

## • **May 8, 2003**

Board of Finance Chairman Michael Jackson called the meeting to order at 8:40 p.m.

Present:

Board of Finance: Jack Boyer, Jack Field, Michael Jackson, Craig Schoon, Rex Swain

Selectmen: Elaine Luckey, Nick Solley

Chairman Michael Jackson called the meeting to order at 8:45 p.m.

Following the budget hearing, the Board of Finance agreed to present the General Fund budget in the amount of \$3,202,816 and the Capital Fund budget in the amount of \$890,025 to the public at the town meeting scheduled for May 22, 2003 at 8:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow, Secretary

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## **May 8, 2003**

### **Town Budget Hearing**

Board of Finance Chairman Michael Jackson called the public hearing to order at 7:30 p.m.

Present:

Board of Finance: Jack Boyer, Jack Field, Michael Jackson, Craig Schoon, Rex Swain

Selectmen: Elaine Luckey, Nick Solley

Selectman Nick Solley presented the budget on behalf of the Board, noting they had worked hard on the budget as in the past. The budget was presented in the amount of \$3,202,816 for town expenses. Nick felt they had come in with a modest and acceptable increase in the payroll for existing employees, approximating an overall 2.8% increase. He outlined changes and additions to personnel areas of the budget as follows:

- Increasing a part-time constable to a full-time position. With the possibility of one of the current full-time constables opting for retirement in the near future, it was also felt this part-time officer has been fully-trained has proven himself well. It was also felt the town has paid for the training and would not like to lose him to another town. \$38,480
- The combination of the Municipal Agent for the Elderly and Senior Center Director into one position, rather than one full-time and one part-time, equates to about a 20% decrease in these combined line items.
- A line item for a part-time Emergency Management Coordinator's position is proposed at \$8,000. These responsibilities have previously been handled on a voluntary basis and have multiplied measurably over the past year. It was felt at least one day a week would be needed to deal with the additional responsibilities under Emergency Management.

Other additional line items:

- A line item for winter salt under Winter Maintenance. Traditionally, this has been paid from the Town Aid Road Funds account. For the purpose of total disclosure and in the event that these State funds are not available in the future, it was agreed to include this \$21,000 in the General Fund budget.
- Various "Annual Repair" line items have been transferred into specific areas, such as town hall, etc.

Capital Budget: Over the past few years the capital budget has been well over \$1,000,000. This has included several major items, including Meeker Swamp, affordable housing, etc. The 2002-03 capital budget currently is \$460,000, while the proposed capital budget increases to \$890,025. Nick noted some items will be reimbursable through a Small Town Economic Assistance Project grant (STEAP), which has been approved for the Town in the amount of \$450,000; however, it was felt that funding for a major portion of these projects may not occur until the following fiscal year. Items included under the STEAP grant include potential site work at the new town garage property, possible removal and clean up of the old garage site on Titus Road, rebuilding of the bridge to the Senior Center, refurbishment of Canoe Brook in this area, and upgrading of sidewalks in various areas of the Depot. In addition, drainage, paving and sidewalk upgrading in the New Preston area of Church Street, Hinckley Road and New Preston Hill. A complete plan is currently being developed but certain engineering and surveying are required before specific costs can be provided. Additional reimbursement will also be sought for the installation of an elevator for the town hall through a Small Cities grant.

Peter Tagley noted it is difficult to attend a budget hearing and not have the information available prior to the meeting. It was noted the proposed General Fund and Capital Nonrecurring budgets are made available to the public in the Town Clerk's office at least five days prior to the hearing as noticed in the local newspaper. Peter felt it important that the voters know the anticipated mill rate prior to voting at the town meeting and that the mill rate must be set to keep the town affordable. He also voiced his concern that the percentage increases in the budgets exceed the percentage increase in the Grand List. He felt while the town budget seems very conservative, the school budget was not passed on the first vote. Michael reported assumption sheets indicating possible mill rates are available with the budget approximately a week prior to the town meeting. Many variables are taken into consideration in the assumption sheets, including the growth in the Grand List, the Town's percentage of students within the district, certain State grants, percentage of tax collection, etc. The growth in the current Grand List is about 2.5% and approximately sixty tuition students are anticipated from neighboring towns for the coming school year. This will increase revenue to the school, thus reducing the net expense to the towns. It was noted when the Boards of Selectmen and Finance prepare the budget, they have control only over the Town's portion. The number of students in the school system on the previous October 1st determines each town's percentage of the Education budget. We have seen a decline in our share of the school budget over the past five years from 51% to 44%. Washington's percentage will continue to decrease from 45.91% to 44.06% for the 2003-04 fiscal year. This decline has helped to allow the Board of Finance to maintain the mill rate evenly over the past several years, but Michael noted this percentage could increase at any time and would greatly influence the mill rate. The Town must prepare for this and continue with it's long-range planning. A Town Aid road fund grant is also anticipated from the State; however, it is questionable if this will continue in the future due to State cutbacks.

Discussion continued at the hearing consisting mainly on the topic of the Education budget. The complete budget hearing has been taped and is on file.

The hearing was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow, Secretary