

Minutes of
Litchfield Budget Committee Hearing
Held on January 11, 2008

Present for the Budget Committee: Chairman B Lemire, B Spencer (Vice Chairman), R Peeples (Selectman's Rep.), J Harte, P Parker, D Miller, M Falzone, B McCue

Present for the Town: P Jewett, A Raccio, H Dilworth Jr.

Present for the School District: S Martin Dr. E Cutler, C Couture, D Beauregard, B Ballou

1. 2008 Town Budget Presentation

Chairman Lemire opened the hearing on the Town budget at 7:00 p.m., introducing members of the Budget Committee. Selectman Peeples introduced members of the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Lemire referred to the work of the Budget Committee, explaining their mission. He spoke about the age of the school buildings and the recommendation by the Budget Committee regarding the proposal for a new school. He also reminded everyone that property taxes are only means available to complete the fiscal function of the Town.

Chairman Lemire referred to the totals for the Town and School budgets and the increases over the 2007 figures. He referred to his spreadsheet, explaining the figures being shown for each department pointing out where the Budget Committee had made changes, with the following notes:

Executive – the Budget Committee made a \$1,000 reduction (\$500 for consulting services and \$500 for public notices)

Administration – the Budget Committee did not recommend the \$13,000 from consulting services

Voter Registration – the Budget Committee removed \$30 to correct an error

Personnel Administration – a change of \$77,600 as there appeared to be a miscalculation in the retirement figures which needed to be corrected.

Zoning Board – the Budget Committee made an \$800 reduction to reflect spending over the last few years.

Police Department – the Budget Committee made a reduction of \$138,804. They removed a new car, consulting services (of a prosecutor) and the amount for an extra patrolman.

Fire Department – the Budget Committee reduced this account by \$17,073 for fire call fighter hours.

Code Enforcement – Salaries were adjusted to reflect a vacancy.

Highways and Streets – the Budget Committee reduced this account by \$37,000 – for equipment hire, workmen's wages and salt in response to averages over the last several years

Street Lighting – the reduction in this account was due to the fact that no location had been specified.

Health Department – the Budget Committee voted to remove Mosquito Control in its entirety from the budget and asked the Board of Selectmen to put this in a warrant article as the indication from last year was there would be no cost attached to this. The Committee therefore stated they would like the voters to have a say in whether they wished to pay for this.

Welfare – the Budget Committee made a reduction of \$10,500 to reflect experience.

Question from the floor:

Mr. John Latsha asked whether the Budget Committee were aware that the Board of Selectmen had voted against putting a warrant article for the mosquito control district on the ballot, and Chairman Lemire stated they had just been informed about the Board’s decision.

Parks and Recreation – the Budget Committee had reduced this account in the areas of grounds keeper and custodian to reflect past experience.

Question from the floor:

Mr. John Latsha asked for confirmation that the Health Officer does not have any money at present in his budget for mosquito testing, and Chairman Lemire confirmed the entire amount had been removed. Chairman Lemire pointed out that the Budget Committee has the right to go back and vote on that if they wish.

There being no further public input on the presentation, Chairman Lemire asked Selectman Peeples to go over the Town Warrant Articles, pointing out that the Budget Committee had officially voted on two of them.

2. Town Warrant Articles

Selectman Peeples read the attached warrant articles for the record, making the following points:

Article 1 – Bond for new fire station

Selectman Peeples explained that the Board of Selectmen had presented alternate financing to the Budget Committee and that the Committee has not voted on this article as yet.

Article 3– Corning Road

Questions from the floor:

Mr. John Latsha asked if the money had already been appropriated for this and Selectman Peeples responded that only the money for the engineering work has been appropriated, and this article is for the construction work. He pointed out that the money already appropriated was not enough to do the whole project.

Mr. Latsha asked for details of the problems with Corning Road, and Selectman Peeples provided some history, explaining the engineering has been done and that this included future expansion to include a couple of other streets in the area. Mr. Spencer clarified that Block Grant money would be used for this project and there would be no cost to the taxpayer.

