

MINUTES
Board of Finance
Tax Assessor and Board of Education Budget Hearing
February 27, 2014

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Elaine Hammers called the budget hearing meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall, Trumbull, Connecticut. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was on public comment.

PRESENT

Elaine Hammers, Chairman
Paul Lavoie, Vice Chairman
Andrew Palo
Thomas Kelly
Roy Molgard
Bill Haberlin
Vincent DeGennaro, Alternate

ABSENT

Kristy Waizenegger, Alternate

TOWN COUNCIL FINANCE COMMITTEE

PRESENT

Cindy Penkoff
Vicki Tesoro

ABSENT

Mark LeClair, Chairman
Bethany Llodra Gilman, Alternate
Tony Scinto
Lori Rosasco Schwartz
Thomas Christiano
Daniel Marconi, Alternate

Also present: Maria Pires, Director of Finance; Mark DeVestern, Tax Assessor; Dr. Gary Cialfi, Superintendent, Sean O'Keffe, Business Manager, Dr. Michael McGrath, Assistant Superintendent; BOE members: Rosemary Seaman, Susan LaFrance, Mike Ward.

TAX ASSESSOR BUDGET

The Chair began the discussion regarding the revaluation process and expenses. Mr. DeVestern indicated that the revaluation process is now required every 5 years, thereby due for the Grand List of 2015. The General Assembly is considering a bill that would grant a 2 year extension but that has not yet been passed. In 2010, the General Assembly passed a bill granting a 1 year extension, Trumbull properties were last revalued in 2011. Mr. DeVestern indicated that the property values have not changed much since 2011 even though there was a spike in the market in the spring of 2013. There would be no harm in delaying 2 years for that reason. The commercial properties (less than 300) also have not changed substantially.

Mr. DeVestern explained the \$352,500 professional line item which was cut by the First Selectman to \$300,000. \$227,500 is targeted for revaluation, which is an estimate as it has not yet been put out to bid. \$120,000 is targeted for the defense of the remaining open tax appeals. The budget is higher because of the nature of the properties, requiring expert tax appeal attorneys, possible need for appraisals if the matters go to trial. Additionally, the 2015 revaluations will require that every home is inspected, as this is required every 10 years. Although we do not yet have a bid, other towns have indicated that their cost is approximately \$30 per parcel. We would hope to obtain a lower bid, and be able to use inspections made on properties since 2011 as part of the inspected properties. There being no further questions, the Chair thanked Mr. DeVestern for his presentation and indicated that all data has now been presented.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dr. Cialfi expressed his thanks for the opportunity to address the core priority of BOE: engagement, connectiveness and safe schools, and the above connection being technology. The technology line item of \$874,000 includes smart boards in all classrooms, of which there are presently 2/3 classrooms with smart boards. They are critical in instilling creative, critical thinking at all levels and among all learning styles.

Dr. Cialfi presented additional charts as part of their presentation.

The Chair addressed the enrollment projections as set forth in the Budget, particularly the decrease in enrollment in the elementary schools by 2017 of approximately 496, or the equivalent of one elementary school. Dr. Cialfi discussed the fact that kindergarten is difficult to predict as the students are not presently all in the school system, that predictions are based on best estimates of birth rates and that they would have a better projection in 6 weeks. The redistricting is moving along well, the goal is to be using no portable classrooms in any school, to have no overcrowding in any school. Portable classrooms are presently used because of the many extras, ie computer rooms, art rooms, special education classrooms, etc. The redistricting is very specifically focused on the particular area of overcrowding and is based on 10 year projections of Maloney McBroom which has extensive experience in these projections, substantially beyond our situation. It will be nothing like the redistricting that occurred when Frenchtown was built.

There has been discussion of the possibility of Madison MS being designated as grades 5-6 and Hillcrest as grades 7-8. That is not possible now but in 4-5 years, it could be possible with the reduction of student enrollment in the event there is still an interest in that possibility. Dr. Cialfi did not feel that the decreased enrollment over the 4-10 years would result in the loss of an elementary school.

Dr. Cialfi answered questions regarding Fairchild Wheeler Magnet High School, indicating that Trumbull is allocated 75 seats. This year 45 students expressed an interest, 39 began in September and 10 have returned to THS, leaving 29 students at Fairchild. They anticipate that as the Junior and Senior years are added next year, they are predicting that 40 students will attend Fairchild. If the 75 seats are not filled, they will remain allocated to Trumbull. The school is very focused on science, math and technology and requires a strong commitment to those programs. The students that attend Fairchild are picked up by bus from THS and returned to THS at the end of the school day.

Mr. O'Keefe indicated that contract negotiations had just completed and that the increase, including costs is 2.7% per year for the next 3 years. Teacher evaluations, which have not yet begun, will not impact the budget as there is an assessment in place for the same. With respect to the medical plan, Mr. O'Keefe indicated that we are on target to meet claims and establish a reserve. The reserve will increase each year for trend analysis. This year was over estimated at \$4.5M, Year 2014-15 will be \$4.1. Each year, the cost to teachers will go up by 1%.

Dr. McGrath addressed questions regarding the landlord affidavits, indicating that they have many forms in hand but does not have an exact number. The Board has a system to flag rental situations and landlords are contacted yearly regarding the status of tenants with students.

Discussion regarding the ECS state reimbursement formula, indicating that Trumbull receives approximately \$3,000,000 per year, that in spite of numerous requests over the years, there is no one in the state that can explain how this money is calculated. Trumbull took a large loss approximately 15 years ago and that it has been consistently \$3,000,000 per year. Mr. Kelly will follow up with our local state rep and senator to attempt to determine how this is determined.

Dr. Cialfi indicated that the common core is driving the better part of the budget, requiring a higher degree of professional development of faculty and in supplies. The standards are more rigorous but are critical for students to succeed in 21st century college admissions and 21st

century positions as it takes learning to a new level of critical thinking and creative thinking. Regarding technology history, as set out in the handout, The BOE requested bonding of \$1,346,000 and \$771,000 was bonded, leaving a technology shortfall of \$574,000. \$290,000 of unused funds from the 2012-13 budget, leaving a shortfall of \$285,850 for 2013-14. The 2014-15 budgeted amount is \$402,809. The BOE is proposing a solution by leasing for 4 years at \$100,702 per year. This would allow for technology to be better upgraded, etc.

Regarding security, Dr. Cialfi explained that there are presently security personnel in each school and they have police backgrounds of one form or another. Additionally, when schools have open sessions (such as family visits during the school day), police officers are present at the schools.

Dr. Cialfi discussed the need for an additional social worker at the high school level as they are understaffed compared to other districts. There has been a shift of PPT from the psychologists to special ed teachers. To supplement that change, the BOE has allotted some clerical assistance, represented by 4 part time staff so no benefits are necessary. At the high school, there is 1 social worker and 3 psychologists. The 200 special ed/DRP students are extremely higher than the recommended level. Dr. McGrath explained the difference between a social worker, who addresses counseling, crisis management and links to community agencies while the psychologist deals with the learning specialists, special ed testing and consultations on behavior.

Dr. Cialfi closed his comments by stressing again that mental health is at the forefront of school safety, being certain that students are connected through programs and teachers, and that the majority of their requests are focused on that area.

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 8:32pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Nancy Milewski
Temporary Clerk