THE FACTS ABOUT THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN BUDGET

A recent op-ed put the low growth rate of Board of Selectmen (BOS) budgets in a negative light. The BOS’s ability to do more with less is a good thing. Our informed management has eliminated unnecessary costs and provided residents with a more efficient and responsive Town government.

Specifically, the reduced budget growth is the result of:

***New administrative employees with a greater depth and breadth of experience and skills****,* ***which allow them to assume more responsibilities than their predecessors***. The reorganization of DPW is a good example of this. After the completion of Miller Driscoll, the Town’s Facility Director assumed the additional responsibility of the school facilities. It was a natural fit as the individual had many years of professional experience in construction and facilities management.

When the Town’s DPW Director/Town Engineer retired and the Town’s Field Engineer moved on to another opportunity, the Facilities Director, who had also previously supervised DPW for a large CT city, assumed the additional responsibility of DPW Director. An Assistant Director/Town Engineer was hired to assume the remaining responsibilities. The entire reorganization resulted in one less administrative position for the Town and the schools.

***Technology*** has resulted in improved efficiencies in a number of departments, including finance and police. New public facing technology, such as the Parks & Recs online programming and rental system, online GIS, SeeClickFix, the revamped Town website and upgrades to the online tax payment system, not only improve the resident experience, but also improve staffefficiencies.

***Retirements among collective bargaining positions*** have resulted in new employees being hired at lower wage rates and, in most cases, with less costly benefits.

***Prioritization of spending, critical analysis of need and a focus on public benefit have meant we are making the right expenditures at the right time.*** The recently requested reexamination of the needs of Fire Station 2 resulted in a determination by the Fire Commission that there wasn’t a need to raise the height of the building or expand the firehouse. What had been a potential $1.4 million project is now a series of deferred maintenance projects with an estimated cost of $250,000 to $300,000.

***Collective Bargaining negotiations*** *have* resulted in lower growth rates for wages and favorable changes in benefits.

***Improved accounting procedures and financial policies,*** includingthe mandatory use of purchase orders, forecasting and updated RFP requirements, have resulted in a greater ability to manage and control expenses. New accounting policies have strengthen the balance sheet.

Having just filed their 2018 tax returns, many residents are feeling the impact of the loss of the deductibility of state and local income and property taxes. They recognize that it is advantageous to seek smart reductions in the cost of government. They also recognize that it is more cost efficient to donate directly to nonprofits, rather than through nondeductible property taxes. Earlier this year, the Library reported that they had earned the BOS’s challenge grant and in doing so acquired more new donors. We did not repeat the challenge for FY2020, as the Library had unexpected building repair expenses, much like the Trackside Teen Center, whose grant was left flat.

The changes to the BOS budget, as a result of the reduction by the BOF, did not impact the Library as the guest columnist incorrectly assumed. Instead they reflected savings identified after submission of the budget and savings we hope to achieve as a result of our ongoing investigation of alternate medical plans.

The economic challenges of our state government and the CT economy mean we all, government, businesses, nonprofits and residents, need to think differently and creatively. As often happens, such thinking brings about a better result.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, another article published about town employee earnings had residents questioning police and firefighter compensation.

Newly hired Police Patrol Officers with no experience begin at a salary in the mid $60,000s for a 38.31-hour workweek. The most experienced patrol officers are paid in the high $80,000s. Sergeants are paid just over $100,000. All officers, other than the Police Chief, the two Captains and the three Lieutenants, are eligible for overtime. Overtime is required when another officer is not available for work, such as when a new officer is attending the police academy, or when an officer is out on worker’s compensation. This overtime is referred to as *regular duty* overtime and is paid by the Town. Officers are also able to voluntarily perform *extra duty* work. This work is paid at an overtime rate, for which, the Town is reimbursed by a third party that requested or is required to hire the service. This extra duty overtime was included in the compensation reported by the Bulletin although it was not an expense of the Town. Extra duty earnings can be significant on an individual basis.

In addition to the wage reimbursement, the Town receives additional administrative fees. The FY2020 budgeted cost for the purchase of police vehicles was reduced by approximately $30,000 in collected fees.

We employ 24 Firefighters on an average 42-hour regular workweek (typically 2, 24-hour shifts per week).  The remaining required hours are filled by planned overtime.  Newly hired Firefighters with no professional experience are paid in the low 60,000s. The most experienced Captains are paid in the mid 90,000s for the 42-hour workweek.

The Police Department is currently down one patrol officer. The Police Commission anticipates filling the position prior to the October Police Academy. Firefighters are at full staffing.