



MINUTES of the Public Hearing of the Board of Estimate and Taxation held on Tuesday, March 17, 2009 in the Town Hall Meeting Room, Greenwich, CT.

Chairman Stephen Walko called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., after which the members pledged allegiance to the flag.

Board members in attendance:

Stephen G. Walko, Chairman
Robert S. Stone, Vice Chairman
Leslie L. Tarkington, Clerk
Nancy E. Barton
James S. Campbell
William R. Finger
William G. Kelly
Edward T. Krumeich, Jr.
Michael S. Mason
Arthur D. Norton
Jeffrey S. Ramer
Laurence B. Simon

Selectmen: Peter Tesei, First Selectman; Peter Crumbine; Lin Lavery

Staff: Peter Mynarski, Comptroller; Peter Siecienski, Fire Chief

Mr. Walko explained the format of the Public Hearing and then provided an overview of the budget process. Mr. Walko thanked the Budget Committee under the leadership of Michael Mason, and members Bob Stone, Larry Simon, and Ed Krumeich, for their excellent work putting together the proposed FY 2009-2010 Budget.

Mr. Walko explained that the budget decreased by over four percent year to year. This has not been an easy budget process. One of the aspects of this budget process that started before deliberation of the budget was lay-offs. The Budget Committee arrived at the recommended budget by balancing those interests that seek a mill rate increase of zero and those that call for a rate greater than four percent. The capital budget was substantially reduced from the projection last March. Continuing the process of bringing the Town's infrastructure to an acceptable level and maintaining it at that level is still a critical element of this budget. The Board already anticipates a greater shortfall in FY 2010-2011 due to the anticipated contribution to the pension fund. Working cooperatively with the employees through union negotiations and labor agreements must yield savings to avoid future lay-offs.

Mr. Walko thanked the First Selectman, Department Heads, the Town Administrator, and appointing authorities including the Board of Education. Mr. Walko also thanked Peter Mynarski, Roland Geiger, Elaine Brown, and Maria Bocchino for their contributions.

PUBLIC HEARING

General

Tad Laraby (and Danielle Wayman) – Representing the working group for the traffic calming initiative in Old Greenwich, near the Civic Center involving Forest Avenue, Harding Road, Brownhouse Road, and Kensington Court. After many meetings, hours, and funding, the Town should proceed with the traffic calming mock-up and neighborhood vote.

Matthew Popp – Cos Cob power plant site. Funding for the Cos Cob power plant site should be consistent with the Selectmen's 2003 plan.

Suzanne Geiss Robbins, Chairman RTM District 2 – Economy and budget. Shared comments on the economy and the budget from District 2: in favor of a much lower mill rate; disappointed that the Board of Education budget was only reduced by \$1 million, and wondered how the BOE budget keeps increasing in light of declining enrollment. Many citizens have lost value in their homes, investments, and income which will affect tax collections.

Joan Caldwell, Chairman RTM District 10, Chairman RTM Labor Contracts Committee – General comments with some reference to the capital budget. Said that a 3.5% increase in the tax levy is too onerous; opposed to the roof on the Civic Center, and would like the GHS auditorium committee to return the unused money to the Capital Fund.

Dr. Carl G. R. Carlson, Vice-Chairman, RTM District 1 – Comments on overall budget. In favor of further reductions in Board of Education budget, DPW budget, elected officials salaries, and S class employees.

William Schmitz – Numerous issues. In favor of consolidation of BOE and TOG Human Resources Departments. Opposed to the hiring of outside consultants for buildings when town resources are available in the Building Department, Fire Inspection, and Building Maintenance. Opposed to GEMS responding to Stamford emergency calls, Selectmen's Blackberry phones, and Selectmen's office staff. Distributed additional written comments to the Board.

Randall Huffman, RTM District 7, past Chairman, Budget Overview Committee – Capital Budget, Operating Plans. The town should restructure collective bargaining agreements to increase flexibility. In favor of continuation of reviewing operating plans for various departments. In favor of issuing long term bonds to provide for critical capital projects including drainage issues, storm water system, and the GHS auditorium.

Erf Porter, RTM District 6; RTM Finance Committee – Drainage, fields, facilities process. Spoke about the competitiveness of Greenwich High School with other area high schools, and that it needs the high school auditorium; re-think capital projects such as Cos Cob power plant, Old Greenwich Civic Center, fields, and drainage (where there are already 3 reports).

Operating

Amy Yu, PTA President, Old Greenwich School representing all elementary schools – Board of Education Budget. Supports Board of Education budget as presented, further reductions will compromise quality of education.

Julie Faryniarz, President, PTA Council President – BOE budget. Supports Board of Education budget, which is three million dollars less than the level services budget for this year. These cuts required a reduction of 25.5 certified FTE, and top administrators offered a salary freeze. The BOE budget is only going up .8% this year.

Cathy Delehanty, President, GEA – BOE budget cuts. Supports Board of Education budget. Opposed to re-opening contracts. Cuts made to staff were primarily with teacher coaches; the Greenwich program has been used at the State level as a modeling example of how to mentor new teachers effectively and efficiently. Positions also impacted were social workers and guidance.

