

Town of Southington  
Board of Finance  
Wednesday, March 28, 2012

STENOGRAPHER'S NOTE: The Minutes are now being prepared in summary style. Please refer to the audio or videotape for more details.

Chair John Leary called the Regular Meeting of the Town of Southington Board of Finance to order at 7:03 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall with the following members in attendance:

Anthony Casale, Jr., Sandra Feld, Joseph Labieniec, Edward Pocock, Jr. & Wayne Stanforth

A quorum was determined.

Also in attendance: Emilia Portelinha, Finance Director  
Garry Brumback, Town Manager

The Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag was recited by everyone in attendance.

**JOHN LEARY, CHAIR, Presiding:**

**111. NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Adopt the FY 2012-2013 Board of Finance Recommended Budget**

Mr. Casale made a motion to approve the \$45,494,307 for the general budget minus \$400,000. Ms. Feld seconded.

Mr. Casale said he would like to see that reduced in light of the fact that last night at our budget workshop we brought to the table \$800,000 worth of budget cuts that would have not affected, in our opinion, this town's service in any way and we were given a paltry \$34,000 in concessions. Of the \$334,000 \$15,000 is a carry over and \$15,000 is in light of the fact we purchased a new piece of machinery that would allow us not to have to rent one and the \$4,000 was off of gasoline of which we asked for \$5,000.

Roll Call Vote:	Stanforth:	No
	Feld:	Yes
	Casale:	Yes
	Pocock:	No
	Labieniec:	No
	Leary:	No

Motion fails 2 to 4.

Mr. Pocock made a motion to approve \$45,494,307 for the general government budget for the fiscal year 2012-2013. Mr. Labieniec seconded.

Mr. Casale discussed the expenditure cuts differing with the amount of \$850,000. He discussed the Town Hall project cut, the library expansion cut, miscellaneous 53<sup>rd</sup> pay regular wage cut, revaluation services cut and the temporary community services cut. He further cited the parks department is a carry forward for Memorial Park, the cut from the highway department, and the fire hydrant rental line.

He felt the only real cut was \$171,000 and adding the \$34,000 brings the cut to the budget of only \$205,000. The number and percentage was used in our second meeting to come up with a commensurate cut to the BOE.

It's inappropriate to say we cut \$850,000 out of the budget when \$645,000 of those cuts had cut themselves, added Mr. Casale.

Ms. Feld spoke of her experience in attending BOF meetings and workshops for the past ten years. She noted this has been the most unreceptive hostile budget process she experienced. Instead of a line by line inspection, this year we did not do this at the request of the Town Manager with the Chair's agreement. Mr. Casale and I did a line by line search to try to save the taxpayers some money. We came up with over \$700,000 and presented them last night. One after another they were shot down without discussion. Agreeing to only a scant few which had already been deleted by department heads.

The BOF must consider everyone. This year with revaluation drastically decreasing home values, when our Grand List came in less than last year's and we're looking at a storm clean up of anywhere from one quarter of a million to 2.2 million dollars, when our rate payers have received rate increases of 20%, 20%, 20%, 15% and now 4% this year and 4% next year with 5%+ to follow, expensive phosphorous clean up looming over us, it's not the time to desert our residents.

Explained the budget includes four new employees and fifteen new initiatives totaling \$631,000 which were rubber stamped by the four other members of the Board plus an additional \$781,000 to the sewer fund and \$3,200,000 in capital projects to be bonded. Where is there empathy for their fellow residents? This budget is a disgrace concluded Ms. Feld.

Ms. Stanforth responded. Our job as the BOF is to make an appropriate budget that respects the taxpayers, gets the job done and is good for the town and the taxpayers. We all brought items to the table. Some passed and some didn't. The cuts you mentioned had been already discussed. You're double dipping on those issues.

The budget before you is reasonable. The percentage increase in the mills is .02 on the town side. I think we've passed an appropriate budget to the Town of Southington that keeps services and keeps taxes low.

More discussion on cuts amongst the Board members.

Mr. Casale further pointed out that he felt the minority party was pressured by the presence of department heads at the table in the discussion. It added up to me as lobbyists being at the table.

Discussion.

Mr. Labieniec felt having the department heads present, certainly not as lobbyists, was extremely helpful.

Discussion.

Mr. Casale stated that the goal was to get control over \$690,000 of overtime for about 30 uniformed firemen. Mr. Labieniec pointed out that is a good example where the six of us worked very well together.

