any idea where they are?
- R. Gray-Yes.
- R. Deojay-It is crazy to me that you would come forward with a budget there is so much on it.
- R. Gray-Rick, I don't see where I gain anything from this budget.
- R. Deojay-How much do you make Russell?
- R. Gray-\$47,000
- R. Deojay-Why don't you cut yours? You cut everybody else and got rid of them. If you are do it to everybody else do it to yourself. It doesn't make sense.
- R. Gray-I did not do it to everybody else. We were told to eliminate the assistants and that is what we did.
- R. Deojay-You were not told to eliminate the assistants. The assistants are better than the people that can take care of something. Joyce is better than Judy on every aspect of everything that I've seen. Just more pleasant! She doesn't have a kind remark to say about anybody. And you, when you get to that, she says she runs the town. You ask her when you're not around she runs the Town. She smiles to you and knives you in the back when you turn around and still you keep her! It's what has been done.
- R. Gray-You're probably right. Anybody else?
- D. Morrow-Can you explain the Library budget?
- R. Gray-Wages is under wages now that \$50,000. There are two full time employees, not 40 hrs full time.
- D. Morrow-The Library saved him when he lost his job by being able to use the computers to get a new one. Be cautious about cuts to the library. Don't cripple the library.
- Leatrice Shippee of Gibson Hill Road-The Library is open 52 weeks per year, 1100 hours, has 6,749 visits, 1,318 cards, researched 120 reference questions, 13,410 adult books, 9,710 youth 5,340.... 28 subscriptions, 265 audio books, 1,805 videos. There is 1 Librarian and 5 workers It provides Job Share, Youth Activities such as Farm tours, Mad Science, Story Hour, Adult Book Club, and has 7 internet computers. Two years ago they started a free clothing bank. Please visit our Library and if anyone wants to volunteer see Rachel.

F. Bood-Democrat vs Republican is not going to fix anything. It is not constructive. We all need to get on the same page and be part of the solution not the problem. Be constructive.

D. Shippee-Are there any other questions?

J. Schrader-What goes out to bid in the town?

D. Shippee-We just put in a new policy this year that anything over \$25,000 goes out to competitive bid. Has to be advertised...

J. Schrader-Why a \$25,000 item?

D. Shippee-Because the state has a regulation, it used to be \$7,500 so this raised it to \$25,000 because of the cost of advertising. Anything from \$1,000 to 24,999 has to have three quotes, telephone, you can call someone and ask for a quote.

J. Schrader-.....24,999.

D. Shippee-I'm hoping that is so, that just went in also.

J. Schrader-How about mowing grass on the side of the roads? Was that sent out? Did you get three quotes for that? .....is that bid on?

R. Gray-We have the same person we have had for the last 3 or 4 years, 5 years. We tried to get other people to bid on it, to be interested in it and there was no interest.

J. Schrader-You just sent out for other to bid on it.

R. Gray-I didn't send a thing, but we let people know the job was available.

J. Schrader-????????

R. Gray-Under the new policy that will go out to bid.

J. Schrader-.....snow plowing because they have done it for 20 years. Times have changed. Should be bid on.

D. Shippee-One of the other things brought up, it was mentioned at the last meeting to have a study done on the Town Hall and the people. The Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen met with a company last Thursday and we are waiting for a quote to come back from them. What they are going to do is, if the price is reasonable, they are going to do job descriptions for every job we have. They are going to tell us what is the going rate is for the average towns in our area and of our size. Whether we have too many people not enough people, hopefully that will settle some of the and we don't know ourselves if we are overstaffed or understaffed. The job get done, maybe there could be some additions. This company is going to come in and do it...

Someone in the audience asked how much that was going to cost us?

D. Shippee-It looks like about \$7,500 but we don't have any good job descriptions of any of the jobs. We don't have anything in here that says if somebody coming into the job today coming in at the highest cost. ....anybody can see what they do. This money will not come out of the budget it will probably come out of the Fund Balance.

Rosalind Choquette of Margaret Henry Road-I just want to correct you on one thing. We do have job descriptions. They are in a book and are open to the public that anyone can come in anytime to see what we do. I want to correct you on that. They might change from this lady but we do have job descriptions and I know Anna and mine are very extensive and I believe Neil read it and was quite surprised as to how extensive our job is. So I would just like you to stand corrected on that.

D. Shippee-We just want to let everybody to know what is going on. If anyone want to know what is going on in town we meet on the second Wednesday of every month at 7:00 o'clock. Anybody that wants to come to the Board of Finance meeting are invited. We don't meet, unless it is a special meeting, in July or August. But every other month we meet and everyone is welcome to come. If anybody has any questions, if not...

R. Tetreault of Pine Hill Road-I'm a little confused and co-pay and .....

D. Shippee-Co-pay is what the employees pay.

R. Tetreault-What do they pay?

D. Shippee-It is 20% of whatever the cost of their insurance is.

J. Lincoln-No it is 15%.

D. Shippee-Oh, I'm sorry it is 15% and the town pays the rest.

R. Tetreault-What is the average cost per person.

D. Shippee-For two people it is \$1541 per month. That's what it is going to be. The Town Meeting on the Budget is scheduled for July 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. and has been adjourned to a vote by referendum on July 15<sup>th</sup>. We have some letters to be read into the record.

