

Board of Finance / Board of Education
Budget Work Session - 2/9/10
Approved Minutes

Attending

BoF Members: Andy Pforzheimer, Jim Meinhold, Al Alper, Warren Serenbetz, Lynne Vanderslice and Gail Lavielle

BoE Members: Barbara Myers, Karen Birck, Gil Bray, Bruce Likly and Richard Dubow and Jim Saxe.

Wilton Public School Reps.: Gary Richards, Ken Post, Arlene Gottsman, Ann Paul, Ellen Andrews, Matthew Hepfer

School Administrators: Julia Harris, Kevin Welch, Jory Higgins, Ginny Rico, Thomas Ford, Cheryl Jensen Gerner, Tim Canty

Wilton Citizens: John Kalamarides, Stacy Crameri, Heather Wilcauskas, Lory Rothstein, Christan Camerola, Justin Reynolds.

Call to Order

The Meeting was called to order by Warren Serenbetz at 7:30pm.

An opening statement was read by Gil Bray, Chairman of the BoE, summarizing the mutual hard work by the schools and the BoE to arrive at the approved Superintendent's budget of a 2.85% increase, which was submitted to the BoF.

BoF Opening Statements

Warren appreciated the work involved getting to this point. He indicated the mill rate needs to be factored into the overall budget increase and his target ceiling on the mill rate increase is 2.9%.

Gail also was impressed with the work involved to get to this point, especially given the constraints of various mandates. She added however, many people she met this past fall indicated they had lost their jobs and

being mindful of this she agreed with the 2.9% max increase on the mill rate. She indicated her support of not wanting to see academic programs or class sizes touched.

Andy shared last year's budget process saw room for improvement on the BoF receiving clearer guidance and information upfront. He also agreed with the 2.9% max increase and acknowledged half the town will hate it and the other half will hate it. In the end, an approximate 1.4% increase for the BoE budget could get to an overall 2.8% increase.

Jim stated this is still early in the process for getting public input. This year's economic climate is not much better so a projected mill rate increase of 2-3% makes sense.

Al echoed the thoughts of others. The distressed economic climate and town unemployment of 5%, up from 4%, needs to be taken into consideration. He needs additional numbers, including the BoS budget, but does support a small increase.

Lynne stated she has not seen the BoS budget so won't form an opinion until all the data becomes available to study.

Questions / Answers

The BoF members took turns asking specific questions regarding the BoE budget. These questions included special services mandates, sharing costs within the district and other towns, enrollment projections, transportation costs, IT programs within the specific schools, custodial levels, textbooks vs. online access, administrative support at the specific schools, instructional leader positions, salaries for advisors, pre-school services, athletic programs and utilizing interns from surrounding colleges.

Several questions will be answered before the next meeting.

- 1.) Regarding IT: what is the IT staff / student ratio, the IT expense/ student and the desktop / student ratio for Wilton and how do these compare to surrounding towns?
- 2.) Why has the number of Miller / Driscoll administrative support been sustained at the same high level over the past 10 years despite the 3rd grade moving to Cider Mill in 2000?

Gil Bray asked when the numbers will be decided and the response was the Grand List is in but the BoS budget isn't due until March 5th.

Dick Dubrow questioned how the Boards would know what the town would support and maybe enough citizens considered education important enough to consider the higher increase. Warren responded the BoF members have received letters, e-mails and held many conversations with the public who have conveyed they don't want an increase in taxes. The BoF members are elected to make the tough decisions and represent the Wilton citizens. Andy echoed the high voter turnout last election tells the story of what the constituents want.

Bruce Likly questioned if the BoF members appreciated the pain and difficulty involved if the BoE is requested to make further budget cuts. Gail acknowledged the pain and indicated given the big chunk of costs can't be touched, i.e. any teacher's union concessions, the small items get hit the hardest.

Warren commented he believed it was a well thought out budget.

Andy's desire is to see a steady 2.5%-4% yearly tax increase rather than the past extreme increases and decreases we've had over the past 10 years.

Lynne stated she used the opportunity to learn from the BoE work sessions and gather info on many areas within the BoE budget. Like most taxpayers she believes taxes are too high but recognizes there is a need to educate the entire community on what goes into the various budgets. A resource needs to be created to gather then disseminate this information. She suggested the BoE and BoF partner together and create a group who will: 1) educate themselves and in turn the public and 2) seek out ideas for cost efficiencies. Gil Bray fully agreed and supported the idea on behalf of the BoE.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Roberts
Recording Secretary