

**Beacon Falls Board of Finance
10 Maple Avenue
Beacon Falls, CT 06403**



**BEACON FALLS BOARD OF FINANCE
BEACON FALLS BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Public Hearing
April 29, 2014
MINUTES
(Subject to Revision)**

1. Call to Order / Pledge of Alliance

Chairman Joe Dowdell called the public hearing to order at 7:00 P.M.

Board of Finance Members present: Joe Dowdell, Jack Levine, Robert Doiron, Brian Ploss, and Joe Rodorigo

Not Present: Marc Bronn

Board of Selectmen Members Present: First Selectman Chris Bielik, Selectman Peter Betkoski, and Selectman Dominick Sorrentino

Others Present: approximately 30 members of the public

2. Discussion and Vote for 2014-2015 Budget

J. Dowdell began with explaining that the town budget proposal for 2014-2015 was based on actuals in the past three years of what was budgeted and what was spent. This budget is based on what was spent and tried to keep in as low as possible. There are some things that we have no choice in the increases, such as fuel and electricity. We were able to decrease gas prices since we are purchasing in bulk purchases instead of going to local stations. The budget is for \$6,210,497, an increase of .50%. This comes out to about \$30,000 and per household, with a house at \$200,000, it comes to about to a \$64.00 increase in tax.

Another point made was the increase in the police line. The police officers will be getting an increase of \$2.00 per hour. The area towns pay their police more and we wanted to be in line with pay rates and attract more applicants.

Another point was the decrease in the waste water treatment plant. An upgrade that has to be done will be coming and discussions will be made in approximately six months.

Another point made was the increase in the workmen's compensation. This caused a minor increase that is controlled by the insurance companies. The health insurance plan is also going up that we cannot control, again this is controlled by the insurance companies. We entered approximately a 12% increase based on information from our agent.

There are other items on page 16 under Special Projects that we must fund. One is the town's mini bus and another is the hose replacement for the fire department. Some of the public work trucks are in bad shape after the bad winter weather. This is the same for curb replacement that needs to be done.

C. Bielik added to the curb repair and replacement project. We have \$16,000 in there which is over and above some FEMA grant money we have received from after applying for it after Superstorm Sandy. We did not receive everything that we asked for and the \$16,000 makes of the difference.

There were no other discussions made by the Board of Finance and the Board of Selectmen members at this time. J. Dowdell indicated that the boards will accept questions from the public regarding the proposed budget at this time.

3. Public Comment

The first person was Ben Coppolella, 30 Fieldstone Lane. He had a comment that he would have liked to see condensed information in the newspaper highlighting the key items so there is some knowledge of what is going. He is wondering how much his taxes will be going up or down and would like to see what the amount of increase/decrease on the taxes per \$100,000 of assessed value will be. J. Dowdell responded that they have tried to have the newspaper to print that and there are copies at the town clerk's office and on-line on the town's website.

The next person was Carol McMahon, 15 2nd Street. She indicated that there are 2 line items that have large increases and that she would like a little more information. On page 5, line item 10-90-03-1130 for Telephone has a substantial increase. C. Bielik indicated that that line item shows that \$16,424 was spent and only \$9,000 was budgeted. According to the proposal that as of the end of March 2014, which is actually the end of February due to a lag in time, the expense paid in eight months is actually \$9,051. We haven't been looking at the number properly and this year we are looking at the actuals, doing it the right way. We are looking at trying to get the expense lower but wanted to have the correct amount of money in there to be able to pay the bills. The next line item that C. McMahon had a question on was on page 17, line item 10-80-06-4301 Prior Year Taxes. She wanted to know why the number jumped up so much. J. Dowdell indicated that we are collecting more in taxes now. We have a very aggressive tax collector and trying to do everything to collect the back taxes. C. Bielik expanded by adding that we had some debate on the amount that should be in that line item. We are willing to bank on the conservative approach by the new tax collector. M. Holloway is taking a very aggressive line than before and we are starting to see the fruits of her efforts this past week alone. We can keep this momentum going, this amount in the line item very reachable.

The next person was Ed Groth, 13 Laurel Lane. He was wondering about the Capital Projects that are on the table that have been stripped down in this budget. One is the sewer treatment plant, another is the fire department ladder truck, and the third is the school. J. Dowdell indicated that there will be another town meeting to rescind the motion to purchase the truck because the fire department has agreed to reapply for the grant properly to get the truck through FEMA. The paperwork was not submitted in time and the truck is out of the picture now. This will be done by reapplying in September 2014 and hopefully getting FEMA to pay for the truck. As far as the sewer plant, we just started meeting today to figure out how much it is going to cost us, where we are going to get the money for it, and how much it will cost the town. In six months' worth of time, we will have a better grip on that. We were told that there are many grants out there that we may be able to get as well as lower interest loans. The grants are the biggest thing since they could be several million dollars in grant. The sewer plant will be addressed on its own meeting. C. Bielik indicated that the expectation is that it will not happen within this budget year, more like next budget year. As far as the school, C. Bielik indicated that the school budget has its own meeting under Region 16; the town budget has nothing to do with it. E. Groth asked for clarification on the set up a capital account, a rainy day fund. J. Dowdell indicated that this does have to be done. The normal expenditures have to be made and E. Groth responded that he thinks it's a great item as long as we don't lose grant money or syphon off for other things.

