

**NEWTOWN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2012**

**PRESENT:** Jeff Capeci, Mary Ann Jacob, George Ferguson, Mitch Bolinsky, Joseph Girgasky, Paul Lundquist, Robert Merola, Kathryn Fetchick, Dan Amaral, Dan Wiedemann, Phil Carroll, Dan Honan

**ALSO PRESENT:** First Selectman Pat Llodra, Finance Director Robert Tait, BOF Chairman John Kortze, BOF member Harry Waterbury, Schools Superintendent Janet Robinson, BOE Chairman Debbie Leidlein, BOE members John Vouros and Laura Roche, Police Chief Michael Kehoe, PC Chairman Paul Mangiafico, Ed Shanley, 25 members of public, two members of press

**VOTER COMMENT:** Karen Pierce, 10 Chestnut Hill Road - It is always being stressed how important it is to maintain a good Moody's rating. Why aren't we taking the same attitude towards education.

Michelle Assante, 16 Wendover Road - When voting "no", what in lieu of advisory questions can we do to make our intent known, send e-mails? She voted "yes" the first time because she supports FDK but voted "no" the second time because of the deep reduction to education. A lot of people are asking for no increase at all but they do not represent everyone.

Dr. Janet Robinson, Schools Superintendent - Our schools are not "deteriorating" as some have been saying. The children today are learning new and more difficult content that any of us had to learn. We need the help of everyone to support the work of educators who work with very few resources. The budget has been reduced "tremendously" every year for the past four years. Help us help kids to be successful. Any more reductions from this point on will be harmful to the education system.

Chris Powers, 75 High Rock Road - Has spent a lot of time in the kindergarten classroom and she feels it is a stressful place. The first referendum she voted "yes" but she voted "no" on the second because she felt it was the only way to come back to the table and request a "reallocation" of funds to FDK.

Sherry Chapman, 4 Millwood Drive - Moved here two years ago from LA. She is disappointed but is "stuck here now".

Hillary \_\_\_\_\_, Patriot Ridge - Moved here four years ago. Education was a large part of the reason they chose Newtown but she is "disheartened" by what has been happening.

Joanne Rosen, Sugar Lane - Brought her kids here tonight because she wanted them to see that there are people who are trying to make their educational system better. She grew up in New Jersey where budgets never failed. She believes the kids are suffering. As a taxpayer, she is spending a lot of money to supplement her kids education.

Robin Fitzgerald, 24 Old Farm Hill Road - Allowing budget input after a failed referendum is imperative to help make decisions. She sent an e-mail with suggestions on getting the budget approved, including putting \$400,000 back into the education

budget and reducing the Fund Balance contribution to \$200,000, moving the other \$200,000 over to education.

John Vourus, 29 Main Street - He is a former educator in Newtown and a Board of Education member but he is speaking for himself in support of full day kindergarten. As a BOE member he has to deal with his colleagues and Dr. Robinson to brainstorm cost savings measures that will not impact services and existing programs. "Stay the course with the \$1million reduction".

Debbie Leidlein, BOE Chairman – She agrees with everything Dr. Robinson said tonight. The children are thriving. Her own children are having a wonderful education experience. But any further reductions to the education budget would be detrimental to programs. She also agrees with Mr. Vourus - \$1 million is enough of a challenge. There are misconceptions out there such as the FDK has already been cut. It has not but it will be a challenge to find a way to fund. Everything is still on the table – no decisions have been at this point by the BOE.

Bill Pieragostini, Point of Rocks Road – Voted "no" at both referendums. The budget is too high. He does not believe that his child would have been any better with FDK. He does not understand restoring any money to the budget with so many "no" votes.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Ms. Jacob moved to approve the minutes of the 5/2/12 regular meeting. Mr. Amaral offered a correction to the line stating that the Oakview ballfields are finished. Ms. Llodra confirmed that they are NOT finished. Minutes unanimously approved as amended.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:** Ms. Jacob advised that the Ordinance Committee cancelled their meeting tonight but will meet before the next regular meeting.

**FIRST SELECTMAN REPORT:** Ms. Llodra reported that the legislature approved a bill authorizing assessors and tax collectors to levy taxes on partially completed properties. This confirms that the existing practice is acceptable and reverses a fairly recent court ruling that it was not. The legislators also increased the amount of fines for blight to \$250 per day.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

**FY 2012/2013 Budget:** Ms. Jacob moved to reduce the proposed contribution to the Fund Balance from \$400,000 to \$200,000. Motion seconded.

Regarding voter comments made earlier, Ms. Jacob commented that she is here for her children as well, and we have a fine school system that is not "falling apart". She believes that reducing the Fund Balance contribution will still accomplish what we promised the ratings agencies this year. She would not support any further reductions to the education budget. This would give the school budget a 0.57% increase and the municipal budget a 0.43% increase, for a total of 1.07% or 24.63 mills.

Mr. Bolinsky stated that he will support this motion. He is still resolute about any reduction to the municipal budget and would not be comfortable with an additional reduction to the schools budget either.

Mr. Lundquist also will support this motion. There seems to be very vocal education supporters advising to increase the schools budget. We heard that anything “beyond” the current reduction would be harmful, but he feels that the BOE and Administration may be too comfortable with the \$1 million reduction that was made. Ms. Leidlein restated that the \$1 million is enough of a “challenge”. She can’t guarantee that we won’t impact existing programs or that future programs will not be reduced. There has not been an opportunity for the BOE to broach the subject yet.

