

## • **May 4, 2006 (Meeting)**

Present:

Finance Board: Michael Jackson, Chairman, Jack Boyer, Jack Field

Alternates: Liddy Adams, John Allen, Jim Brinton

Selectmen: Richard Sears, Mark Lyon, Nicholas Solley

The Board discussed the request from the Inland Wetlands and Zoning commissioners for additional support for their personnel and volunteers.

The Board of Finance questioned if the proposed solution of additional enforcement hours and secretarial assistance would solve the problem. Questions raised were:

- Is the Wetlands Commission following their own regulations in addition to the state law?
- Would the current enforcement officer take on a full-time position?
- Does he have obligations to another municipality?

Selectmen Mark Lyon and Nicholas Solley noted they supported this request and anticipated the increase to be \$27,000. They felt the two Commissions had demonstrated their need for additional hours for the enforcement officer, as well as secretarial assistance, which would enable the Enforcement Officer and Land Use Coordinator to focus on their responsibilities. First Selectman Richard Sears stated he was also in favor of their request. He noted the Commissions are overworked due to an onslaught of people who are acting illegally.

It was felt by members of the Finance Board that they need to know more about what is going on with the Wetlands Commission than they know. Michael Jackson questioned if some of this work was being created and suggested an analysis be done, as well as a strategy for the future.

First Selectman Sears noted we want to protect our natural resources. Our commissions are essentially following the law.

It was agreed to approve this addition to the proposed General Fund budget in the amount of \$27,000, with the proviso that the results of these additional hours be monitored. The lawsuits will be monitored, as well as the effectiveness of the additional hours in assisting the commissioners in making decisions.

The Board unanimously agreed to present the total General Fund proposed expenses for the 2006-2007 fiscal year in the amount of \$3,677,320. and proposed net expenses for the Nonrecurring Capital Expenditures Fund in the amount of \$927,050 for presentation at the town meeting.

**State Elections Commission:** With regard to a letter received from the State Elections Enforcement Commission regarding a complaint filed by Jennifer Iannucci of Bridgewater alleging the misuse of public funds pertaining to the dissemination of a mailing in opposition to an April 25th Region 12 budget referendum, Michael reported he had spoken with the State's Attorney and will provide him with all information sent by the Board of Finance. He will keep the Board apprised of this matter.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

## May 4, 2006 (Budget Hearing)

Present:

Finance Board: Michael Jackson, Chairman, Jack Boyer, Jack Field

Alternates: Liddy Adams, John Allen, Jim Brinton

Selectmen: Richard Sears, Mark Lyon, Nicholas Solley

First Selectman Richard Sears welcomed the public and explained the process followed by the Boards of Selectmen and Finance in preparing the proposed General Fund and Capital Fund budgets for 2006-2007.

A General Fund Expenditures budget in the amount of \$3,650,320 (6.2%) was presented and a Nonrecurring Capital Fund expenditures budget in the net amount of \$927,050 (-5.4%) was also presented. (Attached)

Mr. Sears reported the increases resulted mainly from:

- A 3.5% overall payroll assumption.
- A 30-40% increase in energy costs, including fuel oil, electricity and diesel fuel.
- A \$53,000 increase in pension contributions, due mainly to a change in assumptions used to calculate pension requirements and shortfall in previous deposits.
- Health Insurance - The Selectmen's original estimate of a 10% increase had been reduced to 5% by the Finance Board. Higher deductibles, co-pays, and self-insurance will be reviewed with the Town's agent in an effort to reduce costs. While it is hoped the burden of these costs will not have to be shared by the employees, this may result.
- Highways: Increase in costs of diesel fuel, materials made with petroleum products, hauling salt and sand.
- Sanitation: New three-year contracts have recently been signed for hauling municipal solid waste, recycling and demolition materials, as well as the operation of the transfer station. The Selectmen feel these all are solid contracts and have good experience with the contractors.
- Parks & Recreation: Increase in budget due to additional maintenance/security needed for pavilion bathrooms, walking path, etc.
- Police: Budget has been reduced due to retirement of full-time police officer Ron Dorazio being replaced with part-time officer Lee Levesque. Lee also serves part-time as the Building and Property manager. Lee comes to the Town as a fully trained officer. There are no health insurance costs.
- Building Department: Building Inspection is a contracted service. Expenses for this service are 74% of the fees received by the Town. All personnel costs involved with the inspections are covered under this contracted service, except one 8-hour/week secretary, which is covered by the Town. This contract is due for renegotiation in the Fall. It is difficult to budget costs in this area since housing starts and future construction values are unknown. It has been the policy of the Board to use a net budget number in this area.