Camille Broderick, PTA Volunteer Coordinator, GHS – BOE budget. Supports Board of Education budget, with no further cuts. Services at GHS already impacted by budget cuts are the internship program, college and career services, and electronic music.

Chris Von Keyserling, RTM District 8 – Employee cuts. Opposed to eliminating positions. The town of Greenwich is in the service business. The town demands a high quality of service; look at the level, breadth and depth of services and establish a new level of services to the town and then staff the town accordingly. The vast number of the town's union employees is willing to freeze their pay in order to secure their employment. Town employees generally do not and cannot afford to live in Greenwich, where the tax rate is lower than any other town. The employees live in towns where they are subject to much higher property taxes and increases to their mill rates. Supports Board of Education budget and the GHS auditorium.

Stephen Warzoha, RTM District 9, and RTM Budget Overview Committee. Supports the Board of Education budget and GHS auditorium.

Ms. Tarkington announced the items for the FY 2009-2010 Operating Budget.

Health 401 - 425

Dr. Marilyn Ross Cahn, Greenwich Board of Health, RTM District 6 – Department of Health Budget. In favor of re-instatement of funds for the Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator and no further reductions to be made to the Health Department budget. Infectious diseases have not disappeared in the 21st century. A congressionally mandated panel concluded that terrorists will most likely carry out an attack with biological, nuclear or other unconventional weapons somewhere in the world in the next five years, making it imperative that the public health efforts be strengthened. The Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator focuses on efforts to develop tests and be ready to implement plans and programs in response to potential public health incidents. The Department. of Health's various services and activities will be greatly impacted.

Social Services 501 - 509

Laura Charles, Social Services Department, Homemaker Service employee – Has worked for the Town for 25 years. Opposed cuts to the homemaker services program for the elderly. The Town needs to help seniors who need help.

Capital

Ms. Tarkington announced the items for the FY 2009-2010 Capital Budget.

Drainage

Peter Quigley, RTM District 7 and RTM Budget Overview Committee – Capital budget and funding for Town infrastructure drain repair. In favor of capital funding for storm water, drain, and sewer infrastructure. The town has some serious flood and drain infrastructure problems. Asked the Board members if they had read the study prepared by CDM. The first three projects estimates are in the range of \$70 million to \$75 million, and there are three more projects yet to be estimated, not including the Byram watershed or the Mianus watershed problems. Inquired whether the Board is taking steps to find the funding options for this high priority and it should be put on the CIP process. It is prioritized in the current draft of the 2009 POCD on page 65.

King Street Fire Station

Peter Tesei, First Selectman – Capital \$175,000 King Street. In favor of reinstating design funds for the King Street fire station. Mr. Tesei distributed a GIS map to the Board, reflecting the 475 lots that would be serviced by the proposed station. There has been a rapid expansion of the school facilities in this corridor, as well as some commercial development.

Mr. Tesei also requested adding \$131,000 back into the budget to fund organic turf management of non-school fields.

Bruce Dixon – King Street Firehouse. Supports King Street firehouse. He has approached architects to form an architect's collaborative to design the firehouse, either for free or at a reduced cost. Or, the Town could use plans prepared for other towns that are building fire stations.

Peter Siecienski, Fire Chief – King Street station. Supports reinstating architectural and engineering funds for the King Street station. The Fire Department took a 12% reduction to its operating budget, which is a \$233,000 savings. This is an opportunity to minimize risk. The Board should not delay architectural and engineering funding, while staffing is being deliberated.

Ingrid McMenamain, President, Northwest Greenwich Association (Erica Purnell, RTM District 10) – In favor of the King Street fire station. The association represents over 650 households in northwest Greenwich, whose citizens rights are being violated by the town, due to inadequate fire protection, police coverage, and ambulance service.

Robert J. Richardson, King-Merritt Community, Inc. – In favor of appropriation for King Street firehouse architectural and engineering design work. Homeowner association which represents 220 families. It supports the King Street Fire station.

John Bowman, Byram Citizen Group – Church Street extension pocket park. Opposed to Church Street extension pocket park. This is not worthwhile as a stand alone project at this time. In favor of release of the funds appropriated in current fiscal year, approximately \$350,000, for other projects.

Susan Richardson, Historic District Commission – Round Hill Road/John Street traffic island. Supports reinstating the funds (from \$60,000 to \$304,000) needed to move the traffic island at

the Round Hill Road/John Street intersection. It was ranked number 24 on the CIP list of 43 projects.

Lloyd D. Hull, Historic District Commission, RTM District 10, RTM Public Works Committee – Supports reinstating funds to move the traffic island at the Round Hill Road/John Street intersection. This is not a lot of money and is needed to maintain the infrastructure.

Mary Ferry, RTM District 5 – Sewer bonding. In favor of reducing the term for the sewer fund bonding of \$6.6 million, from 20 years to 5 or 10 years.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Board adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Bocchino, Recording Secretary

Leslie L. Tarkington, Clerk of the Board

Stephen G. Walko, Chairman

SUBJECT TO APPROVAL