

**REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF DARIEN, CONNECTICUT
FINANCE & BUDGET COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of a Regular Meeting Held on April 26, 2010
“DRAFT”**

On April 26, 2010, a meeting of the RTM Finance & Budget Committee was held in Room 119 of the Darien Town Hall with sixteen of sixteen members present.

Present were:

Preston Bealle
Charles Brode
Jack Davis
Terry Duffy
Michael Harman
Ted Hawkins
Nora McIlree
Bruce Orr
John Price
Anita Rycenga
Tim Schwarz
William Smith
Marc Thorne
Reilly Tierney
John Wolcott
Kirk Hoffman

Absent were: N/A

The Chairman, Bruce Orr, called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. Also present in the audience, were some members of the Board of Education, Murry Stegelmann BOE Chairman, among others. Meeting being televised on channel 79.

The agenda for the meeting was accepted.

Presentation of the 2010/11 library budget was made by Louise Berry, Director, Alan Gray Asst. Director of Operations and joining them was John Blyberg, Asst. Director for Innovation. A budget summary and overview sheet of the discussion was distributed to committee members. The 2.3 % increase in the budget was attributable to four major areas. Building services required by operation of the new building, electricity and gas, health insurance premiums and increase in retirement costs. 94.1% of Town residents have active library cards and the library continues to be a tremendous resource for all ages. Mr. Gray pointed out that the Darien Library is a model of lean operating, much of which he attributes to the investment in technology by the Friends of the Library. Mr. Orr presented the panel with a challenge to present a flat budget next year after pulling out health care costs.

Presentation of the approved 2010/11 BOE budget was made by Kimberly Westcott, Chair of BOE, Donald Fiftal, Superintendent of Schools and Richard Huot, Director of Finance. A budget summary handout was given to all committee members. Student enrollment increases, health care cost increases and special education cost increases coupled with reduction of the State excess cost reimbursement grant are major areas contributing to budget increases. Ms. Westcott suggested that they have learned much from the consultant's report done regarding special education and they plan to achieve efficiencies as a result. 67 spouses were added to the health plan as a result of loss of employment increasing costs by \$800,000. Mr. Huot indicated that 18% of premiums are contributed by employees. Mr. Fiftal says that through turbulent economic times the Town has been steadfast with its commitment to education by preserving class size policies and maintaining delivery of educational services. He suggests a shift in demographics will result in a leveling off at some point. Legal fees and settlements in connection with claims regarding the delivery of services for special education exceeded 2009/10 budget by \$501,919. Mr. Huot pointed out that in this area of the law the burden of proof is on the school district vs. the claimant. A mediation process is followed to try and mitigate the need for legal counsel. When asked by John Price if in house counsel had been considered as an alternate, Ms. Westcott said the firm retained to represent the Town's interest in these matters has a great deal of expertise in this area. Mr. Huot discussed other areas that are being explored and some that have already being initiated in an attempt to reduce costs. Some items include 100% direct deposit, delivery by e-mail vs. hardcopy handouts, credit card use to save on staff time and so forth. Mr. Orr thanked Mr. Fiftal for his many years of exemplary service and wished him well in his retirement which was met by applause from all in attendance.

Mr. Stegelman was invited to speak to the committee about the resolution coming before the RTM to appropriate \$908,000 for paving reimbursement under the ARRA grant. He explained that the process is to appropriate, spend and recover. Public Works budget was reduced by \$500,000 last year in anticipation of receiving the funds which did not happen. This year's paving schedule will be accelerated in anticipation of the grant.

Nora McIlree made a motion to wait to see the resolution language before voting. All were in favor with the exception of Jack Davis and Anita Rycenga who had left the meeting for a brief moment.

Mr. Orr requested that we **take a preliminary vote to get a sense of the meeting** on the three components of the budget. Capital, BOS and BOE.

Marc Thorne moved to approve the Capital budget albeit non-binding. Motion seconded by Michael Harman. All in favor with the exception of Jack Davis who abstained.

Bill Smith moved to approve the BOS budget **albeit non-binding**. Motion seconded by Nora McIlree. All in favor with the exception of Jack Davis who abstained.

Jack Davis moved to approve the BOE budget **albeit non-binding**. Motion seconded by Marc Thorne. Vote was unanimous in favor.

Bruce Orr asked for approval of the minutes of meetings as follows:

11/23/09 Minutes approved and favorable votes cast by those in attendance of that meeting: Charles Brode, Jack Davis, Terry Duffy, Ted Hawkins, Nora McIlree, John Price, Anita Rycenga, Bill Smith, Marc Thorne and John Wolcott.

12/7/09 Minutes approved and favorable votes cast by those in attendance of that meeting: Preston Bealle, Jack Davis, Terry Duffy, Ted Hawkins, Nora McIlree, Bruce Orr, John Price, Anita Rycenga, Bill Smith, Reilly Tierney and John Wolcott.

The vote to approve the 1/21/10 Minutes was deferred until our next meeting on May 3, 2010 as Mr. Price has some editing suggestions for us to take into consideration.

3/8/10 Minutes were approved and favorable votes cast by those in attendance of that meeting: Preston Bealle, Charles Brode, Jack Davis, and Terry Duffy Michael Harman, Ted Hawkins, Nora McIlree, Bruce Orr, John Price, Tim Schwarz, William Smith, Marc Thorne, Reilly Tierney, John Wolcott and Kirk Hoffman.

Bruce Orr moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

Dated: April 27, 2010

Respectfully submitted,

Anita M. Rycenga, Clerk

RTM Finance & Budget Committee