

Draft Minutes
Board of Finance Statutory Meeting
March 9, 2010
7:30 PM – Town Hall Auditorium

Chairman Stegelmann called the meeting to order at 7:37 PM. In attendance were Ms. Banks, Ms. Bora, Mr. Duwan, Ms. Mogenson, Mr. Stegelmann, Mr. Zagrodzky. Ms. Mao was absent due to illness. The meeting was taped by Channel 79. Members of the public were in attendance.

The purpose of the meeting was for the Board of Finance to hear public comment on the proposed Selectmen's and Board of Education Budgets for FY 2011. The following individuals signed in and presented remarks. Most but not all speakers provided copies of their remarks, which are attached hereto.

Carolyn Langelier	CDSP Co-Chair	(accompanied by Julie Martens)
Kathy Finnegan	CDSP Rep./Darien High School	
Ann Reed	CDSP Rep./Middlesex Middle School	
Jessica Anderson	Hindley School PTO Co-Chair	representing 5 elementary schools
Laura Grozier	CDSP Rep./Special Education	
Nicole Granath	DHS Student	
Jean Tang		
Jerry Skeets		

There being no additional individuals wishing to speak, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Lorene Bora
Acting Clerk

Good evening, my name is Laura Grozier and I reside at 25 Leeuwarden Road. I am here tonight to represent Special Education, RC 24.

The budget process presented a difficult challenge this year in light of tough economic times. The superintendent and the administration made a conservative budget to present to the Board of Education. We have all had to make compromises in this process and additional cuts to the budget. The Board of Education wants to continue its stated goal of “maintaining programs and only cutting the peripheral items” to preserve the classroom experience. The classroom experience is all most of our special education students have as they often do not have the skills to participate in any of the extracurricular activities. The cuts to special education are contrary to this stated goal and do not preserve the classroom experience for our students and ultimately may impact the general education environment.

Aides have been reduced by approximately 60% from the original budget request and special education teachers have also been cut. As mentioned at the Board of Education public hearing, the population forecasts for special education are accurate. The ELP, TLC, ALC and the resource room at Darien High School will have the largest intake of identified students of any other year. This growth is something being experienced nationally as cited by Kit Savage in her letter to the editor as well as Tom Badway an independent consultant retained by the Board of Education. He found and documented that this growth and Darien’s rate of identification is in line with our DRG. Tom Badway’s findings also showed that Darien is in line with its peers with regard to the ratio of students to paraprofessionals. Reducing the aides to the numbers this budget is proposing will not preserve the classroom experience for the special education students. It will create potential safety issues and could cause disruptions to the general education setting. With the number of both special education teachers and aides reduced, how can the students individualized education plans be implemented? The district will face more mediation and due process because of the lack of personnel to deliver the services and programs in these IEPs.

Tom Badway’s study also found Darien’s settlement costs and attorneys’ costs are two-thirds lower than the three districts we are compared to in our DRG and it’s ability to collect Excess Cost Revenues is also better than the other towns in our DRG. Darien provides appropriate programs for its students and can document their success. If caseloads are made larger by reductions to staff, the quality of our programs will decline. We would not be able to show progress and this could result in higher settlements similar to the other districts.

For general ed, the classroom experience is largely defined by class size. We commend the Board of Ed for maintaining this. For the special education student the classroom experience is largely defined by the ratio of students to paraprofessionals and to special education teachers. The special education budget as it currently exists not only has no room for further cuts, but as it stands presents some

real concerns in terms of impact on the general education environment as special education students will now be in the general ed setting without being fully supported, potential safety implications could arise and there will be reduced learning and growth for our special education students which could ultimately lead to increased costs to the district as attorney fees and settlements increase.

We respectfully urge you to see that the special education experience is not being maintained and the repercussions of this decision may be far reaching and ultimately cost increasing.

Thank you

CDSP Co-Chairs Speech to the BOF
March 9, 2010

Good evening. My name is Carolyn Langelier and I live at 103 Stephen Mather Road. Julie Martens and I are Co-Chairs of the Council of Darien School Parents.

We appreciate that these are difficult times. It is during challenging economic periods that we especially need to reinforce the fabric of our community and maintain our town's stellar public education.

The Board of Education had an especially arduous task this year of working within a lean budget that was saddled with unexpected and unavoidable costs. These cost increases weigh heavily on the Education budget and an increase of 3.5%, which was your guidance to the Board of Education, is just not enough to cover these locked-in costs while maintaining the integrity of our students' education.

After weeks of careful deliberation, the Board of Education submitted a revised budget with a proposed 4.49% increase that included tough decisions and creative solutions. The Board of Education has taken a number of sharp measures:

1. It limited increases in teachers despite rising enrollment.
2. It reduced the clubs and councils budget.
3. It endorsed an unprecedented activity fee on students which many view as essentially a parent tax.
4. It redistricted students to avoid overcrowding at Holmes Elementary School and
5. It cut the technology budget, which over the course of this process has been reduced by 54%.

These decisions were difficult but were done to keep the standard of the classroom reasonably intact while being fiscally prudent. Any further cuts would substantially diminish our students' educational experience.