- Pension: A motion will be presented at the May 18th town meeting to approve \$83,000 as a one-time deposit to the Town's Pension Fund, based on recommendations made by the pension consultants. This deposit would bring the Pension Fund up to par. Changes in assumptions in interest and compensation amounts have been made by the Pension Committee during the past year to better reflect today's requirements. This also resulted in a larger budget for the coming 06/07 fiscal year. Changes in the current pension plan regarding the elimination of private duty compensation used in the calculations are being considered for the future. It is felt employees have the option to choose private duty employment as opposed to overtime employment, which is mandatory. Costs for private duty are also reimbursed to the Town. Suggestions from the audience also included a cap on overtime; however, the Selectmen did not agree as most overtime is in the highway area, which is mandatory for winter storms.
- Land Use Enforcement Issues: Selectman Nicholas Solley reported he and Selectman Mark Lyon had met with representatives from the Zoning and Wetlands Commissions regarding additional time for enforcement services. They had presented their reasons well and the Selectmen support them in their request for additional hours for both secretarial and enforcement personnel. They felt the need is there and the current staffing cannot handle the workload. Volunteers are attending meetings that continue into the wee hours, which is beyond the call of what should be asked of volunteers.
- Mark Picton, chairman of the Inland Wetlands Commission, noted while the workload has increased, the quality of land has decreased. Developers are presenting more aggressive plans. The Wetlands Commission is unable to keep up with these demand and more than half of their workload is dealing with violations and enforcement issues. The enforcement officer does not have enough time to spend in the field to catch things as they are happening. He felt increasing this position to full time is what is required if the Commissions will be effective in enforcing state mandates. He noted the commissioners take their jobs very seriously; but without adequate administrative support, the long hours that they spend are, in large part, going to waste because they are always trying to catch up with things that have already happened. Projects that have been approved are not completed in the way they have been approved. The Commission had reviewed the duties of the enforcement officer, as well as the additional secretarial needs, to insure that the work be done efficiently. A letter to this effect had been presented to the Selectmen. Mr. Picton felt the Town is getting a bargain by having dedicated volunteers working all over town. They are the backbone of the Town's life and government. He felt the most important thing the Town could do is to support them in the administration department. Volunteers, who are currently maxed out on volunteer time, cannot take on administrative work as well.
- David Owen, chairman of the Zoning Commission, also expressed the needs of the Zoning Commission. While their needs are less graphic, they feel the same dilemma. The Commissioners are doing the enforcement because of the lack of time provided to the enforcement officer. He noted the state statutes give a great leeway to creating regulations but no leeway to insuring that applicants comply with them. The Zoning Commission this year will seek a town ordinance that gives them the ability to impose fines on those who are not complying. As they attempt to gain some effectiveness, the need for enforcement is increasing. Mr. Owen noted it has been a huge help to have the assistance of both Enforcement Officer Michael Ajello, as well as Land Use Coordinator Janet Hill, who is incredibly knowledgeable. He felt this is something that the Town must do.
- John Allen noted there are currently 17 hours in the Wetlands enforcement area and 10 in the zoning enforcement area. An additional sixteen for secretarial services is also included in the forthcoming proposal. He asked exactly what the commissioners were requesting. They noted they are requesting 40 hrs/week for enforcement, administrative and decision-making support for the position of enforcement officer in the zoning and wetlands areas, which the Selectmen had estimated would add an additional \$27,000 to the budget. This would include health insurance and taxes.

- Tony Bedini, a member of the Wetlands Commission, spoke on behalf of the amount of time that is put in by volunteers for Wetlands. This included 22 meetings/year and 77 site inspections over the past year. Three/four commissioners will do each inspection and write a report. Meetings are running up to seven hours as of late due to the magnitude of the applications. Minutes of meetings have averaged 18 pages of single-spaced typed written material. They are currently reviewing 22 violations. Since there is insufficient time to review each permit, they are unable to review the work involved. Many items of the permit are changed after the fact. Applicants have had to attend meetings for 3-4 months because sufficient information is not provided due to the lack of time available for review of the applications prior to their meetings.
- Valerie Andersen noted she had attended many of the land use meetings and agendas runs very late. She urged the Board to consider the addition of these hours for land use. She noted the Town professes to want open space, to conserve our land and to conserve the rural character of the town. This is the first line of defense. While no one likes big government, this is very proactive and we have to protect what we now have. She felt seriously this is a clear and present danger.

