



BOARD OF FINANCE

Clifford J. Hurgin Municipal Center, 1 School Street
Bethel, Connecticut 06801 Telephone: (203) 794-8501

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 9, 2013 - 7:30 p.m.

Bethel High School Auditorium

PRESENT: William Kingston, Chairman, J. Phillip Gallagher, Timothy Draper, Gary Regan, Patricia Smithwick, Eileen Freebairn and Claudia Stephan. Also in attendance was Comptroller Robert Kozlowski, Lawrence Craybas, Chairman of the Board of Education, Dr. Kevin Smith, Superintendent of Schools and Theresa Yonsky, Director of Fiscal Services for the Board of Education.

William Kingston opened the Public Hearing at 7:30 p.m. and, among other comments, provided an overview of the Board of Finance process to reach the proposed budget being presented this evening. He spoke to his belief that the Board of Finance is not a pass through agency; they prepared the budget based on the state, local, federal economy, and looked to prepare a budget that provided affordability while maintaining services and our bond rating. He noted that the Board of Finance did not fund the non government agencies since they could not agree on which agencies to fund or not to fund. Mr. Kingston offered other members the opportunity to speak. J. Phillip Gallagher advised that the Board of Finance increased road construction by \$165,000 in the Highway account instead of having the same \$165,000 in the capital projects as some believe that this is a maintenance item rather than a capital item and should be funded out of operating expenses instead of bonding. Patricia Smithwick offered that she did not think the Public Hearing was the opportunity for Board of Finance to speak, that it was for the public to offer their comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

David Glahn, Elizabeth Street: Among other comments offered that people should be allowed to speak; their comments need not be "brief".

William Duff, Long Meadow Lane: Among other comments, offered that the \$5,000 stipend paid to the two Selectmen should be eliminated and the funds used for other purposes.

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Robert Crnic, Old Hawleyville Road: Among other comments, asked the Comptroller for explanations on several accounts that had increased and offered that the school budget looks good.

Alice Hutchinson, Rockwell Road: Among other comments, offered that it is short-sighted not to increase the Assessor's office staff to the full-time position and that it is important for Bethel to pay its fair share of the services provided to our residents through the various non government subsidies.

Jane Bickford, Vera Drive: Among other comments, read a letter from the Library Board of Directors, requesting funds for the added part-time staffing they had requested be restored.

David Glahn, Elizabeth Street: Among other comments, offered that by not funding Meals on Wheels, the Board of Finance has shown they are heartless and are not leaders.

Dionne Craig, Whipporwill Road: Among other comments, offered that the Board of Finance funded the non government agencies last year and wondered why this year is different. Board of Finance members offered that they could not agree on which agencies to be funded.

Dominic Ippolito, Linda Lane: Among other comments, questioned the tax increase, and asked about employees receiving paid accumulated sick time upon retirement and questioned why Bethel has so many ESL students in comparison to neighboring towns. Board of Education representatives, among other comments, advised that the sick time (portion of) upon retirement for certified staff/teachers is a negotiated item and that there is a screening process to prove that students live in Bethel resident.

Tia Murphy, Linda Lane: Among other comments, offered that it is important for the Library to have proper staffing levels to cover the area of the Library open to the public. Safety is a factor as well.

Thomas O'Leary, Terry Drive: Among other comments, requested that funding to the non-government agencies be reinstated and provided facts about Ability Beyond Disability, headquartered here in Bethel. He pointed out that the numbers shared by Mr. Kingston do not tell the whole story of the financial situation of Ability Beyond Disability.

Al Vargas, Reservoir Street: Among other comments, advised that he has gone to the shelters to feed homeless people, prioritize cuts and wants to run for First Selectman.

Nicholas Hoffman, Sand Hill Road: Among other comments, offered that as the Director of Development for Family and Children's Aid, his organization is not part of the non government agency subsidies; believes that the way the charities are funded is dysfunctional and should be sheltered from political nonsense.

Mary Welander, Hoyts Hill Road: Among other comments, offered that it is important to restore the funding to the Board of Education account; it is imperative to support the school system.

William Hillman, Walnut Hill Road: Among other comments, offered that Ability Beyond Disability, while they do pay taxes, they are a 501C3 and receive tax relief, and the terrible event in Newtown was perhaps an isolated event and not necessarily a reason to justify staffing increases to the Library.

Lawrence Craybas, Board of Education Chairman: Among other comments offered that the Board of Education is taking an All Hazard Approach to the best of their ability to protect teachers, students and staff. Safety and security improvements have been included in their budget request.

Kim Lemone, Allen Way: Among other comments, offered that the funds be restored to both the Board of Education account and the non government agency accounts; let the voters decide.

Robin Kahn, Brookview Court: Among other comments, requested that the funds be restored to the Library account.

Anthony Orrico, Grandview Avenue: Among other comments, supported the 3rd ROTC instructor (Navy requirement is 150 students - Bethel has 234). This led into a discussion, Board of Education representatives advised they will have to prioritize since the funds to support all their initiatives was reduced. J. Phillip Gallagher advised that the Board of Finance can't reduce specific line items; they only have control over the bottom line of the Board of Education budget. Lawrence Craybas, Board of Education Chairman, among other comments, advised that the Board of Education has presented status quo budgets for years and when the Board of Education presents their budget request, it is to fund what is included, and when the requests are reduced, it does limit what they can fund.

Jenny Tesar, Chestnut Street: Among other comments, requested that the funds be restored to the Library account.

Alycia Matchen, 32 Wolfpits Road: Among other comments, requested that the funds be restored to the Board of Education accounts, students deserve the same opportunities.

Laurel Draper, Aunt Pattys Lane: Among other comments, looked for clarification as to what the Board of Education would be funding, she felt recent correspondence from the Board of Education was misleading by stating that none would be funded; she would like to see the ROTC position funded. The Board of Education again stated that they would have to prioritize since funding was reduced; the priorities are the Reading Specialist, School Physiologist and then the ROTC instructor.

Matthew Knickerbocker, First Selectman: Among other comments, offered that the non-government agencies are not charities and deliver services to Bethel residents and that this is the second time that Bethel was the only town in our area that did not fund the non government agencies and further, finance board members that voted against supporting the agencies advised they didn't vote against them because they said the budget was too high; they said they voted against them because they couldn't decide which if any to fund for various reasons, and he doesn't believe that's an appropriate decision for the Board of Finance to make.

William Michael, Fleetwood Avenue: Among other comments, advised that he is against increasing any head count, revaluation has shifted the tax burden to businesses, Library costs the town over \$2,000,000, believes that the funding of the non government agencies are charities and the whim of government shouldn't pass this on to taxpayers, more cuts are needed.

Irene Drake, Pleasant Rise: Among other comments, offered that no further cuts should be made, we have a fantastic school system and can't stop investing in it.

Robert Zupperoli, Fleetwood Avenue: Among other comments, requested that funds be resorted to the non government agency subsidies and the Library needs to be adequately staffed.

Frank Islip, Evergreen Drive: Among other comments, offered that there has been a waste of taxpayer dollars with various construction projects.

As there were no further comments, William Kingston closed the Public Hearing at 9:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

