

**BOARD OF FINANCE
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2018
7:30 P.M. – COMMUNITY CENTER**

Chairman Michael Ayles called the public hearing to order at 7:35 p.m.

Present: Board Members: Meghan Scanlon, Veronica Wallace, Kenneth Gamerman, Michael Ayles, Jeffrey Beatty, Jonathan Trotta and Kenneth MacKenzie

Town Officials: First Selectman Matthew Hoey, Board of Selectmen Members: Charles Havrda, Louis Federici, Sandra Ruoff and Susan Renner, Finance Director Maryjane Malavasi, Asst. to Finance Director Sandy Offredi, Executive Assistant Karen Quercia, Tax Collector Deb Milano, Social Services Director Tammy DeFrancesco, Economic Development Coordinator Brian McGlone, Parks and Recreation Commission Member Sue Robins, Fire Chief Charles Herrschaft, Assistant Fire Chief Mike Shove, Police Chief Jeff Hutchinson, Deputy Police Chief Butch Hyatt, Police Commission Chair Mike Mikolay, Health Director Dennis Johnson, Parks and Recreation Director Rick Maynard, Town Engineer Jim Portley, Town Clerk Anna Dwyer, P&R Seniors Program Coordinator Terry Buckley, Registrar of Voter Gloria Nemczuk, Town Planner George Kral, Youth and Family Services Director Lyne Landry, Land Acquisition Commission Member Gary MacElhiney and Clerk Traci Brinkman

BOE Officials: Superintendent Dr. Paul Freeman, Asst. Superintendent Jason Beaudin, BOE Members Dr. Kathleen Balestracci, Christine Cohen and Chair Bill Bloss, Business Manager Linda Trudeau, and Accounting Bookkeeper Terri Vetre

Others: About 15 in the audience

Media: Mike Graziano, taping for GCTV

1. Public Hearing on proposed 2018-2019 Budget.

Mr. Ayles went through the format of the meeting which would consist of presentations by the Town and Board of Education, questions and comments from the audience as well as questions from the finance board.

Board of Education Budget Presentation

Dr. Freeman went over the vision and mission of the school district and noted that this budget is built on district priorities as well as the budget assumptions to provide a safe and healthy school environment, maintain a focus on instruction, extend and improve opportunities and be innovative in utilizing personnel and other resources to further student learning and meet mandates.

He noted that enrollment has been flat the last four years even though a previous demographic study had anticipated a drastic drop in enrollment. He added that they are down 72 students over 13 grades.

The total BOE budget request is \$59,747,175, which is an increase of \$1,097,039 or 1.87% over the current budget.

Dr. Freeman went over the Efficiencies which include restructured full time positions, efficient hiring with regard to salaries, reducing the number of outplacements and reduced Supplies and Materials as a result of enrollment adjustments and frugal management. He noted that the cost drivers are salaries, medical, transportation and special services, which total \$1,304,519. Their total budget increase is less than that because they were able to find savings in other areas.

Dr. Freeman said investments in this budget include two elementary music positions at the elementary level, an assistant coaching athletics position and continued support of the instructional coaching model, IB program, and building more special education capacity.

Dr. Freeman stated that they have three bond requests: Baldwin Middle School HVAC for \$2,078,314, Melissa Jones HVAC for \$1,402,427 and the Architecture and Engineering for the projects for \$210,186. The total bond request is \$3,690,927.

Dr. Freeman then gave a staffing summary. They added two elementary music teachers. They are shifting one elementary teacher from another school to Leete and adding a .5 paraprofessional at Cox for a total increase of 2.5 positions.

Mr. Bloss then discussed the quality of education in Guilford. He added that they continue to provide an unparalleled return on investment.

Maria Krysh of 58 Trailwood Drive said she is a new resident and she made the decision to move to Guilford this past August because of the school system. She is not alone and knows others that moved to the town for the same reason. She is happy to see the

continued support for the schools.

