

TOWN OF SOMERS
BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2009

I. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting was called to order by Chairman James Persano, at 7:04pm. Members present were George Warner, Michael Parker, Tom Mazzoli, Steve Krasinski and James Persano. Also present were Board of Education representative Tim Potrikus, School Business Manager Bill Boutwell, Selectmen David Pinney, Kathy Devlin & Joe Tolisano and Finance Director Greg Simmons.

II. BOARD OF EDUCATION UP DATE

Mr. Boutwell distributed information from the last BOE meeting showing how they intend to achieve level funding. Mr. Mazzoli had discussed the proposal with Dr. Sufredini and reviewed the information. At the Elementary School a \$12,000 savings will be achieved by having one principal and one 10-month assistant. Instructional, administrative and custodial staffing cuts were discussed. One teacher has put in for retirement.

The BOF suggested that substantial savings may be possible by switching to a Health Savings Account Plan with little impact on those insured. Mr. Potrikus said this would be investigated. Currently there is such a plan in place but few people have taken advantage of it.

Mr. Boutwell stressed that the proposed BOE budget was not configured to match BOE cuts to anticipate State cuts, but rather to keep the upcoming budget level with the current year. Mr. Potrikus will notify the BOE of the BOF's request to reconsider a salary freeze of 4.7% for the instructional staff. Mr. Parker warned that what will happen will not be known until the "11th hour", therefore plans should be ready to protect people if there are possible ways to prevent layoffs.

III. BOARD OF SELECTMEN UPDATE

Mr. Tolisano expressed his concerns regarding putting together a budget with so many variables unresolved. He said that for planning purposes the BOS has gone as far as they can without looking at staff cuts. Mr. Persano said the BOS should aim for a 0% increase and should not look at closing the gap, as this is the roll of the BOF.

The State changes in funding for the resident State troopers was discussed. Originally, the full cost of the Trooper was bourn by the State. Over the years however, the State's share has been reduced to 30% and now Somers may be required to carry the full expense of the trooper. Since the State funds a far smaller percentage of the cost of Somers' schools than other school systems, the BOF hopes that a concession may be made regarding better funding to cover the State trooper.

IV. BUDGET SUBMISSION REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Chairman Persano opened the floor to public comment:

Janet Shofstein of Mountain Road said that she moved to Somers from Ellington and finds the Somers' mil rate is much lower. She feels that rather than cutting services, Somers' citizens should pay higher taxes to cover the services we receive. Mr. Persano explained the mil rate is not an accurate way of comparing the taxes in different towns and that the mil rate is tied to revaluation. When home values are adjusted upward in revaluation the mil rate will have a corresponding decrease and likewise decreased home values will cause an increased mil rate.

Kathy Ciavis said she had heard that a teacher would be cut from each grade and she is concerned with how this will affect class sizes. Mr. Mazzoli said that he had discussed this with Dr. Sufredini and was assured that there would be no classes with as many as 28 to 30 students. However, he suggested that parents attend the next BOE meeting and get a definitive answer regarding anticipated class sizes.

Andy Philips who is a teacher and member of the association wanted to know how much investigation goes into finding ways to reduce spending. He cited an example of four-year-old textbooks that are being replaced unnecessarily. He feels that it is unfair that paid positions in the schools are being cut when other areas can be found where cuts may be made.

Tim Babbitts wanted to know if bonding or short-term borrowing had been considered. Mr. Persano responded that the Town does not do short-term borrowing and none of the bonds are due.

Terry Lewis suggested that parents could be asked to provide some of the supplies that the children need i.e. paper, erasers and pencils.

Chad Watt of Pond Circle said that elementary class sizes will increase to 27-28 students. He wanted to know if the BOF would be willing to work with the Department of Education to negotiate with the unions for a wage freeze. He further stated that although he is a fiscal conservative, he would be in favor of a tax increase to fund the schools. He also wanted to know if monies earmarked for education might go into the General Fund to be spent on other Town expenses. He asked for the BOF to assure that this does not happen.

Lisa Reilley is a Somers teacher and has children in the Somers school system. She pointed out that Somers teachers are paid less than other Connecticut teachers. She does not feel that education is the priority it should be in the Somers budget. She does not think a pay freeze for the teachers is fair, but would favor a tax increase.

Mr. Krasinski explained that the cost of funding for the schools increases the budget \$1,000,000 per year. On top of that there will be approximately \$1,000,000 lost in State funding to the Town this year. Covering these costs with taxes alone would require a 3-mil increase.

Carrie Wilde encouraged discussion with the unions regarding a pay freeze so teachers and staff don't get laid off. She pointed out that a tax increase would not pass and other parents will not defend it.

Selectman Pinney thanked the BOF for hearing the opinion of the Town citizens and thanked the people for coming. He stated that the solution would not be a 3-mil increase, nor will it come entirely from surplus or from slashed budgets but rather from some combination of these.

V. MINUTES APPROVAL – January 26, 2009 Regular Meeting

A motion was made by Mr. Warner; seconded by Mr. Mazzoli and unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the January 26, 2009 regular meeting as written.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

VII. BILLS, TRANSFERS AND APPROPRIATIONS

A summary of the transfers as approved appears below:

Dept.	From	To	Amount	Reason
		2/23/2009 #22		
Fire Department	Electricity	Building Maintenance	\$1,000.00	To cover overages in building maintenance issues.
		2/23/2009 #23		
Fire Department	Telephone & Alarm	Laundry	\$700.00	Reimbursement to paid staff, previously moved too much to vehicle repairs
		2/23/2009 #24		
Selectmen	Legal Services	Legal-Zoning	\$1,000	Cover unplanned zoning legal expenses.
		2/23/2009 #25		
Selectmen	Health Insurance	Unemployment	\$2,734.00	Cover outstanding unemployment liability for remainder of fiscal year.
Selectmen	Health Insurance	Fire Protection	\$4,560.00	Water main expansion and increased number of hydrants
		2/23/2009 #26		
Tax Department	Printing & Supplies	Advertising	\$230.50	Legal notices required by State Statute have increased

A motion was made by Mr. Krasinski; seconded by Mr. Warner and unanimously voted to accept the bills, transfers and appropriations.

VIII. OTHER

Mr. Krasinski asked for five-year plan regarding the Town's current and projected financial status during the fiscal crises. Mr. Simmons will prepare a seven-year plan and e-mail to the BOF.

The upcoming meetings were discussed:

March 10th, Representative Bacchiocci will come to Somers to discuss what is happening at the State level.

March 16th, all budgets will be presented.

March 23rd, regularly scheduled meeting of the BOF.

April 27th, Public Hearing on the budget

May 11th, Annual Town Meeting

May 19th, Budget Referendum

Postponing the revaluation scheduled for next year was discussed. If legislation passes allowing the Town to postpone the revaluation, the company that will be doing it has said that they are amenable to stretching their contract out to accommodate postponement.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Parker; seconded by Mr. Mazzoli and unanimously voted to adjourn the February 23, 2009 meeting of the Board of Finance at 8:41pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeanne Reed, Recording Secretary

MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVAL AT A SUBSEQUENT MEETING