It was noted that the Boards of Finance and Selectmen have taken this into consideration and had come to understand the need for this additional assistance. They had agreed with the need for additional staffing by including sixteen hours to provide secretarial assistance to relieve the two administrators for their tasks.

- Barbara Carey suggested the Town would be better off approving this request for additional enforcement hours than paying legal fees to fight lawsuits. She felt thousands of dollars could be saved if violations could be stopped before they occur.

Michael Jackson noted that he works with Steep Rock and they are uniquely sensitive to these issues. All of these things have to be put into some financial context or we cannot have a budget. With the projected budget, if we did not change the mill rate we would have a \$1.5 million dollar deficit. School construction budget would be in addition to that. While the Grand List is growing nicely, it does not cover all that we want to do. It is a constant tension. There will be a tax increase. How large, we do not yet know. The entire series of expenditures with the increase in the school budget must be taken into consideration.

Jack Boyer questioned the procedure to be followed. It was noted the budget cannot be changed at the town meeting and decisions are to be made that evening by the Board of Finance. Michael Jackson explained the process is that the Board of Selectmen must make a recommendation to the Board of Finance on the subject. This must be made tonight and they would consider it. While the Board of Selectmen had not passed a motion at their earlier meeting, they agreed to meet with the Finance Board on this issue at their meeting following this budget hearing.

- Valerie Friedman of the Zoning Commission noted she supports this issue. She noted there are issues of enforcement before the Zoning Commission that they do not pass on to the Enforcement Officer. His burden is enormous; and given the responsibility of his job, she does not know how he can do it in forty hours. She urged approval by the Boards as they do not have the manpower to audit the applications and the importance of doing so.
- First Selectman Sears asked if they had the sense that the people of the Town would support this. He noted the Selectman had labored over this.
- Mark Picton noted the efficient administration of the Land Use regulations is of importance to the residents, not only to the applicant. This town can afford to do this and it cannot afford not to do it
- Jack Field of the Finance Board asked if this increase would make a difference as he felt it was very

modest. He questioned if the commission had any sense as what it really takes to do this job.

- David Owen noted to get perfect compliance you would have to spend 100% on it, but he felt completely confident that this would not be wasting money. We are at the point where we could make very feasible improvements; plus, it would ultimately relieve legal costs. As the Town grows, the pieces of property are more difficult to build on and are more difficult to permit. If something needed to be cut, he would cut his budget.
- First Selectman Sears again questioned if he understood the public's sentiment. The larger contest is about growth and development and the growing pressures that we will be facing.

The Selectmen agreed to the additional funding of \$27,000 to be distributed among the Zoning and Wetlands enforcement salary line, the health insurance line and the required tax line items.

There being no further comment on this issue, Selectman Nicholas Solley addressed the proposed Nonrecurring Capital items.

Mr. Solley noted the proposed Road Program includes net expenditures of \$310,000, the Vehicle & Equipment area includes net expenses of \$290,000 and the Building and Property area includes net expense of \$327,050 for a gross total of \$1,296,050. This would be offset by \$369,000 in anticipated grants, for a net total of \$927,050, a 5.4% decrease in capital from the previous year.

Roads: Recent increases in the cost of oil affect many of the road expense areas. \$150,000 in Town Aid Road grant funds will be used to offset costs. Tony Bedini noted the Wetlands Commission had spent a great deal of time addressing the Town of New Milford on the impact a recently-approved 76-unit development would have on Walker Brook Road. He questioned if there were funds in the budget to address this. Nick noted there were no funds budgeted for this purpose but if damages were to occur as a result of this development, the Town would have the right to seek reparation.

Vehicles & Equipment: A proposed expenditure of \$125,000 is included toward the purchase of a new pumper/tanker that will replace a 1983 pumper/tanker. This would be the first payment of two payments proposed over the next two years. The Fire Company will also provide an additional \$50,000 toward this purchase. A highway truck will be replaced according to the long-range vehicle replacement plan.

