

Minutes of the Board of Finance Budget Review Meeting  
April 7, 2008 – Middle School – 7 p.m.

Members present: Justin Donnelly, Joseph Sangiovanni, Joanne Sullivan, Dennis Kreps, David Tagliavini, Sam Fuller Alts. James Lennon, Tom Frenaye  
Also present: Selectmen S. Lingenfelter, B. Fitzgerald, Treasurer C. Davidson, Director of Finance D. Cerrato

Chairman Justin Donnelly called the meeting to order.

For the record, the Chairman wanted to acknowledge the passing of Mr. Paul Hryniewicz, well known Suffield resident who was greatly interested in the affairs of Suffield and often spoke at Town meetings regarding his concerns.

**Citizen Comment:**

For the record, Mr. Donnelly wanted to clear up a misunderstanding, a misapprehension; there is no harness on anybody's ability whether you are an employee of the Board of Education or the Town to speak in opposition to things that are happening with the budgetary process. Anybody can speak. That is your first amendment right; there cannot be any job action of any kind. This is not the policy of the Town of Suffield or the Board of Education.

Mr. Donnelly: I received a hard copy of a petition with 74 names, from Melissa Sullivan. There are some comments included on the petition and the comments speak for themselves, but the proposition of the petition was that those people who signed and did not make comments are against the proposed position of the Assistant Superintendent. Copies of this petition were distributed to the Board of Finance members. It was noted for the record that board member Joanne Sullivan is not related to Melissa Sullivan.

Mr. Donnelly stated he will speak for himself; he has received a lot of calls. The calls do not support the Assistant Superintendent's position. He noted that the Board of Finance (BOF) is responsible for the entire Town, to make the appropriate judgments for the entire Town. We do not have the veto power over line items in the Board of Education (BOE) budget. But we are interested in your comments.

- ✔ Larry Edwards , 651 Bridge Street – The Board of Finance has no email address. He would like to see that corrected. There is no notice of the change of meeting location on the website. He would like to encourage the BOF to keep to a 4% increase.
- ✔ Kathleen Murphy, 371 North Main St. – She supports the full BOE budget; it is a move toward excellence.
- ✔ Bob Raum , 1296 Mountain Rd. – He asked that the BOE budget be sent back, and not accept it. He thinks \$70,000 for a part time Assistant Superintendent is outrageous. It is outrageous to expect the taxpayer to pick up that dollar.

Mr. Donnelly noted that this proposed budget contains only a half year salary; a full year would be \$140,000 plus benefits.

- ✔ Elle Englander, 35 Highland Ridge - She is speaking in support of the full BOE budget; to approve the BOE as presented.
- ✔ Steve Sorrow, 532 Hill St. – He has lived in Suffield for 50 years. He does not support the proposed position of the Assistant Superintendent t.
- ✔ Kuchas , 519 North Grand St. – Most other towns do not have an Assistant Superintendent. I think that this money could be spent on other programs.
- ✔ Jeanne Gee - The level of communication was poor. It was not brought to a public forum where residents could comment on the proposed position of Assistant Superintendent. She is 90% against the position; but we should have more discussion on this new position. Asking for a pause in the process, we do not want to spend money carelessly.
- ✔ Amy Reay - She expressed a concern that the funding for outplacement (Special Education) should not be reduced.

**Chairman Donnelly's comments:**

We will close the books for the Town and the Board of Education by August 15, 2008 in order to allow more time for the auditors.

We will be looking for quarterly reports from the BOE and the Water Pollution Control Authority on the status of expenditures.

Capital Improvements: We have been working with the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures to make sure that we have a coherent prioritized capital improvements budget. We are asking the BOE to get into that process so that we are getting your capital improvement needs with a prioritization so that we can all work together and come up with a one Town plan. It is already in process with the Town.