The next person was Sheryl Feducia, 2 Bonna Street. She thanked everyone for the hard work and for the increase in the police's wages. She asked for clarification on page 6, line item 10-90-13-1047, Wages – In Lieu Health Insurance. She asked if this is for employees that do not take the health insurance through the town. C. Bielik indicated that she is correct. There is a cap of \$5,000 per employee based on the contract on the buyback. There are four people at the cap of \$5,000 of the buyback which equals \$20,000, the amount on this item in the budget.

The next person was Mike Krenesky, 22 Maple Avenue. He questioned 2 items – highway maintenance and the library study under Capital Projects. M. Krenesky asked about the road repairs and the fact that the roads are getting worse. He was wondering if this budget allows us to take a more aggressive approach to fixing the roads. C. Bielik agreed that the roads are getting worse. A couple of years ago, there was a road referendum that was defeated by one vote. There has been nothing done for the past two years. We know that there are some "big tickets" items coming down the road for us and there are some programs that are available that provides a little bit of money that we help start us. We applied for a program to help get Highland Avenue Ext. and Beacon Street fixed. Based on the thresholds of the program and the conditions of the roads, these are the worse roads that we can fix under the amount of money that we would receive from this one program. Starting there, there are more things that will be done down the road. There is some LoCIP money available that will help pay for a number of things. There is some equipment at the public works department, air conditioner upgrade for the town clerk's department, and fixing the parking lot at town hall that are being looked at getting done. M. Krenesky then asked about the library study and about the property that was purchased to potentially build a new library on. Both J. Dowdell and C. Bielik indicated that there is no library study.

The next person was Doug Bousquet, 20 Cyr Circle. He thanked the boards about the increase in the police. C. Bielik indicated there is a new officer now who is part time now. His plan is to retire in Naugatuck and then increase hours in Beacon Falls, which is about 5 years away. There is also another officer who retired from New Haven Police Force and is going through the process of being hired by Beacon Falls, which will take approximately 3 to 4 weeks. D. Bousquet then indicated that we cannot keep putting “band aids” on the roads, that they need to be fixed.

The next person was Gary Komarowsky, 15 2nd Street. He indicated that he was speaking as Chairman of the Board of Assessment Appeals. He noticed that line item 10-90-17-1220 for Expenses on page 7 was reduced by 56%. He wanted to explain that the boards are underfunding the expense line and would like to have \$20.00 put back into the line item. Previously, he was able to attend training at no cost. He comes up for reelection in 2015 and, in event that he isn't reelected, the next person would need to attend the training and having \$20.00 in that line item would be good. His question was regarding having money put aside for land acquisition on North Main Street. C. Bielik indicated that no money has been. There is a general land acquisition fund that we have been seeded a little money into this account and over time, we will build up the funds to be able to take advantage of opportunities when they occur. G. Komarowsky indicated that he thinks that something should be put aside for this.

The next person was Russell Bacon, 14 Oak Drive. He indicated that Burton Road is in terrible shape because there are some people dumping water into the street.

The next person was Mike Opuszynski, 132 Back Rimmon Road. He wanted to thank the board for land acquisition fund and hopefully advanced the fund.

The next person was Carol Sullivan, 20 September Lane. She indicated that at a previous meeting, there was talk about putting boots on cars with delinquent taxes on them. C. Bielik indicated that the tax does own one boot and getting actively engaged in that. We are looking at bigger amounts now such as property taxes and land taxes. It will take a lot of time to look at the vehicle taxes since many vehicles may not exist anymore. C. Bielik agreed and will look into this. C. Sullivan also questioned the electricity in town since she has switched due to cost. C. Bielik indicated that we do look at rates at third parties and try to get better rates. C. Sullivan then asked about the roof at the high school and C. Bielik indicated that is under Region's 16 and not the town. C. Sullivan wanted an explanation about the \$700 chair that was purchased. C. Bielik indicated that the chair in the First Selectman was not there. The previous First Selectman received a chair as a gift and took it with him when he left office and had given the chair from his office to the Administrative Assistant, whose chair had broken. C. Bielik indicated that he researched four catalogues and found a chair that was appropriate for the office of the First Selectman. The chair that was purchased has a lifetime guarantee.

The next person was Steve Moffat, 136 Burton Road. He thanked the boards for their work on the budget and wanted to note that he is an employee for Public Works and Park & Rec. The maintenance position was still cut out of the budget. They are working on a skeleton crew now and there is a liability of safety with one guy or two guys on a work site. He would like to ask that they reconsider keeping another staff member.

The next person was Jim Trzaski, 106 Burton Road. He wanted to make a statement that the fire department worked very closely with the boards in cutting their budget by \$50,000. A lot of work that has been done at the fire house was by fire volunteers. In the future, with more standards for safety that will be placed by laws, they may have to ask for increases.

J. Dowdell indicated that was the end of the first round and in the second round, please keep everything to this budget and not on the Region's budget.

Sheryl Feducia indicated that she has seen the chair and it is a nice chair, and she has been looking for a home chair for her husband to work at home. She has found chairs that are not as nice and about \$500 without a lifetime guarantee.

The next person was Lauren Classey, Munson Road. She wanted to point out that the town can only purchase from only certain vendors and J. Dowdell responded no, that we can purchase from more than that. C. Bielik indicated that he had purchased a chair for home a few years back for about \$500 and it feel apart within those few years.

J. Dowdell asked the public if there were any more questions about the budget and not about the chair. There were no further comments from the public at this time and at the second request for comments.

4. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:48 P.M.: **Doiron/Levine**; *no discussion*; all ayes.

Respectfully submitted,

Marla Scirpo
Board of Finance, Clerk
Board of Selectmen, Clerk