Jeremy Jackson of 178 Lovers Lane said he has two children at Calvin Leete and there are 36 families in support of the additional fourth grade teacher for the school. Those classes are the biggest in the district. By adding the third class it will improve the experience for the kids.

Lorna Romero of 112 Manor Road said she is disappointed that there is no money in the budget for moving the start time at the high school. It has been proven that a later start time is better for their health. The recommended time is 8:30 a.m. The district has been working on this for four years and she is disappointed that no money has been allotted to make that change.

Mr. Bloss explained that there is no additional money in the budget for later start time. He added that they looked at an alternative last year, which was two bus waves, which would have added a minimum of \$500,000 to \$800,000. There is still a possibility the start time committee will make a recommendation for a somewhat later start time that is cost neutral. This is not an issue that has been shut down, it is still something they are working hard on. He hoped that if there is a no cost way to be able to do this then it would be communicated to parents sometime in May.

Mark Tamsin of 627 Towner Swamp Road said he has been a resident for the past 10 years. He is a disgruntled taxpayer, because the increases keep coming. He believes in zero percent budget increases. They are always taxing the poor guys and need to respect the positions of people who didn't come out tonight.

Dr. Freeman explained the many measures the district has taken to reduce cost such as renegotiating bargaining contracts and shifting medical benefits to high deductible insurance plans. They were able to reduce medical benefits by \$500,000. He added that the cost of inflation is over 2% and the BOE increase is 1.87%. It is hard to provide quality without some increase annually. He added that the Guilford district ranks up there with more expensive districts in quality, yet they spend about \$3,000 less per student than some of those districts.

Ms. Wallace said she knows that the district is obligated to provide transportation for every student, but she asked if some students could opt out.

Dr. Freeman said they cannot opt out. He added, however, that they can stop within a mile of every home and are not required to go to every door. In addition they overload when planning buses at the high school, because not every student is taking the bus every given day.

Mr. Gamerman asked if there are places to extend the internal special education capabilities so they can reduce more outsourcing.

Dr. Freeman explained that during the last budget cycle they put the last block of the program in place so they now have a Pre-K through age 21 program continuum. He added that they started with Pre-K and elementary and the high school and this year they have the middle school.

There was a discussion about tuition as well as the new positions being proposed.

Town Budget Presentation

Mr. Hoey went over the mission of town government which is to maintain the infrastructure in the community, support the Board of Education, pursue Economic Development and Tourism, provide town services, and maintain the quality of life.

Mr. Hoey then went over Budget Objectives and Key Factors, which include maintaining high levels of services despite continued reduction in state funding. Maintaining the Senior Tax Freeze Program at Current Levels, continuing the investment and maintaining infrastructure of town roads and providing the essential safety and public protection services including full-year funding of an additional police officer and eight new firefighters. In addition this budget funds pension liabilities at actuarially recommended levels, continues the investment in ecological improvements to Lake Quonnipaug, maintains capital project funding within the operating budget and budgets without reliance on revenues from fund balance.

Mr. Hoey noted that the Town Operating Budget is \$29,716,978, which is a \$1,057,979 or 3.69% increase from the 2018-2018 budget. Debt Service totals \$8,496, 654 and represents a \$617,620 or 7.84% increase over the current budget. The total Board of Selectmen budget with operating and debt service is \$38,213,632 and is an increase of \$1,675,599 or 4.59% over the current year.

Mr. Hoey said the Board of Selectmen reduced the original budget request that was submitted by \$1,454,738. He noted that Salaries increased 4.14%. Current staff salary increases went up by 3.05% and the second half of funding for the police officer and town's contribution for the eight firefighters brought that up to 4.14%. Employee Benefits increased 10.51% so the total increase in those two categories is \$1,345,000.

Mr. Hoey said in spite of that increase the BOS is only adding \$1,057,000 in this budget, because all other operating expenses dropped by \$240,000. He added that they are asking for \$1,008,157 in Capital which is down from \$1,080,000 last year.