**Budget Review of the Board of Education Budget -**

Michael Smith, Chairman of the BOE stated that we begin with an overview. We do not go over things we have sent you in writing. Copies of the BOE power point presentation were distributed to the members of the BOF. He noted a reduction of approximately \$400,000 in the health insurance line. We have improved class size, improved technology, and made significant improvements. Mr. Bob Eccles, Chairman of the Budget Subcommittee, noted the objective of BOE: to develop and submit a budget which maintains and expands the level of excellence. He reviewed the budget process and the work by the budget subcommittee. The budget supports a level service budget and seeks District Improvements for a total budget of \$29,494,332 which reflects a 6.9% increase. No services are being cut. He explained the proposed budget in detail referring to the power point presentation. He reviewed the proposed increased staffing, certified and non-certified. The funding for Special Education has increased over the current budget but reflects actual expenditures based upon the current students and the known new students for the upcoming year.

Questions from the BOF members:

Mr. Fuller: are you saying of the 6.9%, 1 % would be offset by State Grants?

Yes, perhaps more than 1%.

Ms. Cerrato noted that even though we are in the second year of the state budget the amount is not yet final until the legislature votes.

Chairman Donnelly: Do I understand that the proposed budget includes (names the new staffing). I am astounded that your legal budget is far in excess of the Town's legal budget. Why such a big increase anticipated? Mr. Eccles: The BOE has to deal with Special Education services; some service requests are sometimes litigated.

Mr. Donnelly reviewed the legal services line item for the past year; why is there such an increase. (There is some confusion as to what figures are used and where). The BOE will check to see what changed on the new format because the detail did not agree with the summary pages.

Mr. Donnelly asked for further clarification. At some time, the discrepancies need to be explained. He noted his following concerns:

1. How is the progress on the bridge and how much money are we spending to bus those kids this year. You are transporting kids from the High School over to Bruce Park in a bus because there is no bridge there, instead of walking ½ mile.

What is the progress?

2. I was looking for the Musical. Is it funded? A. Yes.

3. Text Books; show a decrease. But you also show supplemental textbooks with a dramatic increase. What is the difference? A. Supplemental textbooks are essentially workbooks.

4. The outside maintenance has gone up dramatically. Did we have the BOE take over Town activities?

5. He is pleased to see promotion of the VOAG.

6. On the Assistant Superintendent, is there a recommendation that came from one of the accrediting agencies? Saying that we needed one? And if so, can I see that? I called Mr. Basile this a.m. and asked for a copy of the organizational chart, showing the dates of hires of administrators, when position was created and who filled the positions. And I did not get it. I want to get it.

Mr. Smith stated he did not know of an accreditation issue; the source of the position of Assistant Superintendent has been discussed by the BOE in several years past. It has been discussed in the past two years. We have identified that this is critical to our district. As far as process is concerned, we do not have a job description for this proposed position. We have not gone through the process of formally approving this new position. We did identify this as a higher level need. This part time position can act as a place holder so that we do not lose a year in the process we need to find new superintendent.

Mr. Donnelly: I am comforted that our school district is not threatened with an accreditation issue. I am only speaking for myself. I had rather have the process and hear it all out and see what we are talking about before we committed to \$180,000, \$140,000 for salary, \$10,000 benefits, and a new secretary for the central office. We are trying to juggle numbers from you and the Town, and I see almost \$200,000 that is not critical at least in my observation. I had rather hear you come in with the process and frankly that is what I am hearing from all these people. I think they would listen if they thought they were part of the process. I could not find minutes of the retreats where this was discussed.

Mr. Sangiovanni: It is a bit of a surprise, this request for Assistant Superintendent. First we heard of it was in the press. I think we need to hear the justification and what will the Assistant Superintendent do. It needs more justification for us to consider it seriously. You may want put together a job description.

Mr. Smith; The district needs to move forward. Colleges are looking to see what other districts are doing. We need people in leadership capacity to talk with the college people. We need to meet the leadership challenge. If we have not communicated fully with you, it does not diminish the importance of the proposed position.

Mr. Sangiovanni: I have calculated very quickly; we are spending \$11,200 per child. How does that compare with your figure of \$9,000 per child.

