

May 8, 2008

Board of Finance Budget Hearing

Present: Board of Finance: Michael Jackson, Chairman, Jack Boyer, Barbara Brown, Jack Field

B/F Alternates: John Allen, Arthur DuBois, Jr.

Board of Selectmen: Mark Lyon, First Selectman

Selectmen: James Brinton, Nicholas Solley

Members of the public

First Selectman Mark Lyon welcomed all and presented a brief overview of the proposed budget. The proposed budget had been filed in the Town Clerk's office and posted as required. General Fund expenditures were proposed at \$3,889,936. Mark noted while this indicates a 3.95% increase as compared to the 2007-08 budget, it is shown on the presentation as 2.7%. This is attributable to a change in the accounting presentation in the Building Inspection area in an effort to show a truer indication of Town costs. Nonrecurring Capital Fund expenditures were proposed at the net amount of \$1,150,176 or a 7.5% increase. Total General Fund and Capital Fund Expenditures were \$5,040,112 - a 2.3% increase. Adding the Town's net Education expense of \$9,039,674 (4.2%), the overall Town Expenditures equate to \$14,079,786 (3.5%).

Finance Chairman Michael Jackson explained the change in the Building Inspection expense area, which was also provided as a separate presentation to the public. He noted the Town contracts for building inspection services at a cost of 72% of the fees collected. This results in no expense to the Town other than office expense, which includes postage, membership fees and fees paid to the State at \$.16/\$1,000/value.

Capital Plan: Selectman Nicholas Solley presented the Capital Expenditures as part of the Town's Long-Range Capital Plan. The budget is presented in the areas of: Road Program, Vehicles & Equipment, and Buildings & Property. Specific items described included:

- The Road Program includes a new line item for the refurbishment of dirt roads. This will be an on-going program, which initially addresses approximately 2 miles of the Town's 27 miles of dirt roads over the next 10/12 years. It will go beyond the annual maintenance of dirt roads with gravel replacement, compaction, etc. Repairs to two Walker Brook Road bridges will accommodate standards required to accommodate bus traffic. Town Aid Road grant funds in the amount of \$200,000 will be used to offset costs in the Road Program.
- The Vehicles & Equipment area includes the first of a two-year plan to replace a 1989 International 4 wd fire pumper. The WVFD felt the body on the existing truck could be used with the addition of a new cab and chassis.
- In the Building and Property area, Nick noted the cupola and upper dome of the Bryan Memorial Town Hall is in need of painting and re-leaving and the Depot firehouse (now the Police Office) is in need of window replacement and brickwork repair.

Questions raised by the townspeople included:

- The appropriation of \$25,000 for rental assistance to the Washington Community Housing Trust. The Town had approved a subsidy to assist seniors with rental payments at Riverwoods Senior Housing several years ago. This has recently been depleted. Due to changing circumstances and the cost of living, it sometimes becomes difficult for seniors to meet their rental costs. These funds are only available to seniors at this complex.
- The appropriations for Open Space and Housing . Mark Lyon reported he has spoken with the Conservation Commission recently and they will be looking into identify property for these purposes. Their findings would be brought to the Selectmen. The Selectmen continue to address this issue. Michael Jackson noted the townspeople had voted several years ago on the issues they felt most important to the Town for the use of tax money. The issues of Open Space and Housing were of highest importance and these appropriations are made in response. The funds would be used for seed money and not to entirely fund projects. To date, nothing has gone forward and the funds have been accumulating. Question was raised as to why the funding continues if land is not being purchased. Michael noted that rather than have a large item in any one year, it was felt it best to obtain funding over several years in the event that an opportunity arises. An option could also allow the Town to take a mortgage on a piece of property. It is up to the Board of Selectmen and the townspeople to determine if this is the right amount of money to be included in the budget or if it should be there at all. Comment was made in favor of this line item and it was hoped it would continue. With regard to the Macrocostis Preserve, Michael noted while owned by Steep Rock, the Town took the rights to the water. It is a town asset with Steep Rock monitoring the property.
- Need for additional staffing in the Land Use area was made. The Selectmen have addressed this issue with the moving of a clerk to the Land Use office, plus additional staffing hours if needed. This will be included in an overall review of town hall staffing and responsibilities.
- Funding of boat launch and beach area projects. Are they now totally funded and where can the total costs to the Town be obtained. Mark reported costs are higher than originally budgeted several years ago and volunteer funds have been received from the Lake Waramaug Ass'n., in addition to funds from the towns of Warren and Kent and a D.E.P. grant. There is no line item in this proposed budget for additional expenditures. A separate account had been established to insure the funds are specifically used for this project.
- Anticipated mill rate. Peter Tagley questioned if it could be assumed that with the 4% increase in expense that the mill rate would be increased by 4%. Michael thanks him for his consistency over the years and reported that this will not be decided until after the town meeting approves the budget. The Board tries to maintain a one month's surplus and will not leave a deficit in the best interest of the Town. Going forward, there needs to be a resolution to the school situation, which most likely will prove costly.
- Impact on property tax collection. Mark noted according to the Tax Collector the change has been minimal. She has done a good job of clearing up past due taxes.
- Changes to town employees' health insurance plan. Maintaining a self-insured deductible in health insurance and a self-insured dental plan will continue. These have proven beneficial to the Town. Possibility of increasing dental benefits from \$500 to \$750 is being considered. The town's agent, Arthur Mulligan, has provided much insight over the year's to costs and maintaining benefits, for which the Town is appreciative. We will continue to investigate many options.
- Building fuel costs. It was noted the Town has been able to obtain favorable rates as a member of a fuel consortium with Region 12 and other towns and regions. A contract is usually signed in the late summer, early fall. Until that time, future rates are unknown. The current Town rate is \$2.05/gallon.

The Hearing was adjourned at 8:15 p.m. A tape of the hearing is available with these minutes in the Town Clerk's office.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow. Secretary