Mr. Hoey said that while local revenue has increased \$106,759 in this budget, due to state budget decreases and further holdbacks by the governor they used a baseline that they think is the most reasonable at the moment, which would result in a \$226,787 decrease in state revenues.

Mr. Hoey then went over the components of debt service and discussed the amount of work the different departments do in a year, outlining where and how tax dollars are spent:

The Fire Department Responded to 3,861 calls. The Police Department responded to 11,993 Incidents. The Guilford Free Library Circulated 250,000 Items. Public Works Maintains 48 Square Miles of Roads. Parks and Recreation Served 8,000 Participants in Over 600 Classes. Social Services assisted 657 households. Youth and Family Services held 1,671 clinical appointments. The Health Department Conducted 638 Inspections. The Assessor Manages 6 Tax Assistance Programs and Over 10,000 Real Estate Accounts and the Town Clerk Recorded 3,673 Deeds, issue Close to 500 Marriage, Birth and Death Certificates.

Mr. Hoey said it is a different year this year since they just experienced a revaluation year. There was a drop in the overall value of property by 3.72%. It is difficult to understand the impact of the increase this year. It is their intention to help the community understand the impact related to their tax bill by providing a calculation tool on the website. They can enter their old assessment against the previous mill rate along with their new assessment and the proposed mill rate. This will give them the difference in their tax dollars.

Susan Anderheggen of 200 Landon's Way said while she appreciated the information regarding where tax dollars go, she asked if they could also have trend lines and comparisons to other towns. She added that there are places in the budget that are going down, but a lot of places that are going up. It seems like everyone adds a little here and there. Parks and Recreation is up \$28,000.

Mr. Hoey said many of the departments that are going up are salary related. He noted that those are contractual and they are obligated to pay the increase. He added that he has entered into an agreement with ClearGov.com, which takes statewide reported data on town and schools budgets and provides benchmarks against other similar communities. Mr. Hoey said this is an attempt to produce exactly what Ms. Anderheggen is looking for. He added that they are in the initial stages now, but are hoping to roll out something prior to the budget referendum.

Wendy Furniss of 14 Beech Road questioned if the additional firefighters being hired will also be trained paramedics and if they will have ambulances at other locations rather than just downtown. Mr. Hoey answered yes to both of her questions.

Mr. Trotta said the General Fund Capital is about \$1 million. He noted that they are trying to pay as you go rather than bond. He questioned at what point that would level out.

Mr. Hoey said they would like to keep that account between \$1 million to \$1.2 million. What they tend to do is just push things off to outlying years. The needs don't go away they just get pushed down the road.

There was a discussion about overtime, in particular at the police department. There was also a discussion about staffing at the police department.

There was discussion about the BOE bond request. Mr. Bloss noted that the HVAC systems at Baldwin and Melissa Jones need to get done. They are original systems with frequent failures. It was noted that the town has no bond request this year.

Ms. Wallace asked Mr. Bloss if they are comfortable with security at the schools in light of everything that has happened nationwide.

Mr. Bloss said the BOE is going to be discussing this. He noted that they were in the middle of design at the high school when Sandy Hook happened and they reworked the plans following a vast majority of the recommendations provided by the state and their consultant. In addition the Guilford Police Department is committed to insuring the safety of the students.

There was a discussion about the increase in medical insurance.

Mr. Ayles took some time to explain revaluation, the Grand List and the effect on taxpayers. He also summarized the budgets again. He noted that the board has a budget workshop on Thursday, 7:30 p.m. at the Community Center and if no action is taken the board will meet again on Monday at the same time and place.

Motion: Upon a motion made by Mr. Trotta and seconded by Ms. Scanlon, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 9:38 p.m.

*Vote: In Favor: Scanlon, Wallace, Gamerman, Ayles, Beatty, Trotta and MacKenzie
Opposed: None
Abstaining: None*

Respectfully submitted,

Traci K. Brinkman
Clerk
Board of Selectmen