



**TOWN OF BEACON FALLS
BOARD OF FINANCE**

Public Hearing re: 2010/2011 Proposed Municipal Budget

Tuesday May 18, 2010

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson of the Board, W. Hopkinson called the meeting of the Public Hearing to order at 7:10 P.M. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Vice Chairman G. Smith and Board Members R.Doiron and L. Krepinevich

Also present were Selectmen S. Cable, M. Krenesky and D. Sorrentino and approximately 70 Beacon Falls Residents.

L. Classey the Board of Finance Clerk, read the call.

Joe Rodrigo motioned to accept the call. Joe Dowdell 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

R. Doiron motioned to accept L. Classey as the permanent clerk. Joe Rodrigo 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

W. Hopkinson began the meeting noting that there are copies of the budget available for everyone and asked that people share some of the handouts. She noted that the topic of this meeting was to discuss budget cuts that were made after the last proposed budget was defeated at a town vote. The meeting was also going to review some material increases in the municipal budget. She noted that once the review was complete, questions were welcome but she asked that the questions be limited to the municipal budget only and that all are cooperative in that we are all here for the best interest of the town of Beacon Falls.

Changes that were made since the last vote include:

- \$30,000 cut from chip sealing
- \$12,500 cut from the proposed Town Hall phone system
- \$100 cut from the Library Clerk
- \$300 cut from the Library Professional Development
- \$10,000 cut from Town Council legal fees

\$10,000 cut from Engineering and Consultants
\$5,000 cut from Emergency Services - Service Award Program
\$2,500 cut from Emergency Services - Dep. Supplies - AMB
\$2,500 cut from Emergency Services - Turnout Gear
\$6,900 cut from a new Police Vehicle
\$852 cut from Planning and Zoning Enforcement Officer
\$1,000 cut from Park and Rec - Spray Clay Fertilizer
\$1,000 cut from Park and Rec - Commissioner Op Expense
\$1,000 cut from Park and Rec - Seasonal Wages (directly impacts the summer rec program)
\$1,000 cut from First Selectman's expenses

Cuts total \$84,152.00

Budget Increases

\$61,000 Employee Benefits - Medical Insurance (currently in negotiations)

\$11,000 Emergency Services - Physicals & Inoculations (each Fireman is required to have a physical which cost \$450 each)

\$12,500 Emergency Services - New Turnout Gear (very fortunate to have over 30 new recruits)

\$22,277 Police Lt - offset Fire Marshall (position was moved and enhanced the current Fire Marshall position- he covers the supervision in the afternoon shift as well as back up for troopers and is also in charge of homeland security and he is our grant writer)

\$13,632 Police - full time patrol (this is due to the current year being underfunded)

\$49,173 Police Part time patrol (less than half of this is due to underfunding for the current year - part time patrol covers for full time patrol during vacation and sick time as well as helping out during town events - additionally 3 midnight shifts were added plus a \$7,500 for a DUI check)

\$10,076 - Highway maintenance overtime - (this is due to underfunding in the current year as a result of all the snow removal)

\$10,000 Highway maintenance - Tree work (It costs \$5,000 to rent the equipment and the plan is to rent the equipment 2 times in the upcoming fiscal year)

\$17,000 Highway maintenance - Guard Rails/line Painting

\$10,000 Highway maintenance - Catch Basin Cleaning (mandated)

\$30,000 Highway maintenance - Chip Sealing (noted that \$30,000 was already cut from this line item which severely impacts the plans the chip seal the roads that are in need)

\$10,000 Wastewater Treatment Electricity (calculations indicate that this is the amount needed for electricity at this plant)

\$114,000 Wastewater Treatment - Equipment Replacement (a portion of this is related to a mandated issue relating to nitrates, additionally we are planning on replacing 1 of 3 pumps this year yet all three pumps need replacement - 1 pump costs \$60,000)

\$20,000 Sludge Processing

\$36,492 Library Full Time (due to the increase in library circulation)

Total \$427,150 (major increases and does not included the small increases)

Grand List went up so it off-sets this number.

