

TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON
EAST HAMPTON CT 06424
BOARD OF FINANCE
Special Meeting: 2007-2008 Budget Minutes
Wednesday, March 28, 2007
7:00 PM
High School Library Media Center

Members present: Chairman Ted Hintz, Kurt Comisky (7:10), Henry Thorpe, Jill Simko, Judy Isele (7:26), and Katherine Avery

Staff Present: Town Manager Alan Bergren, Finance Director Jeff Jylkka, Fire Chief Chuck Stickler, Tax Collector Marie Durkin, Social Services Coordinator Jane Leary, Park and Recreation Director Ruth Plummer

Other Attendees: Town Council Members Kyle Dostaler and Melissa Engel, Board of Education members Joanne Barmasse, Debra Robinson, Alan Hurst-Chairman, Michael Vasquezna, State Representative Gail Hamm

1. Call to Order:
Chairman Hintz called this meeting to order at 7:04 PM followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Public Comments: N/A
3. Board Remarks:
 - Purpose of meeting is to provide an overview of the items/issues/needs being considered for the 2007-2008 budget.
 - The BOF will present the BOF approved budget to the town rather than the Town Manager's budget as has been done in the past.
 - The BOF will meet again to discuss the budget, there will be a public hearing, another BOF meeting to discuss the public comments, and a meeting to approve and send the budget to the TC.
 - Common issues/needs raised by multiple departments include: technology
4. Discuss the 2007-2008 budget:
 - Tonight's news mentioned Gov. Rell's proposal to put a cap on property taxes; cap at 3%; a town may override the 3% by referendum; this may impact a town's ability to manage their own affairs; town's have seen 6% property taxes.
 - BOE:
 - i. Proposing 7.28% (1.6m) increase over last year; focus on the following items: staff, facilities, technology and special education; 2.1% is discretionary, 63% core operating costs, and 34% increase in staff to support programs
 - ii. Staff increases needed to reduce class sizes: most of which is at the middle and high schools. Staff increases include: curriculum coordinators, language teacher, speech assistance/staff, staffing for kindergarten program for those behind, language arts, math teacher and English teacher

- iii. Common criticisms: Teacher make too much money; Told we have a good school system yet also told we need to do more – appears to be a disconnect in messages
 - iv. Asked the net increase in staff? Didn't have the number available at the meeting, but noted last year they hired 3 psychiatrists and 1 high school teacher. NOTE: the 3 psychiatrists were hired to bring students back to the district with regard to the special education program – some students were brought back this year even though the 3 psychiatrists don't start in their role until September. There is the desire to get to 16-17 students out placed – state rate is 10%, EH is just below the 10%.
 - v. Expect the school population to level off and be lower in about 5 years.
 - vi. Gayle Hamm provided a handout that reflected the Democrats "tinkering" of Gov. Rell's proposal regarding New ECS aid: 60% to education and 40% to tax relief. The document suggested EH ECS increase would be 1.05m. Alan's Town Manager's budget did not assume that we were going to get the 1.05m. His budget is much more conservative and assumes we will not receive all of these funds. The % to education and % to tax relief is good information that the BOF can count on.
- General budget (Alan):
 - i. The entire budget is on the web site; focus of changes are on staff, utility costs and pension fund. Staff include: adding 2 police, 1 EDC, 1 animal control officer, 1 administrator for park and rec. and facilities.
 - ii. Village center is a priority for the town
 - iii. Capital: need to reinvest in our roads and facilities; social services needs to be a focus since there are needs that are not currently being met; need lake commission support.
 - General comments by the BOF:
 - i. We continue to repair year after year rather than addressing root causes and fixing what needs to be fixed. We should keep spending money on patches/short term fixes
 - ii. Technology: many departments are looking at tools and we need to coordinate the needs to develop solutions that will work and can be maintained. Example: Assessors office/GIS system: currently the assessors office uses maps from 1943 where as there is technology (G.I.S.) today that is much more accurate. The G.I.S is a tool that may be built on so that many departments can benefit from it: the police, fire, public works, etc. Many towns already use this technology, EH is behind. Another example mentioned was with regard to the Library which is wireless, yet the Senior Center (a wall away) is not.
 - iii. Question ask with regard to the status of the technology committee: Kyle responded by saying the TC is currently interviewing for the committee and hope to have them completed by end of April; expect the committee to be established by June. The committee will look at town-wide issues (back-up, security, etc.) and will make recommendations. Concern expressed by others that another year will likely pass before we see benefits from this committee.

5. Public Remarks:

- Tax relief is needed
- Education: looks to remain flat; we did bring back special education students without the 3 psychiatrists so that says something
- Don't cut capital!
- Show the tax payer the value of their money; the public is not seeing the benefits of their hard earned money
- Why can't we separate BOE and Town?
- Concern that kids are over-medicated. Response: Town needs to provide social services so that the BOE doesn't have to – BOE needs to focus on educating kids. Psychiatrists cannot prescribe medication.
- Katherine's comments regarding spending good money after bad, please explain? Response with example of the Library which has wood siding that is rotting, has woodpecker holes, and costs 28k to stain and needs to be stained every 6 years; perhaps we should look into vinyl siding rather than continue to fix these ongoing issues/continuous maintenance costs
- Facilities has a great plan developed but the water system is holding the plan up.

6. Adjournment: A motion was made by Judy Isele, seconded by Katherine Avery, to adjourn the meeting at 8:32PM. Motion passed 6-0.

Submitted by:
Karen Lee