We appreciate the challenge that our Board of Finance has in representing the interests of our entire community. However, we respectfully ask that we not let our children bear the brunt of our budgetary woes any more than what the Board of Education has proposed. There is no more room for cuts without substantially diluting the quality of Darien's public education. Darien's parents need you to fund the already lean Board of Education budget. Thank you.

Respectfully,

Carolyn Langelier and Julie Martens
Co-Chairs of the Council of Darien School Parents

Good Evening. My name is Jessica Anderson and I live at 6 Mayflower Road. I am the co-chair of Hindley's PTO and I am representing the five elementary schools in our town. First of all, I want to again thank Mr. Fiftal and the entire Board of Education for their continued support and devotion to the education of our town's children. The PTO's from all of our schools recognize that this year, in particular, is incredibly difficult due to the overall economy, and that that the Board of Ed has taken great pains to remain fiscally responsible, while trying to ensure our children have, and continue to receive everything they need for a successful, well-rounded educational experience.

A few weeks ago, at the Board of Ed hearing many of us stood up and implored the Board not to cut the budget for clubs and intramurals. We did so because we know the value in these extracurricular activities. We know what clubs and intramurals mean to our kids, and we know that without these activities our schools become solely a place for academics and nothing more. Obviously, the Board of Education knows it too because they listened to us and they made minimal cuts from the budget in this area.

Having witnessed the vote on the proposed cuts to the budget, I can say the Board of Ed has already cut the most they could without deteriorating the strength of our educational system. They painstakingly went through the budget again and again, arguing the merits of each item line. They tried desperately to bring the numbers down to be in line with the Board of Finance request to cut two percent, or 1.7 million from the original number. They've already cut close to a million. I'm here tonight to ask you, the Board of Finance not to ask for any more cuts. We feel the budget has already been cut too close to the bone, and any further cuts will strike at the heart of our educational system. Our school system is strong, but additional cuts will weaken it tremendously. The Board of Ed has wisely tried to spare our teachers and aides from the cutting board, but if they are asked to make more cuts, they may not have that luxury. Additional cuts will undoubtedly affect teachers.

We recognize the difficult choices the Board of Ed and the Board of Finance face. We recognize your job is to make sure the town supplies services to its citizens while trying to maintain one of the lowest tax rates in the county. We know it comes down to what the town can afford. But we firmly believe we cannot afford to sacrifice our town's educational system.

In closing, we once again want to acknowledge the tremendous task at hand in reducing the budget, and the efforts of Mr. Fiftal and the Board of Education. We hope you'll agree they've done their due diligence in reducing the budget by a sizeable amount, and that to ask them to make further cuts to an already tight budget, will severely and detrimentally impact Darien's school system. Thank you.

Good evening. My name is Ann Reed, I live at 15 Libby Lane, and this is my third year representing Middlesex Middle School as a Budget Representative.

First of all I wish to commend the Administration and the Board of Education who have set a remarkable standard for education in our town. The thoughtfulness and thoroughness of their planning has brought this town a well earned reputation for excellent schools and to Middlesex Middle School, recognition as a Blue Ribbon School under the No Child Left Behind program.

This budget season has been extremely difficult and intense. We all know the economic realities and we all want the educational excellence in our town to continue. I want to extend my great gratitude to the Board of Education for balancing those two elements. Cuts were made across most RC's as the Board of Education looked into every corner to find ways to reduce the budget. The Board of Education has submitted a budget that allows our fine academic traditions to continue and as much as possible, to enhance the school experience by continuing Clubs and Councils and athletics. They cut everything they could without seriously hurting the educational process. At the public hearing for the Board of Education in February we were all incredibly proud to listen to many passionate and articulate DHS students talking about their classroom experiences as well as their wonderful and fulfilling Clubs. I for one was so impressed with our students.

Based on the budget submitted by the Board of Education, Dr. Boccanfusco and the other administrators and teachers of Middlesex Middle School will be able to fulfill their part in the educational process for the next year. Any more cuts will certainly make the process extremely difficult and cut into the ability to deliver quality education to our 6th to 8th graders. Middle School is a crucial time for these students and the formula that we have at Middlesex works and works very well. Are we really in a position where we want our children to be in overcrowded classrooms with overloaded teachers and with no outlets after school?

I would like to remind the Board of Finance of one item in the capital budget for 2010/2011, the renovation of the old gymnasium at Middlesex. This project has been needed and requested for several years and is a top priority capital project. As Mr. Engeman has said, the floor is past its useful life and this replacement is necessary for the gym to be usable and safe. In addition, the replacement of the bleachers means that Middlesex will continue to have one space in which the entire student body can be together.

This has been an arduous process marked by many hard decisions by the Administration and the Board of Education. They have both shown a great deal of patience and heart during the progression of this budget. What they have submitted for approval to the Board of Finance is fair and gives our schools what they need to maintain the quality of education that this town is known for. I urge the Board of Finance to approve the budget as submitted by the Board of Education.

Thank you for your attention.

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