W. Hopkinson also explained that another change that is noted in the budget is related to the municipal budget being changed before the referendum of the school budget. The region 16 budget did pass since then with an increase of \$601,579. The remaining amount, the cost of operating the Town of Beacon Falls is \$282,625

S. Cable asked to read a letter that she received from Rick Gard of 121 Rice Lane Extension (attached to this document) regarding his suggestions for this budget. S. Cable read the entire letter but for recording minute purposes, the following is a summary of the letter: Rick Gard noted that "we absolutely cannot have a tax increase this year", "there is no room to pay for expanding our town government", "recommended places to cut" full time librarian and possibly reduce the library hours, new Police Lieutenant, over-all Police Department, discuss giving up Resident State Trooper.

The meeting was opened up for public discussion.

Vince Morno, 3 Laurel Ridge - asked that the Board expand on Wastewater Treatment increase - is it critical that this work be done this year?

Response: W. Hopkinson explained that at the last BOF/BOS meeting, all Department Heads were present. The head of the Wastewater Treatment facility told the BOF and BOS that this was absolutely necessary and that sometime in the future the Wastewater Treatment plant would require another \$500,000 to fix a mandated issue.

Bernadette Doione, Naugatuck (President of the Beacon Falls Senior Center - former Beacon Falls Resident) - On behalf of her seniors she was asked to inquire about reducing the mini-bus to 1 day per week. She noted that a lot of the seniors are upset because they often go to the Dr.'s more than once per week.

Response: S. Cable informed Bernadette that she should have had one of the seniors from Beacon Falls speak at this meeting as Bernadette is not a town resident. She also noted that she does not know where she got that information from as there have not been any cuts made to that line item.

Robert Spear, 14 Lakeview Rise - asked why the contingency increase was a \$20,000 increase when it doesn't appear that we even used last years. His recommendation is to do away with the \$20,000 increase. Additionally, he asked why we could not use the reserve fund for the Wastewater Treatment issue.

Response: W. Hopkinson explained that we are currently using \$100,000 out of the contingency fund. She noted that on page 18 of the budget under "other financing sources" Operating transfer in = \$100,000. It is separated as that is the way it has to be done for the budget purposes. They did not take more out of the contingency due to concern of rising electricity and fuel costs.

Sue Mis, 15 Bonna Street -Questioned why we are cutting the Emergency Services - she noted that we have 30 new firefighters and the budget does not allow for new equipment or safety equipment. Who decides who gets the safety equipment and who does not?

Response: W. Hopkinson explained that the Fire Chief was able to give back some of his money for new turnout gear. His explanation was that while they are in training they could use the older gear and once they are fully trained hopefully they could get new turnout gear to get them up to code. The Fire Chief was also asked to look into a better price on physicals so that is why they took the cut there.

Sue Mis responded as not only a mother of a Fire Fighter but asked "which one do you want to put in danger?"

Thomas Vetricc, 35 October Lane - He noted a mil increase of 1.5. He noted that his home was recently assessed at \$30,000 higher than before and noted that he is on social security and has not received any increase in social security and while electricity and gas is going up for the town, it is also going up for the residents. He is very concerned about this increase and how it will effect senior citizens. He noted that he sympathizes with the town because they need more money but so do the residents.

Sheryl Feducia, 2 Bonna Street - Thanked the Board for their work and noted that she is a member of the school board. She noted that she will answer any questions anyone may have regarding the school budget and gave out her phone number. She noted that she looked at the budget and made some comments and recommended cuts and gave it to the BOF. Her basic comment was that she thinks that each line item could be tightened a bit.

Lou Krakowski, 7 Oak Drive - Responded to Sheryl Feducia's comments regarding the school budget. He noted that the meetings are reversed. This amount of people should have been present at the Board of Education. He noted that the town missed the meetings

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for the Board of Education budget (he's not sure how) but he noted that the municipal budget is minute compared to the school budget. He also said that the Board of Finance should have had their budget approved before the school budget was approved. He noted that if it was held in that order, the towns people would be more aware of how much the school budget was affecting the overall increase and then maybe would have been more present at the school budget meetings. He noted that there was a whole lot more people present at this meeting which was covering a fraction of their budget yet very few at the school budget meetings which impacted the budget tremendously.

Sheryl Feducia took the micro-phone to announce that the school budget went up 1.4% this year.

