

April 8, 2013

The Board of Finance on this date held a public hearing on the proposed budget for fiscal year 2013-2014 at 7:00 p.m. at the Stonington High School auditorium. Members present were Glenn Frishman, Chairman; John O'Brien, Secretary; June Strunk; Dudley Wheeler; Sandy Grimes and Bryan Bentz. Also present Maryanna Stevens, Director of Finance; Board of Selectmen; Superintendent of Schools, Van Riley; Board of Education members, Town Hall staff and residents of the Town.

Mr. Frishman opened the public hearing at 7:00 p.m. The budget presented totals \$57,848,062 with a 19.88 proposed mil rate. He stated that he had asked the Director of Finance to do some research and discovered that back to 1959 the Grand List had never declined until this year. Due to the revaluation property values were adjusted, there is an almost 20% decrease in the Grand List, which causes the mill rate to increase. 77.89% of properties would see no more than an increase of \$199.00; while 17.76% will see a \$200.00 to \$999 increase per annum. This creates a challenge for the Board to provide quality services for an acceptable price.

Mr. Frishman explained that a healthy fund balance helps maintain the good bond rating, added flexibility to handle emergencies and when the BOF takes money from the fund balance and applies it to revenue, we face a revenue shortfall in the following fiscal year because that was money not raised by taxes.

Board of Education budget has grown to be 58.14% of the total town budget, and has increased the past 6 years. He directed the assembly to Page 4 of the budget book, the Town of Stonington economic and Demographic Information. As the BOE budget is the largest he will begin there.

Mr. Frishman informed the assembly that the Board of Finance would proceed with deliberations immediately following the Public Hearing.

**Gail MacDonald, BOE Chairwoman** stated that she is proud of the budget; she felt it was conservative at less than a 3% increase; it respects the taxpayers that pay. It was built on the needs of the students with programs that benefit all-including all day kindergarten to end the achievement gap, sports and middle school technology. She added that budgets that do not pass are not always because of an unsound budget, it is often voter apathy, misunderstanding or personal issues. She hoped that all elected officials would work collaboratively to pass the budget. She concluded in asking for support of the \$48,000 and \$100,000 security package to keep the children safe.

**Greg Teifert, Old North Rd** commended the Board for their time. He addressed the School budget stating that he applauds the efforts for increased safety but with debt high and government cuts he believes it necessary that the town sharpen their pencils and may need to cut more.

**Gordon Lord, Pawcatuck** thanked the Boards of Finance and Education for their dedication and time during these tough times. After reviewing the budget in detail, he asked how the BOF arrived at the \$250,000 cut to the BOE budget made at the last meeting. After mandatory and contractual increases he does not see the leeway. He added that he is concerned about cuts to the middle schools. Mr. Frishman stated that the cut to the BOE was made to assist in a successful passing of the whole budget. As he pointed out there is a significant percentage of the demographic on fixed incomes.

**Rob Marsiglia** stated he would like to restore funding to the BOE budget but it may be best to stay as it is, as he wants to see the budget pass.

Mr. Frishman continued with the remainder of the budget.

A member of the audience asked about the 2012-2013 unassigned fund balance amounts. Mrs. Stevens replied it is too early to determine that number.

**Kim Connett, Stonington** asked about the large increase in the labor negotiations line. First Selectman Haberek explained that this includes potential contractual wage increases and benefits for all Town employees.

**Rob Marsiglia** is currently the Planning and Zoning commission Chairman and has volunteers in different positions for many years. He stated that the Commission is divided on restoring the Planning Director position adding that he as Chairman would like the funding restored for the Director position for four reasons: As a commission there has been no progress for the past year, year and a half. Day to day operations in department are going fairly well but planning is not going forward. He is concerned about processes at Town hall specifically where applications have staff conflicts and disagreements. He believes the Town needs a qualified professional to enforce policies and improve the atmosphere, particularly interpersonal issues. A director can present vision, consistency with the POCD and ZBA, future K-12 projects and increase commercial development.

**Wendy Barry** EDC Commissioner, Board member of Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce and POCD subcommittee member stressed the importance of restoring the Planning Director position.

**Chuck Sneddon** asked how there is little or no funding for the Director of Planning. Mr. Frishman stated that the First Selectman offered the funds for the position. Mr. Sneddon spent 6 years on the P&Z Commission and stated he needed the Planning Director to effectively do his job. He does not feel the Town

can be effective for the future without this position. All new commercial development is because of POCD. The Grand List has grown 100% because of professional planning. Revenue is the way to improve education within the town. **John Prue, Pawcatuck** echoed the support of the three previous speakers. Planning and Zoning is currently a leaderless department, the past year P&Z has taken steps backward. The Planning Director position is by default also the head of Economic Development or at front end of pipeline.

**Pauline Murphy** does not feel the small amount for leaf pickup is necessary and does not benefit anyone.

**Scott Bates Stonington** thanked the BOS and BOF for their steady and consistent support. Emergency Management Services responded in extraordinary fashion the past few years. He asked them to consider the school safety pilot program at West Vine Street School. They have been working on improvements but hope to be first in line for funding from the State.

**Charles Young, Pawcatuck** spoke requesting an increase to funding for the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center. Using the 2010 US Census Bureau Information he stated that 20.2% of Stonington residents are age 65 and over. 5.3% of the residents live below the poverty level and 25.3% families in Stonington earn under \$35,000 a year. Enrollment, senior activities, transportation food pantry and meals on wheels has increased dramatically. Disaster relief center.

**Laura Eisenboss, Mystic** spoke in support of the Mystic & Noank Library. They are a valuable community resource. Average 90% users are Stonington residents. She asked for restoration of \$16,810.

**Susie Canning Mystic** spoke in support of the Mystic & Noank Library. She read a letter from the Stoneridge library committee who rely heavily on the library as many of the residents cannot travel. They asked for restoration of \$16,810.

**Chuck Sneddon** repeated his question regarding the reduction of funds for the Human Services Director. Mr. Haberek stated that the Youth and Family Services Coordinator has assumed the duties of the director as Human Services Manager.

**Kathryn Taylor** spoke in support of the Westerly Library. The library was initially established to serve both sides of the river.

**Matthew Buck** volunteer and treasurer of the Stonington Ambulance. He thanked the Boards for the current funding. Due to cuts they have a shortfall and asked that the Board be mindful of the services they provide.

**Patrick Cassidy** also thanked for the Board for funding for Stonington Ambulance.

**John Nickerson Pawcatuck** is so grateful for the volunteer organizations within the community. There is virtually no growth in Human Services, he realizes it is difficult to determine who should receive funding. He supports increased funding to the local community center as they provide services for all age groups. Libraries are treasures primarily operated by volunteers and he would love to see increased funding.

**Cindy Nadeau Pawcatuck** stated that the revenue stream can grow by supporting and strengthening schools.

There being no further questions or comments for the Board, Mr. Frishman closed the public hearing at 8:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leslie Packer".

Leslie Packer