Building & Property:

Beach/Boat Launch/Boat Storage: Phase 1 of the renovations in the beach/boat launch area will be offset with anticipated LoCIP and DEP grants.

Bryan Plaza: Valerie Andersen noted that Bryan Plaza had been a capital item proposed several years ago and had been carried over but was not shown in the current year's proposal. Nick noted the Selectmen did not see any change within the next year; therefore, it has not been included.

Depot Firehouse: With regard to the Depot Firehouse, Ms. Andersen noted the proposed office relocation would create a double hit - cost increases to relocate, as well as loss of income from the current rental of the first floor of the firehouse. Nick noted the lease on this area is due to expire at the end of October. Due to the overcrowded situation in the lower level of the town hall, it is hoped to move the police into the first floor of the firehouse, adjacent to their current garages. A portion of the Land Use offices would be moved into where the police area is vacated. The Town will continue to receive income from the rental of the upper level of the firehouse.

Land Acquisition/Housing: First Selectman Sears reported two ordinances had previously been approved

with regard to land acquisition for open space and housing. An additional ordinance had also been passed to establish a Fund for Open Space. He noted the ordinance set up for Housing was to be used to obtain land for affordable housing; however the Fund had not as yet been set up. The newly-appointed Housing Commission will develop the actual fund to be used. The funds that have been approved have been specifically designated for that purpose. Valerie Andersen felt this was a budget item to be used by the Housing Commission; and should be in the General Fund. It was noted this is not a General Fund item, but rather a capital item, similar to that of Open Space Land Acquisition. The money is held aside until the Housing Commission brings it forth at a town meeting. The purpose of the \$50,000 is to provide seed money for investigating parcels of land that might be used for future housing projects in town when and if they were found. i.e. Dodge Farm. The Town had advanced funding for this project, which the Housing Trust returned to the Town. Previous town meetings had approved \$75,000. This remains set aside in the Nonrecurring Capital Fund. If the proposed capital item is approved, a total of \$125,000 would be available for use. Dick noted the Housing Commission, which is the conduit for this, does not approve the funds to be spent; but rather gathers information for use in making decisions.

Valerie felt we are funding a Town Commission and that there is no way set up to spend the money. She suggested either changing the ordinance or deleting the proposed appropriation from the capital expenditures. She did not feel it is enough to buy property.

Peter Tagley noted that several months ago the Town had the opportunity to purchase a large piece of land. He questioned if there is no program, how is it determined how to spend this money. It was agreed by all that it is a cumbersome process, with many steps needs before it is presented at a town meeting for consideration.

Michael Jackson referred to the purchase of the Meeker Swamp property with the assistance from the Town. With Steep Rock spearheading this project, the Town had approved a special appropriation of \$500,000 toward this purchase, thus allowing this important piece of land to be taken off the market. The Town did not want to get into this position again; and it had been decided at previous town meetings to anticipate this spending and set funds aside annually for this purpose. While it is unknown when another piece of land will become available, it is felt the Town would be in a more secure position to have these funds in place. It was noted the Open Space Committee of the Conservation Commission keeps track of land that could become available.

It was agreed that a better way must be found to avoid this cumbersome process to purchase land as it becomes available. Peter noted every piece of land protects the Town from overdevelopment. It is obvious that development is coming up Route 202; and that in order to be effective, all parts of the Town must be considered.

Valerie Andersen again questioned how the \$50,000 would be accessed. It was noted these funds are set up as a proactive measure to investigate possible lands and prepare information for the Town to consider. She suggested the appropriation not be made this year and these funds be allocated toward the General Fund Land Use expense needs.

Dave Thomson questioned if it was worthwhile to put \$125,000 in the capital fund this year for the Walker Brook Bridge if development is anticipated in this area. It was noted the bridge is worth repairing now and construction will not be in that area of Walker Brook Road. Nicholas Solley noted the Nettleton Hollow Road Bridge is scheduled for replacement in the summer of 2007. The State has noted Walker Brook as in need of repairs; therefore, funding for this project should remain in the budget. Dave suggested reducing this line item by \$27,000. It was noted that typically the Town does not borrow money from the Capital Fund to fix something in the General Fund.

The Board noted their thanks to the public for the best turn out in years. The hearing was adjourned at 9 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow, Secretary