J. Lincoln-"From Jennifer Mossner to D. Shippee dated Wednesday June 25, 2014. Dear Mr. Shippee, My name is Jen Mossner and I am a Sterling resident. I am writing because I became aware that the position of Assistance to the Selectman (Joyce Gustavson's Position) has been eliminated from the budget. Although I cannot attend the budget meeting tonight, I respectfully ask that the committee re-instate the position into the budget. As a Sterling resident, I understand the need to reduce the overall budget but I fee that this is a much needed position and one that, if eliminated, will have a devastating impact on the town. Please consider my request and contact me if I can be of any further assistance. Sincerely, Jen Mossner 188 Church St., Sterling, CT 06377."

"From Patti McClanahan to D. Shippee dated Tuesday June 24, 2014. Hello Mr. Shippee, I am unable to attend the public hearing tonight, but I would like the Board of Finance to re-instate the assistant's position in the Selectman's Office. In talking with Joyce, I know she recently submitted a \$500,000 STEAP Grant application to the State of Connecticut for work to be done on Gibson Hill Road, as well as prepares the PowerPoint presentation, among other duties. Having two people in the Selectman's Office has been an asset to the Town and this position is one that should be reinstated. Thank you, Patricia McClanahan."

"My name is Bob Harwood. I live on Valley View Road in Sterling for the past 18 years. I would like to show my support for Joyce Gustavson. She has always done a great job and I have always felt secure noing she was assistant to the Selectman. Please reinstate her position. Signed Robert L. Harwood."

"June 25, 2014 My name is Dori Cote, I live on Valley View Road in Sterling. I would like to show my support in the reinstating of the Selectman's Assistant Joyce Gustavson. I think Joyce is a valuable asset to the Town of Sterling and she need to stay in the position of assistant to the selectman. Thank you Dori A. Cote"

"There is a dollar figure below which it will be impossible for Town employees to effectively complete tasks required by statute. The Boards of Finance and Selectmen must balance reducing expenses against providing quality services for our citizens. Keep in mind that over \$1,000,000 of the BOS budget is for educational items, the largest of which are construction bonds, bus and van. The 6/11 BOS budget includes a "per diem" line item under wages. Calculate all cost associated with replacing staff with daily workers. See if the savings are as much as it first appears. If part-time workers must be hired, it might have been smarter to keep the trained and experience employees we had. The Boards aim to fulfill residents' requests, but they should expect some unhappy residents who have to wait to license a dog, get a pistol permit, or pay taxes, because the assistants are gone. Expenses must be balanced against quality. It would be best to speak directly to the individuals whose positions were cut. I know that the BOS assistant brought in more than \$25,000 this year in old permit fees, and applied for a STEAP grant. The revenue collectors have brought in hundreds of thousands in back taxes from tax sales. The revenue collector, Town Clerk and Selectmen's administrative assistant won't be able to pursue these "extra" ventures as the sole employees in their offices. Aside from that, our auditors expect to see a division of labor in



the revenue collector's office, reducing the chances of fraud and embezzlement. The Boards have had initial meetings with an "efficiency expert." If the budget fails again, the Boards may want to reduce all Town workers to part-time. This seems likely to create more unhappy townspeople, as they wait even longer for help. It is also possible the town might be fined for some reports that are submitted late. If the Boards are proceeding with the efficiency expert, her recommendations should be considered before cutting staff further (even if it's only hours per week, and not entire positions). Again, our Boards must balance the quality of services provided for our citizens against reductions in expenses. Signed, Penny Keith 6/24/14"

June 25, 2014 Board of Selectman Board of Finance Town of Sterling I am writing in hopes that the BOS will reconsider the termination of Joyce Gustavson. She is a real asset to our town. She has taken the initiative of writing a grant and invoicing for services performed by town employees. She has brought money into our treasury that exceeds her salary. Please rethink this situation and strive to find another way of making the budget cuts call for at the town meeting. Sincerely, Leatrice Shippee."

From Marnie Reynolds-Bourque to D. Shippee dated Wednesday June 18, 2014. Dear Mr. Shippee, I know you are getting inundated about the proposed budget, but I also had to comment on it. I also am concerned, being an unemployed tax payer. That being said, I noticed that positions are being cut for the budget. Being unemployed in this struggling economy is no fun. I read the notes of the meetings and see that people are complaining about extra positions, but surely cuts can be made somewhere to try to keep people employed. These are tough times and I just hate to see another person jobless, especially someone as helpful, knowledgeable and nice as Joyce. I also read the comments about the library being on a "volunteer" basis, and I think that is a horrifying suggestion. A library says a lot about a Town, and I am sure you have experienced how easy it is getting volunteers to fill boards for a monthly meeting, never mind on a weekly schedule. I know it is only a suggestion, but I had to comment on the ridiculousness of it. Thank you for your time, Marnie Bourque."

D. Shippee-There were no changes made to the Local Capital Improvement Plan and Budget. It is basically a grant

The hearing was closed at 8:14 p.m.

Attest: Judith K. Lincoln  
Judith K. Lincoln, Administrative Assistant