Carol Sullivan, 20 September Lane - noted that she was in agreement with Lou Krakowski's statement. She said that she has heard that the kids are taking tennis lessons and ceramic classes at school and does not believe that is education. She asked how many people are employed by the Town of Beacon Falls (approximately 50 with a lot of part-timers). She inquired about medical co-pays. S. Cable noted that the maximum co-pay is \$650.00. S. Cable also noted that they are currently in negotiations with the unions and also asked the unions to come up with more things they could give back. It was noted that this should be looked at and is being looked at.

Bob Simmons, 46 Fieldstone Lane- asked for clarification of the grand list as the budget is showing two different numbers on two different pages.

Response: The cover sheet is the correct number

Ben Copelella, 30 Fieldstone Lane - questioned the grand list number - one budget shows 18.5 million and another shoes 19 million (a difference of \$500,000).

Response: W. Hopkinson noted that when the previously proposed budget was presented, the Region 16 budget had not yet passed. They could not include the Region 16 budget until it had passed.

Kurt Novak, 90 Munson Road - Agrees that the budget is already cut very slim however noted that Fireworks are included in the budget yet proper Fire Fighter gear is not. He recommends no cuts to the budget as they are then cutting people's safety. He noted that school budget is a bit crazy and noted that this year they went for a higher bidder for snow removal instead of the lower bidder and also bought a new plow truck. The BOF reminded him that the questions and comments should be limited to the municipal budget only.

Pricilla Cretella, 66 West Road - she is with the Board of Education and noted that the school budget has to be approved by the first Monday in May. She explained the shift in students and that is why they Town of Beacon Falls received a .7% decrease last year and a 1.4% increase this year; she was asked by the BOF to keep her comments to the

municipal budget. She noted that the town has to be fiscally responsible so if the town hall has to become part-time then that's what they have to do.

S. Cable responded by saying that the town hall already has skeleton crews and they are all watching the municipal budget suffer due to the school budget. She noted that we can't nickel and dime with the operating budget and that we have a good town that is growing in a good way. The bottom line is that she doesn't think that the town should be told to cut their staff in half because if they were to do that, then the teachers should be cut as well.

Bob Spear, 14 Lakeview Rise - noted that he is a retired Construction Engineer and that he is concerned about the \$114,000 for the Wastewater Treatment Plant. He asked that if the state is mandating removal of nitrates, is the state going to fund it? He also asked that if a pump costs \$60,000, what is the \$54,000 going to be used for.

Response: The answer was that the state will not be giving a re-imbusement. G. Smith explained that we do not have the specifics for that \$114,000 but noted that the mandates that they are talking about are not even in place yet. He noted that the fund was more than 1 million dollars at one point and is now at \$500,000 because we have been off-setting it with so many mandated updates at the sewer plant. The Board of Finance felt that it would be fiscally irresponsible to take their reserve fund and deplete it any more in the event that the plant has a major problem which would cripple the town. If we need to fix something right away, we need to have a reserve fund to fix it.

G. Smith noted that he's aware that no one wants to pay higher taxes but if we cut the budget anymore, the expense that will be realized as a result of this will be tremendous for example if chip sealing the roads is cut anymore, will cost a lot of money to reclaim the surfaces at some point. He noted that if this budget does not pass, we will eventually have to revert to last year's budget. He asked what everyone was looking for, are they looking for a 0% increase? He noted that we could cut the fireworks and sports subsidies but there's nowhere to go after that unless you get into health and safety such as trash. Any further cuts will drastically effect the landscape of the town.

R. Doiron commented that the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen did work for months going over every line item in this budget countless times. After the budget was not passed, both Boards met with all Department Heads who graciously, at the Boards request, offered to give back something to the Town of Beacon Falls in an effort to reduce the budget by \$84,000. He noted that his position is that this \$84,000 that is being cut is so insignificant that when spread out over the towns people amounts to approximately less than \$30 per household. For this we are jeopardizing our roads, fire and safety personnel, police personnel and how the town operates. He noted that the budget right now is very tight and that his theory was to send the same budget back for the public hearing.

Nick Grace, 45 Cedar Lane - asked if during a 24 hour period, do the police always have a back up. It was noted that there are times when we only have 1 officer on patrol.