Discussion.

Mr. Casale brought up taking the fund balance utilized and reduce it as a Board to make a zero starting point to have a balanced budget for the first time since anyone can remember. We were in favor of that. There are items agreed on by both sides of the table for the betterment of the town.

Discussion.

Ms. Feld the problem wasn't with having the department heads there, the problem was with having them participate. It's a totally new way of doing things to have this participation in our discussions. She found it frankly, intimidating.

Mr. Labieniec did not find it intimidating but extremely helpful. This allowed us to have the most up to date information possible to make the best decision.

Discussion.

The Chair noted they had 11.5 hours work of workshops. We had the budget books in our hands for eight weeks. We had questions going back and forth which the town estimates they spent between 75 and 100 man-hours answering. What it comes down to is a philosophical understanding or a platform understanding of what is in the best interest of the taxpayer?

Is it to cut something out of the budget or is it to leave something in the budget? That's what we sort out. Every item in the budget does not deserve a cut. It could be left, cut or removed completely. What is in the best interest of Southington, what's in the best interest of the taxpayer?

Mr. Brumback brought us a budget at 2% overall increase. Asking for a respectful budget and then cut every line that may not be what is in the best interest of Southington or its taxpayers. Maybe the best was to do nothing with it. We did our best. Went through every line.

Similar thing with the BOE. We collaborated up front and we worked hard on this. We have to have new ways of looking at things. To have the top managing officer from the BOE and the Town at the table, it could give us some insight. Everybody at the table asked both of them questions because of their presence.

Mr. Casale pointed out that his idea was to cut part of new initiatives. Not cutting all three people that were new hires, but just one. Not cutting the \$100,000 he wanted in his flex account but just half. Not cutting all the IT he wanted, but just one portion of it. Well thought out and in the best interest of the taxpayer.

Mr. Labieniec explained all of us spent more than the 11 hours in private than we did in the room. The difference is when you look at the budget it's a philosophical question: Do you start with the premise the budget is accurate as presented or do you start with the premise the budget has fluff. That's the big question.

Mr. Casale said philosophically he believed Mr. Brumback, Dr. Erardi and everyone involved presented the best budget they thought they needed at the time. However, do we need \$1 million worth of new initiatives in this budget? How about half? Half for education to staff and see where it goes. How about we give you the desperately needed IT Administrator and the Community Services person and then we take out the finance person and see where we go. My position is we're putting too much on the cart.

Discussion.

MOTION TO APPROVE \$45,494,307 FOR THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013.

Roll Call Vote:	Stanforth:	Yes
	Feld:	No
	Casale:	No
	Pocock:	Yes
	Labieniec:	Yes
	Leary:	Yes

Motion passes 4 to 2.

Mr. Stanforth made a motion to approve the BOE Operating Budget for the fiscal year 2012-2013 at \$82,437,600. Mr. Labieniec seconded.

Ms. Feld commented that the four other members decided to give the schools most of the \$1.16 million federal grant they received last year only this year it came out of Southington taxpayers' pockets and not the federal government.

Mr. Casale noted that the \$215,000 cut is not actually a \$215,000 cut and \$100,000 is a carryover from the line item from North Center School rental that was accumulated this year which had not been used.

Ms. Portelinha confirmed there is no carry over in the BOE budget when asked by Chairman Leary.

Mr. Casale then stated that is the reason this Board cut that \$215,000. Yes, it was a \$215,000 cut with the understanding the \$100,000 was because North Center School did not get utilized by the BOE this year. A carry forward or not, that was the discussion in the room.

Mr. Labieniec commented on the \$1.16 million. Last year it was handled in two very deliberate steps. The first step was what is the proper level of funding for the BOE and secondly, how're we going to account for the \$1.16 million. Six to zero consensus at the time on how to handle that. When the BOE budget passed last year, there was an understanding there was an \$80,000 cut to the BOE and we were handling the \$1.16 million in the way we did and that passed 6 to 0 last year.

Ms. Feld stated there was no comment made in reviewing the documents that the town would cover the shortfall this year --- the funding cliff as you spoke about it. Certainly, the town would do everything they can to make it up to the BOE. That was before we hit two storms, phosphorus problem, the reval and of course the Grand List way down. No commitment was made last year at this time.

Mr. Labieniec pointed out there was an understanding that the \$1.16 million was not going to be "used against" the BOE. The true starting point was going to be their total level funding which included what their level of funding was in addition to the \$1.16 million. We do not have to agree to cover anything. The agreement last year was what is the accurate starting point.

