

May 5, 2011

Town of Washington Annual Budget Public Hearing
7:30 p.m.

First Selectman Mark Lyon opened the hearing with explanation of handouts available and expressed special thanks to Bryon Memorial Hall Trustees for the new sound system and lighting. The hearing proceeded with a brief overview and then questions and answers.

Mark Lyon: Our cover sheet gives brief review of our budget. We worked with the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance to put together what we thought would be a responsible budget. It includes 1% for full-time employees and a 2% for our part-time employees. Our full-time employees will continue to receive their health benefit. We did raise the deductible, but that is covered by the town. We have adjusted those line items in the health insurance line, but the overall impact on budget due to reduced premiums and the fact that ... we are insuring fewer employees is only \$350 increase.

We have adjusted upwards for fuel oil and heating. We increased our contribution to the Gunn Memorial Library by a considerable amount to help keep them as a viable asset to our community. Our capital budget is our biggest percentage increase in any given line item, but that includes some capital purchases of highway equipment that help to improve the efficiency of our highway department and allow them to take on more of the work that normally would be contracted out. We have found over the last few years that we have not increased our cost line items for our paving and drainage and major road maintenance. Because of escalating costs, we are doing less and less of it. This is equipment is purchased to allow our highway department to take on more of that work in house which on the few occasions where we've tackled projects, we've found that to be very cost effective. It also will address a lot of issues that we have so far as paving and drainage. With a lot of our smaller work, we end up paying a premium because of the lack of volume when we hire an outside contractor to that work.

There were some decreased line items in our budget. One was our fire house debt service which continues to be paid down. Our pension fund contribution was decreased by a considerable amount due to largely the work our Finance Board subcommittee did with Union Savings Bank to get a better return. We also realized probably about a 50% reduction in the cost to process our recyclables. It now leaves our recyclables expense at about a third of the cost of our solid waste expense. Every pound we put into recycling saves about 40% on overall cost of disposal.

We did make some big reductions in two of our funds that we set aside, open space and housing fund. Both were cut by approximately 60%. We felt that that was the best thing to do for the short term. It helps control our overall increase. I don't think it diminishes the value we put on those two items, but we cut the funding level to control our overall costs.

That's my brief explanation. The bottom line, our overall increase only went up 0.6%. That is due in large the work that our departments did and our employees did to contain costs for the coming year. They are the ones that are managing to do more with less. They should be commended.

Peter Tagley: For the last ten years I've been temporarily living on off Mygatt Road. Dick Sears had budgeted about \$200,000 to repair that road. Do you know what ever happened to that? Is that still in the works? He budgeted that a long time ago. Mygatt Road is in pretty bad shape.

Mark Lyon: That's one of our projects to address this year. That went on hold pending potential development there which hasn't come about so it's time to go ahead and hire an engineer to do the work

that's needed

Pete Tagley: I have another question ... Has the town ever pursued the concept of separating the food that's thrown away into a recyclable product that the town can sell?

Mark Lyon: No.

Mark Lyon: Any other questions or comments, arguments?

Valerie Friedman: I'm aware that the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance had some issues with the Region 12 school budget which for the town is 65% of the total budget. I'm curious why you didn't go public with that with enough notice so that taxpayers had a chance to see those positions in writing in advance of the vote? If all you do is speak to each other, it really doesn't accomplish the objective of making the point to the community ... Don't you think it would have been more effective if you made that public disclosure earlier?

Mark Lyon: Whenever I was asked by members of the press, I expressed the same opinion. I understand what you're saying. I know there were some FOI issues how you go about presenting vote for or against. I did on any occasion that I was asked express my concern.

Michael Jackson: [Board of Finance] We're not allowed to use town funds to advocate any position on any issue.

Valerie Friedman: But you can use the media effectively? ...

Michael Jackson: There was a lot of conversation to be had so that we could all agree as to where we were.

Valerie Friedman: The timing did not work out. In the future ... planning in advance.

Michael Jackson: We're also trying to do one other thing which I think is very important for the relationship between the Board of Education and the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen. We had no interest in starting a public fight early about the size of the budget so what we did was work with them on the budget. We asked questions. We got some information ... but at least we had a dialogue. That's the first time we've had that in a long time. ... We have a very severe problem in the region. If it was a business problem it would be the functional equivalent of a disaster, because in five years you're going to have a 50% reduction in student population.

Valerie Friedman: And higher costs.

Michael Jackson: The Board of Education has got to come to grips with how they're going to restructure the overhead and teaching code ... Whatever you're going to do ... you have to do in the next three to six months.

Valerie Friedman: I think ... sense that people outside the Board feel the disaster more than some of the Board members unfortunately.

Michael Jackson: Well, let's be fair. The Board of Education members work tirelessly. Some of them, all of them collectively may not have the same background and may not have a feel for the planning issue confronting it. We're trying to point it out and ask them to focus on it and we'd be glad to help in any way we can. They're elected. We're elected. Under the state law we don't have any influence on their budget. It's just by future of our charm.

Valerie Friedman: Thank you.

Mark Lyon: Other comments or questions?

Dan Coughlin: I live over in New Preston on Findley Road. I was just wondering about drainage and repairs. Is there a schedule published what roads are being taken care of?

Mark Lyon: We usually have some advance. We don't have a schedule at this point. As we do, we will communicate that.

Dan Coughlin: Would that be put online?

Mark Lyon: It could be put online. A couple of times we also used our phone alert system. Findley Road is another road that took a beating and is one of our priorities.

Dan Coughlin: Great, thanks.

Mark Lyon: If that's it, I'd say we could close the public hearing if there are no other comments.

Male: I would just like to say that I appreciate your efforts and Michael's efforts, the Board of Finance. It's a smart, intelligent representation of what's going on and I appreciate it.

Mark Lyon: Thank you.

Mark Lyon: Thank you for your time. Thank you for coming out. It's good to see so many people are interested. See you here in two weeks.

Hearing adjourned at approximately 7:46 p.m.

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I, Sheila R. Silvernail, do certify that the foregoing pages are a true and accurate summary to the best of my ability of the Public Hearing of the Town of Washington, CT held on May 5, 2011 and represent a synopsis of questions and comments and not a verbatim transcript.

Dated at Washington, CT this 7th day of May 2011