Mr. Amaral believes that the Town did an excellent job in keeping down expenses but perhaps we can find more reductions. Ms. Llodra pointed out that over the past five years, the municipal budget has only increased by a total of 1.1%. She added that only one-third of households have children and the other two-thirds do not. Services that benefit everyone need to be supported, but we have begun to erode that capability by reducing funds in the BOS budget.

Mr. Merola supports the motion on the floor but is not comfortable with that being the only reduction made tonight. Mr. Merola moved to amend by also reducing the Board of Education budget by \$25,000 and reducing the Board of Selectmen budget by \$25,000. Amendment seconded and failed: 10 NO (Capeci, Jacob, Ferguson, Bolinsky, Lundquist, Fetchick, Amaral, Wiedemann, Carroll, Honan) - 2 YES (Merola, Girgasky)

Mr. Amaral moved to amend by also reducing the Board of Selectmen budget by \$200,000. Amendment seconded and failed: 11 NO – 1 YES (Amaral)

Ms. Llodra stated that she understands the sentiment that it was not fair to reduce the BOE budget and not the BOS budget. But if the reason for this motion is to “share the pain”, the BOS have been feeling a great deal of pain for the past three budgets. They chose to approach budget preparation this year by telling departments to think “no increase”. There is no buffer in this budget just to give the Council something to “cut” if necessary. Don’t punish them for this. Ms. Fetchick explained that she seconded this amendment because the total increase would then be under 1%, which comes closer to the zero increase some people want. Mr. Wiedemann assured that he has no intent to punish the First Selectman and feels it was irresponsible for the Superintendent to put forward a 3.5% increase, but he also feels we need to get below 1% to get this budget approved by the voters. Ms. Llodra assured that no more can be taken from services – look to the Fund Balance contribution.

Mr. Wiedemann moved to amend by reducing the Fund Balance by an additional \$75,000. Amendment seconded and failed: 9 NO – 3 YES (Lundquist, Fetchick, Wiedemann)

Mr. Wiedemann moved to amend by reducing the contribution to the Fund Balance from \$400,000 to \$125,000. Motion seconded and failed: 8 NO – 4 YES (Amaral, Wiedemann, Carroll, Honan)

Mr. Lundquist moved to reduce the contribution to the Fund Balance from \$400,000 to \$200,000 and to increase the Board of Education budget by \$200,000. Motion seconded and failed: 11 NO – 1 YES (Lundquist)

## **MAIN MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

Ms. Jacob moved to send the FY 2012/2013 Budget in the amount of \$106,406,523 in expenditures and \$106,606,523 in revenue to the voters. Motion seconded and carried: 11 YES – 1 NO (Amaral)

Ms. Jacob moved that the Legislative Council charge the Board of Selectmen with setting the date/time of the Town Meeting required by Charter for action on the budget after a second failed referendum. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Ms. Jacob moved that if the Board of Selectmen decides to send the budget vote to a referendum, the hours for voting be set as 6:00 am to 8:00 pm. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Town of Newtown Firearms Ordinance:** Chief Kehoe and PC Chairman Paul Mangiafico explained the need for an ordinance. There has been an increase in complaints about the discharge of firearms in town. The current ordinance allows discharge as long as you are on your own property. The Borough has an ordinance that prohibits this.

Ms. Jacob moved to refer to the Ordinance Committee the consideration of a Town of Newtown Firearms Ordinance. Motion seconded and unanimously carried.

**Resolution – Dickinson Park:** Ms. Jacob moved to approve the resolution entitled: RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR A SPECIAL APPROPRIATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$336,000 FOR THE DEEP BROOK STREAM RESTORATION PROJECT AT DICKINSON PARK TO BE FUNDED FROM A PASS THRU GRANT FROM THE CANDLEWOOD VALLEY CHAPTER OF TROUT UNLIMITED (THROUGH THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE) IN THE AMOUNT OF \$252,000 AND \$84,000 TO BE SUPPLIED BY THE TOWN WITH FORCE ACCOUNT LABOR AND EXISTING MATERIALS. Motion seconded and unanimously carried. “Force Account Labor and Existing Materials” means in-kind services.

**Charter Revision Discussion:** Mr. Capeci advised that the Council would need to appoint a Charter Appointment Committee to interview candidates and make recommendations. Once the Charter Revision Commission is appointed, they will be given a charge approved by the Council. However, if time permits, they can look into anything not in the charge. It may be difficult to get all of the work done in time to put any proposals on the November election ballot.

**VOTER COMMENT:** Kristen \_\_\_\_\_, 16 Fieldstone Drive – Disappointed by the sentiment that voters can't say "no" and get money restored. When she votes "no", it doesn't always mean that she believes the budget is too high.

Michelle Assante, had copies of letters from those who could not be here tonight to express their opinions. Whether e-mails are "cut and pasted" should not matter to Council members, those people are expressing their opinions.

Ed Shanley, 7 Littlebrook Lane – Has lived here 47 years and this is a great town. This is one of the best boards we have had in many years. The problem is that people don't go out to vote. Our budget is getting out of control. The school system seems to be spending more and quality is going down. Money is not the issue, we need better people.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 pm.

Jan Andras  
Clerk