Mr. Stanforth said on the BOE said we don't have a spending problem as much as a revenue problem. The state's ECS has been decreased. The works grant dried up.

The BOE presented us with a reasonable budget with cuts of many personnel in here. We have to start with the premise that we had a working budget that did the best to fund education in a reasonable

manner. We made some cuts and I'll leave it at that. This budget is respectful for education in this town and the taxpayers in this town.  
Discussion.

The Chair commented not everything needs to be cut. You have to decide if it is in the best interest of the taxpayers. Sometimes a cut is or a reduction and sometimes to leave it alone is in the best interest of the taxpayers. Our job is to do what is in the best interest of the taxpayer overall and it doesn't always mean the taxpayer out there wants the budget cut and lose various services.

I look at it and say does this make sense, is it efficient, is the leadership effective, is the money going to be used wisely and prudently. Those are the things that are important.

MOTION TO APPROVE \$82,437,600 FOR THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OPERATING BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013.

Roll Call Vote:	Stanforth:	Yes
	Feld:	No
	Casale:	No
	Pocock:	Yes
	Labieniec:	Yes
	Leary:	Yes

Motion passes: 4 to 2.

Mr. Labieniec made a motion to approve the \$216,461 for the Animal Control Fund budget for the fiscal year 2012-2013. Mr. Pocock seconded.

Mr. Casale said he didn't recall having a discussion about animal control.

The Chair said the Board may not have flipped to the page, but somewhere in the last month and a half that we had the book, I think many of us looked at the page.

Mr. Casale said he did, as well. It should have been brought up for discussion. I didn't bring it up and that's on me.

Roll Call Vote:	Stanforth:	Yes
	Feld:	Yes
	Casale:	Yes
	Pocock:	Yes
	Labieniec:	Yes
	Leary:	Yes

Motion passes: 6 to 0.

Mr. Labieniec made a motion to approve \$4,594,675 for the Sewer Fund Budget for Fiscal Year 2012-13. Mr. Pocock seconded.

Ms. Feld wanted to remove the automobile from this particular project and see if we can't find a way to get the sewer department administrator a car that's currently being used by the town that he can use. It is excessive at this point with all the additional money needed in the sewer plan. A car at this point is just over the top.

Mr. Casale agreed citing sewer rates that were just raised. To throw a \$25,000 burden on to the taxpayer for a new vehicle I believe is unwarranted at this time.

Mr. Stanforth said the car is 20 years old. A \$25,000 car that'll last us 20 years, I think we get our money out of that. I see a good investment there.

Ms. Feld said the Board had not had this discussion previously, either.

Discussion about other town vehicles that might be used.

Ms. Feld suggesting putting this part of the budget off until we get more information. Just vote on the rest of the sewer fund budget.

The Chair disagreed. With a \$125 million budget, replacing a 20 year old car that came under the advice of those looking at it is appropriate.

MOTION TO APPROVE \$4,594,675 FOR THE SEWER FUND BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2012-2013.

Roll Call Vote:	Stanforth:	Yes
	Feld:	No
	Casale:	Nope
	Pocock:	Yes
	Labieniec:	Yes
	Leary:	Yes

Motion passes: 4 to 2.

The budget will be passed along to the Town Council. The Chair recapped the general government spending is \$45,494,307 that is up \$73,000 from last year.

The BOE is \$82,437,600 for a total budget of \$127,931,907.

An increase in the mills is .63.

The mill rate at this point based upon the new revaluation of the Grand List is 27.53 mills.

Mr. Labieniec clarified some of the financials.

Discussion of the proposed increases people can expect in their taxes.

The Chair emphasized the intent of revaluation is not to raise taxes but to redistribute the tax payment.

Discussion.

Closing Comments:

Mr. Casale stated in closing he would like to thank on behalf of myself and Ms. Feld, Dr. Erardi, his administrative team, Mr. Goralski and the BOE, Mr. Brumback and his team, especially Emilia, all the department heads who took part in all that went on, the boards and commissions and especially I would like to thank the majority members of this Board who have been here sitting for their third or fourth year now for your insight and your experience. It certainly guides Sandy and me and we have a good education going through the process. Moving forward, I would we'll be able to work together for the betterment of the Town of Southington.

Ms. Feld seconded those comments.

Mr. Pocock made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Stanforth seconded. Motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 7:46 o'clock,p.m.)