

March 17, 2003

Present:

Board: Jack Field, Robin Hirschfield, Michael Jackson, Rex Swain

Alternates: Liddy Adams, Mark Lyon

Selectmen: Elaine Luckey, Harry Wyant

Press: David Lombino, Litchfield County Times

Tax Collector: Tanya Wescott

Treasurer: Linda McGarr

Guests: Steve Sordi, Resident State Trooper; Valerie Friedman

Tax Collector's Report: Tanya Wescott reported while outstanding tax collections are a little higher than normal she expects to receive payment in the near future on several accounts from banks and attorneys. She noted her concern and that of other tax collectors over the Governor's proposal to eliminate the DMV's check on delinquent taxes prior to registering of motor vehicles. Rep. O'Neill has also presented a proposal to eliminate the motor vehicle tax altogether because of the differences in mill rates in each municipality. If this tax were eliminated, she estimates a reduction of approximately \$590,000 in motor vehicle tax collections. She suggested a better way might be to have the DMV collect the tax and it then be apportioned to each town. Tanya feels she can collect most of the outstanding debt, which she does not feel will be higher than previous years.

2003-2004 Budget Considerations:

Police: Elaine Luckey introduced Steve Sordi, the Town's Resident Trooper. Steve suggested consideration be given to adding an additional position for a full-time officer. Currently, there are two full-time officers and three part-time positions. Part-time positions have diminished by 40% over the past year. Sixteen weeks of training is required to be certified as a police officer. Steve reported it is difficult to maintain part-time personnel, as many leave for full-time positions after having been trained at the Town's expense. A full-time position would afford the Town more coverage and would reduce the need for additional part-time personnel. A full-time officer would be certified as a first responder and have authority to act in the full capacity of a police officer. While the full-time officer budget line item would increase, Steve reported the line items for training, overtime and part-time officers would decrease, as will the resident trooper's line item since compensation is at a lower rate than in previous years. Steve reported the Town currently has a part-time officer, who is fully-trained and has proven himself a competent officer. He would like to consider him for this position if approved in the budget. The Board suggested fees for private duty coverage be reviewed to insure that the Town's expenses for payroll, vehicle use, insurance coverage, etc. are being met.

Treasurer's Report: Reduction in investment income was again discussed, as is the case everywhere. Linda outlined how investments are scheduled. Since investment rates are so low, paying off the Town's current debt service on the firehouse, which is paid at a higher rate, will be investigated. Linda reported the State legislature has approved an increase from 1.1% to 2.5% for conveyance taxes to be received by the Town from March 15, 2003 through June 30, 2004.

Selectmen's Report: The preliminary 2003-2004 budget was discussed. Elaine noted this is a DRAFT and subject to further amendments. She reported two additional new positions are being considered beside the police officer: An eight-hour/week Emergency Management position and a full-time Building & Property Management Coordinator.

Emergency Management Coordinator: Government mandates have expanded many areas of public

safety due to recent world-wide terrorism events. As the Town's Emergency Management Coordinator, Rocky Tomlinson has served for many years in a voluntary capacity. His duties have increased measurably and include serving as chairman of the Local Emergency Planning Committee, the communications coordinator with Litchfield County Dispatch and as the Town's representative to the Citizen Council Corps, the Office of Emergency Management, the State Department of Health Risk Assessment and Smallpox Clinics, as well as coordinating the Town's emergency response with volunteer fire department, police, volunteer emergency medical service, selectmen, schools, highway, volunteer agencies and others as needed. This position entails much responsibility and Mr. Tomlinson is finding it difficult to attend to all the requirements while holding a full-time job. He would be willing to cut back on his current position. This would be considered as a contracted position, rather than a town employee.

Building & Property Management Coordinator: The Building and Property Commission had originally recommended this as a part-time position. It was felt many town buildings, as well as town properties, deserve more attention than they are getting in the best interest of the Town. Upon further review, they recommended a full-time position be considered.

Payroll: Elaine reported merit pay increases have been considered for employees. These vary in percentage and the initial total proposal equates to an overall 2.5% increase for current positions and 9.9% including the positions of police officer and Bldg. & Property Management coordinator.

Capital Expenses: A total of \$1,354,025 has been initially proposed, which includes all requests and possible projects. Grant funds, including STEAP - \$450,000, LoCIP - \$150,000, Small Cities Grant - 90% of \$300,000, Local Bridge, etc. are contemplated, although not all would be received in the coming fiscal year. The Selectmen anticipate further review of the proposal.

Education Budget: It was noted the Board of Education would meet that evening and it was anticipated preliminary estimates include a 5 % increase on the basic budget. Question was raised on \$280,000 of proposed expenses, which includes fuel, transportation and health benefits that had been cut from the previous year's budget, and \$90,000 regarding the previous Superintendent's retirement package. Valerie Friedman noted the increase in the number of non-certified personnel has increased measurably and does not compare to school districts in the area. Seventy-percent of the Education budget is personnel- related.

Regional School Governance Legislative Study: Jack reported this Committee will draft legislation based on the Survey Committee's findings and forward it to the Education and Planning and Development Committee. The current law allows a town to withdraw completely from a Region following the same process used in regionalization; however, it does not allow the withdrawal of specific grades only. All three towns would have to be in agreement. He will continue to follow this process.

Special Meeting: The Board scheduled a Special Meeting for March 31 at 5 p.m. to review the proposed budget with the Selectmen.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow
Selectman's Assistant