Mr. Grace noted that he would hope that any police officer that goes out and puts himself in harm's way would always have a back-up. He requested that no cuts be made at all to the Police Department and Fire Department who protect our lives at the risk of their own. He also noted that the Fire Department is also volunteer and that if we ever got a paid Fire Department, the cost would be very high as they would be unionized as well.

Tony Douglas, 268 Burton Road - noted that she doesn't think anyone in town wants to cut the Police or Fire Department but suggested that the town hall be open only 3 days per week. She also noted that she cannot take a town seriously who did not cut out the fireworks and noted that this budget is going before people who can't pay their mortgages and there are foreclosures all over town so again, suggested the fireworks be cut. She also asked what the Board of Finance was doing proactively so that they are not asking the town for another 7% next year.

G. Smith responded that the Fire Works were taken out but the amount was really insignificant in that the fireworks probably cost each resident 25 cents so they put it back in.

G. Smith asked for a show of hands as to whether or not the town is looking for a 0% increase. He noted that we have zero control over the school budget and in order for the taxes to stay as they are, they would have to cut nearly 1 million dollars from the operating budget which is a significant amount of money. He noted we could "shut the town hall down" and still not get 1 million dollars. He noted that there would be no trash coverage, no round-the-clock police coverage, no sports subsidies or fireworks, etc. He noted that currently we do not have any sewer fees. He noted that these cuts would be completely irresponsible.

Joe Pavlic, 21 Fieldstone Lane - asked how much of the grand list is residential and how much is business.

Response: 95 - 97% is residential

Can we try and increase the grand list, have the Planning and Zoning or the Economics Department work to lure more businesses into town.

S. Cable responded by saying that at one point, Beacon Falls was all residential. They have been working on getting more commercial businesses. She noted that she had interviewed an economic retiree to work with EDC for consulting to attract more businesses to town. She noted that it's a big thing for the town to have a Subway opening tomorrow as well as a bakery coming back. She noted that a lot of the businesses are doing really good. She noted that this is something they are totally aware of because all the board members have to pay taxes too.

E. Groth, 30 Laurel Ridge - noted that he was at the recent joint BOF/BOS meeting and noted that one of the members of the boards made a statement to the affect that he did not know if the citizens of Beacon Falls had the intelligence to understand how these

infinitesimal cuts could destroy the town. He noted that since he has decided to get involved in town government he realized that those who are in favor of the budget have something to protect while those who are against it have something to lose. He quoted someone once saying "we get the government that we deserve". Going forward he believes that more people need to get involved in these meetings and see a turnout such as tonight's turnout at other town meetings. He suggested that the library use more volunteers. He noted that when they first moved to Beacon Falls, he and his wife asked if there were any volunteer opportunities at the library and were told that they had all the volunteers that they needed. He continued that his recommendation for a cut would be to freeze the library budget and not add additional staff at this time. He also noted in respect to the fireworks, that he found out through the meetings he attended that they are the single most attended event of the town as it is generally for the kids. He believes the \$5,000 for the fireworks should stay in and anything that helps to make the town a better place to live and play is a positive.

Susan Dowdell, 32 Wolfe Ave. - responded to E. Groth's comment. She noted that the reason the library is looking for increase in hours is because they had a 25% increase in circulation. She noted when Ed and his wife came to talk about volunteer hours, they needed people who knew what they were doing and it takes prep time to prepare for the volunteers. She also noted that the library had 54 hours of volunteerism last month alone.

Sal Falzone, 195 Lasky Road - noted that if more people paid attention to the school budget and had a showing like this, we would be in a better position.

G. Smith asked again how many people think that the budget should be cut more. He asked for a show of hands who thought it should be cut more. Approximately 25 people raised their hands.

Meg Krepinevich, 134 Essex Court - asked if it was possible to having the question for referendum identify if the people are voting "no" because the budget is "too high" or "too low" as that would be helpful in understanding how the townspeople feel.

G. Smith responded that they did try that once and it did not work out very well.

Kathy Grace, 45 Cedar Lane - noted that it seems to her that most people who are voting against the budget are never going to be happy. In order to keep the budget down they should have voted no for the school budget - the municipal budget is such a small part of the budget. She noted that we have to live with Region 16 budget and wishes that the BOF did not cut anything as she thinks it's too low already. She noted that suggestions to close the library or town hall to 3 days per week does not make sense. She feels that the first budget that was presented was a responsible budget and any more cuts would be irresponsible. She also noted that in addition to the Fire Department, the BOF is also volunteers who have put in a lot of time and hard work and are doing the best job that can be done. She asked that we go back to the original budget.