Article 5 – Guard Rail for Albuquerque

Questions from the floor:

Mr. John Latsha asked why the Budget Committee did not support this article and Chairman Lemire responded the Committee felt this was more of a maintenance issue than something for a warrant article.

Article 6 – Town Operating Budget

Selectman Peeples stated this article was recommended by the Budget Committee and the amount was subject to change.

Mr. Spencer provided details of what the impact would be on the tax rate if the Operating Budget passes, breaking the total down for each warrant article, for a total increase of \$2.23 if everything passes. He pointed out this is the same as for this year.

There being no further public input, Chairman Lemire closed the Town portion of the hearing at 7:28 p.m.

3. 2008 School Budget Presentation

Mr. Miller introduced the school representatives, and Chairman Lemire thanked everyone for their efforts in putting together the budget and the presentation. Chairman Lemire made a brief introduction and continued to explain where changes had been made to the original figures, pointing out that there were reductions amounting to \$256,000 in 14 out of 89 account lines.

Object code 110 – Chairman Lemire explained about the District’s request to increase Administrator salaries. He stated they were not sure that all positions would be filled, resulting in a \$5,700 reduction and the Budget Committee had used historical figures in calculating what they thought would be adequate funding of the account.

Object code 211 (Health Insurance and Dental) – Budget Committee stated the Committee had used the same reasoning for the cuts they made in this account.

Object code 220 – the cuts in this account corresponded to the reduction in salaries.

Game officials – historical figures showed this was over funded

Telephone maintenance – in accordance with historical expenditures the amount in this line was not appropriate.

GMS building repairs – the School Board had put an amount in just in case, and since there were no specific items attached to it the Budget Committee had removed the figure until there were specific items to be addressed.

Boiler repair – again compared to historical expenditures this felt high to the Budget Committee, therefore they reduced it accordingly.

Object Code 446 – there was a correction to a price and the Budget Committee figure is the correct amount.

Object Code 519 – the figures historically did not support the request

Object Code 534 – historically this account has been under spent therefore the Budget Committee felt it reasonable to reduce it.

Object Code 610 (Supplies) – this was reduced for the same reason as the previous account.

Object Code 810 – this was adjusted due to lower student numbers and was agreed to by the School Administration.

Mr. Martin, wishing to clarify some of the detail prior to the reductions explained:

- about the market survey to place the Administrator salaries at the market mean
- about the reduction in co-curricular activities resulting in a reduction in the number of school activities
- about Dental insurance – the School had budgeted at the rate provided by the insurance company
- GMS building repairs – Mr. Martin stated he took full responsibility for not putting details of these in the budget and explained how these had come about.

Mr. Martin also pointed out that the School Board had taken a significant number of reductions before submitting the budget to the Budget Committee, and that many supply accounts were level funded. He stated he was concerned about the supply accounts as new curriculum implementation brings large costs for multi media etc. Referring to the athletic fields at CHS he explained these are deteriorating.

Chairman Lemire complimented the Boards for their work and stated the Budget Committee members had performed an outstanding job at reviewing figures and the rationale for requests. He also spoke about the difficulty of receiving information at the last minute, and explained the Budget Committee rationale in cutting \$250,000 from the whole budget.

4. School Warrant Articles

Mr. Miller presented these, referring to the handouts available to the public and read them for the record (see attached). He stated he was cognoscente that the warrant for the new school was a large one.

Question from the floor:

Mr. Bill Spencer asked for details of the impact on the tax rate of the bond for the new school, and Mr. Miller responded, referring to the slide in his presentation.

Mr. Martin explained the estimated tax impact of the Operating Budget at \$1.59 prior to adding special education. He explained the 2007 tax rate had a reduction of \$1.31 due to under spending in special education which had been returned to the voters, and the net increase over the two years would be 30cents on the tax rate or 15cents /year.

There being no further input from the public Chairman Lemire closed the Budget hearing at 7:55 p.m., reminding the audience of the dates, times and place of the Deliberative sessions.

Minutes by: *Sandra Maxwell, Recording Secretary to the Budget Committee*