Mr. Eccles: We are spending more; we are closer to the median. We are not at the bottom of list now. Mr. Smith stated our data does lag; 2005 -06 per pupil cost, \$9,600.

Mr. Lennon: Who audits the comparison of district expenditures?

Mr. Smith: The State Department of Education.

Mr. Lennon: I cannot believe this disparity of this comparison. I do not believe the numbers.

Mr. Sangiovanni: What are we getting for our money? How many students go to top level colleges? What are the performance factors? We do not understand.

Mr. Donnelly: You have not given any information in response to Joe's question or mine that I find of value.

Mr. Tagliavini: How are our kids doing? I do not hear a lot about that.

How are they doing in testing? Are they attending second or first tier of colleges? Are they going to skilled jobs? I do not know where they are at, and I feel we do not have this information. I would like to have more information. When you present a budget, I want to know how the kids are doing. We spend a tremendous amount of money, on class size; give us reasons to increase this budget. I would like to see testing results, etc. We do not get that information.

Mr. Eccles: You want a score card. We do not have a score card. How do we measure excellence. We do look at our participation in Advanced Placement classes.

Mr. Lennon: I am retired; the majority of my pension is fixed. Do you know what percentage Social Security gave this year? 2.58%. Your percentage of increase is almost three times that. I believe that throwing money at education is not the answer.

Mr. Kreps: Basically we have a good school system, dedicated staff. We have increased staff, lowered class size, and yet we have seen no results, we do not know how the students are doing. Why do you need an Assistant Superintendent? You have to share your vision long before you ask for the money. The use of a Lead Teacher on a trial basis, to see if it does work, and if does not work, regroup...That makes sense. It is possible to amend the budget by making a motion to reduce the budget by a certain figure at Town Meeting. Maintenance is difficult to see...what you are doing? People do not know what your administrators do. You want to create more programs when you should maintain the programs you have. You have a number of good programs and we should maintain those fully before we try new ones.

Mr. Frenaye: What about the program to evaluate physical education. Is it still in the budget?

Mr. Eccles: It is a small number; we now have a volunteer to do this.

Mr. Frenaye: How will the Sheff v O'Neil settlement affect the Suffield School system?

Mr. Smith: I do not believe any district will be immune.

Mr. Frenaye: In your comparison group, Education Reference Group (ERG) or District Reference Group (DRG) , does anyone of the schools have an Assistant Superintendent?

Mr. Eccles: None of the school systems in the DRG have an Assistant Superintendent and we don't want to wait until half of them do before we act on it.

Mr. Frenaye: We must understand why we are going in the direction of an Assistant Superintendent.

Mr. Lennon noted that the recommendation for an Assistant Superintendent did not come from the Superintendent; it came from the Budget subcommittee.

The Chairman thanked the Board of Education for their attendance and their presentation.

New Business:

Budget procedures – The Director of Finance, Deborah Cerrato stated that we need to set the budget on April 21, two weeks from tonight. In the past, we have used a budget subcommittee, to review and make recommendations to the full board. Last year, the entire board did the review. The Board decided that the entire board would act as the budget review subcommittee for the 2008-09 budget.

The Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) will come in Monday night. Afterward, we will start going through the budgets submitted. We should have good idea of revenues. She will bring her computer to the meeting, and will be able to update the projections presented. The First Selectman will present his updated excel spreadsheet of the municipal budget.

**First Selectman's comments**

Scott Lingenfelter reported that the Charter Review will vote on another budget at their next meeting. The Fire Commission and the Fire Chief came before the Board of Selectmen at their last meeting, and continued to seek funding for a new fire fighter's position. The BOS will vote on that issue at their next meeting. The BOS, by vote, endorsed all the A recommendations as presented by ACCE.

The Chairman reported that the Finance Task Force will meet Friday morning. A public hearing on the proposed 2008-09 budget will be held April 30, A legal notice will be placed in the newspaper.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Bobbie C. Kling, Secretary to the Board of Finance  
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