G.Smith brought up revenue. He noted that if we decimate the town by cutting everything, there would be no reason for a business to come into town. We need to provide them with something for them to want to come into town.

Kurt Novak, 90 Munson Road - asked what percentage Prospect's budget went up. The answer was, they think it was 5%.

Sheryl Feducia, 2 Bonna Street - she is in support of what the town does. She noted that the cuts she found were small cuts throughout the budget and that the Town can do with them what they may. She noted that she works for state welfare and 12,000 people in the state of CT will be losing their unemployment and that is only the first round. She announced her phone number again if anyone wanted to call her regarding the school budget. She noted that 6 out of the last 10 years, Beacon Falls benefitted from the school budget.

Ben Capolella, 30 Fieldstone Lane - noted that he sympathizes with the BOF and from his time spent with them he noticed that they are a fine group of people and doing the best they can. He does not suggest they spend much more time trying to figure out where they can cut a few more dollars as he's sure they have already cut more than they think is necessary. He would like the BOF to explain to the folks at the meeting what the consequences would be if they should vote down the budget again.

Response: G. Smith explained that this budget is set to go to a town referendum because the BOS felt it was better to go town wide vote and give people more of an opportunity to vote. If the vote is "yes", the operating budget before them will go through. If the vote is "no" we would go back to the drawing board and see what they could cut more. He invited all to attend that meeting. After that, they will go to another referendum. If the budget is not approved prior to June 30th, state statutes say that we will have to revert to the current year's budget numbers which would drop almost \$400,000 from the budget they are presenting. There will not be enough to fund the town. That will be a problem. It was also noted that it costs the town approximately \$2,000 for each referendum.

The referendum is scheduled for June 2, 2010 at Laurel Ledge school. The date was changed due to time constraints.

Liz Falzone, 195 Lasky Road - noted that she has listened to everyone and their remarks and she has empathy for those who are fearful of the economy and the way it's going but asked that it be put in perspective. She feels that majority of the people who are frightened about the tax increase comes from the fact of the school budget. She noted that the school budget is a done deal, the school budget has passed and there is nothing we can do about it. She noted that Beacon Falls is a lovely town and community that has to participate as a whole. She noted that all should participate in all votes and suggested that the next time a vote comes up they get out and vote. If they need to petition other people than that's what they should do. Her point is that they have to be there for the meetings and votes of the school budget and also that we cannot afford their expenditures. She noted that the municipal budget should not be cut any more.

Stan Oswicky, 49 Diana Lane - noted that he thinks the people in attendance are more upset about the local budget than the school budget. He thinks that the next year the BOF should get their budget to referendum before the school budget is passed. This will get more people to pay attention to the school budget. He also noted that he believes that the town's biggest mistake was not dissolving the region when they had their chance.

G. Smith - asked again if the people are opposed to the budget or are they opposed to a tax increase. Both are two different issues.

Joe Ashea, 2 South Circle - He agrees with what the last two people had to say. He's for low taxes as much as everyone else and that we can pick at the budget but the real problem is the school budget. If they cut the budget, all they are doing is cutting programs and that the problem is the teacher's contract and that's where people need to get involved.

Jim Oberchuck, 7 Laurel Ridge - he noted that the school budget went up 1.5% but the town went up close to 8% - why did the percentage of the town go up so much?

Response: W. Hopkinson noted that last year our taxes went down 1/2 a mil and a lot of that had to do with the population shift for the school budget. This year we are seeing the students shift back. \$601,000 was related to the shift. .7 mil is strictly due to the population shift and .45 is due to the school budget; the town budget is a very small amount relative to region 16. Jim Oberchuck noted that 7% increase is a big increase and that people do not get 7% raises. Response: a lot of the budget increases are contractual.

K. Novak, 90 Munson Road - asked how many people will vote yes. A quick count of hands was approximately 25.

W. Hopkinson thanked everyone for coming out to this meeting.

G. Smith motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 P.M. R. Doiron 2nd the meeting all voted aye.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:50 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,


Lauren Classey
Clerk for the Board of Finance