

Town of Lincoln

Budget Board Meeting

March 15, 2006

Members Present:

**Ken Booth Mary Varr Carl Brunetti Bob Ericson Linda Noble Joe
Dziobek**

**Claudette Lussier Roberta Gosselin Greg Leonard Jack
Newman Cheryl Ethier**

No members were absent.

**There was a School Subcommittee meeting at 6:30, prior to the
Budget Board's meeting and public reading of the budget.**

Notes can be found as an addendum.

**The Budget Board Meeting began at 7:40 with the Pledge of
Allegiance.**

**Ken Booth welcomed everyone to the annual reading of the proposed
budget as presented by the Town Administrator.**

**Jack Newman made a motion to amend the agenda for the Budget
Board Meeting to have the public hearing of the budget first.**

**Linda Noble seconded the motion. The agenda was amended by a
vote of 11-0.**

Ken Booth proceeded to read the Administrator's proposed budget as follows:

Property Tax Revenues at \$46,142,000

Local Revenues \$2,827,600

Municipal Operating Budget of \$15,267,317

Educational Operating Budget of \$44,780,148

Total Combined Budget of \$66,885,519

Town Administrator \$118,955

Town Planner \$63,806

Personnel \$83,990

Town Clerk \$223,373

Finance \$569,212

Tax Assessor \$257,984

Public Safety – Police \$3,062,220

Public Safety – Rescue \$1,076,346

Public Works – General \$101,492

Public Works – Engineering \$124,837

Public Works – Code Enforcement \$155,194

Public Works – Parks and Recreation \$590,176

Public Works – Animal Control \$88,218

Public Works – Tree Warden \$46,596

Public Works – Public Buildings \$289,126

Sewer \$335,627

Human Services \$171,864

Public Library \$915,655

Town Council \$38,000

Town Solicitor \$164,907

Probate Judge \$4,531

Town Sergeant \$1,400

Board of Canvassers \$1,700

Budget Board \$2,300

Zoning Board of Review \$12,020

Board of Assessment Review \$2,250

Tenants Board \$1,388

Conservation Commission \$6,550

Sewer Appeals Board \$100

Personnel Board \$2,100

Juvenile Hearing Board \$1,250

Parks and Recreation Commission \$1,000

Land Trust \$1,500

Municipal Court \$23,000

Grants and Contributions \$66,000

Fixed Charges \$3,393,056

Capital \$260,727

Municipal Debt Service \$4,064,950

Total Debt Service of \$6,725,054

The School Committee requested an Educational Operating Budget of \$45,669,453 excluding capital.

Ken Booth concluded the first public reading of the budget.

The Budget Board distributed a handout to explain the budget process and to inform the taxpayers of some issues that the Budget Board has been questioning in the budget.

It was noted that the charter has been changed so that the public hearing is now 3 weeks after the Administrator presents the proposed budget to the Budget Board so that they have time to look at it and be versed enough to discuss it at the reading.

Ken Booth noted that the Municipal Subcommittee of the Budget Board had made the following notes regarding the budget:

-The town does not always have to increase up to the 5.5% cap, but could opt for a lower percent increase.

-The homestead exemption is not a concern of the Budget Board politically, but they are concerned about the impact that any change would have on revenues.

-Until the town reports their annual revenues to the state on June 15th, the only thing that the Budget Board can do to estimate the

- coming year's revenues is to work with the information that is available.**
- The salary study and performance audit had been put into resolution and need to be completed.**
- Legal Settlements could be a threat to the surplus because of pending law suits.**
- Pension funding has always been a concern of the Budget Board and the General Assembly, and it was noted that the Budget Board always recommends funding the pension more aggressively.**
- There are still unsigned contracts.**
- There should be a long-term capital plan for things like the dams and sewer system rehabilitation which tend to be more expensive to fix later if put off.**

Ken Booth turned the meeting over to Cheryl Ethier, School Subcommittee Chair to discuss things that the School Subcommittee had noted while going through the budget.

- It was noted that the School Subcommittee works with the School Department and School Committee in an extensive budget process.**
- The Subcommittee had issues with the addition of 4 classrooms at Lonsdale and using every square inch of the high school complex.**
- There should have been more of a reduction in the elementary school budgets due to the moving of the 6th grades to the middle school**
- The Subcommittee had issues with increases in administrative staff system-wide.**

Ken Booth noted that the budget process is a very open one and provided the public with a list of upcoming Budget Board Meetings encouraging the public to attend.

The Budget Board welcomed public comment and questions.

Bob Turner looked at the 2005 audit on the town's website and noted that the revenues exceeded the budgeted amount by \$1.6 million, however the town only saw a \$400,000 surplus.

The property taxes were collected at a 90% rate, which still leaves \$1.2 million in excess that does not appear in surplus.

There was about \$300,000 in overexpenditures from individual departments, which he felt should be in supplemental appropriations.

Bob Turner wondered if the Town Council was ever apprised of the overexpenses because if they did, then they faulted on their fiduciary responsibility because they should have let the administration know.

The Budget Board was never apprised of the overexpenditures.

Bob Turner also noted that the 5.5% cap should be on the tax levee, not the tax rate.

The resolution passed in a previous Financial Town Meeting said that the John Hancock windfall received of about \$625,000 should have gone into the pension funding, but he did not see where the funds were put into the pension.

Steve Woerner noted that he prepares a monthly report for the Town

Council and they are passed on to the state quarterly.

Steve thought that it would be inappropriate to ask for \$800,000 at the Financial Town Meeting in supplemental appropriations to fund a \$1.2 million surplus.

Steve also noted that the pension is funded correctly by municipal code.

Bob Turner noted that since the Administration is supplying reports as needed, it seems that the Town Council did not follow through with their responsibility to report overexpenditures.

Carol McCourt noted that the student enrollment for the 1st grade is nearly identical for Northern ELC and Fairlawn ELC but a 1st grade classroom is being cut from Northern and not Fairlawn. She knew that the Budget Board is not responsible for the cut, but she wanted to let the public know that there was a seemingly glaring inequality.

Ed O'Neil thanked the Budget Board for their countless hours of voluntary work, and wanted to know if there were any metrics or measures to compare cost per student over the years and cost of administration per student over the years.

Ken Booth noted that the schools can generate the information of cost per pupil.

John Tindall-Gibson noted that the information is also available on the state website.

John Tindall-Gibson noted that the health insurance is increased to make up for cumulative shortfalls over the years.

Ed O'Neil wanted to know if there were any cost reduction programs in place.

Ken Booth noted that an energy savings company will be coming in, and that things like that are being looked at, but there are still things that should be looked in to.

John Tindall-Gibson noted that the School Business Operations Administrator is a certified official who oversees business operations of the school such as bidding out, long-term budgeting, contracts, etc.

Lori DeSimone thanked the Budget Board for their hard work, and wanted to know why there was no money requested for the repair or renovation of the tennis courts as they are utilized a great deal.

Ken Booth noted that it costs over \$100,000 to repair the courts, and the Administrator has recommended to do so possibly next year, but this year is a hard tax year due to the new middle school. It would be something that the public would have to address with the Administration and Town Council.

Mary Ann McComisky wanted to publicly remind the taxpayers that there will be many additional expenses that come with the new middle school, and compromises will have to be made while ensuring that

educational needs are met.

In response to the comment that the reductions are not enough in the elementary schools considering the loss of the 6th grades to the middle school, she noted that certain things have been put on hold for a few years now in anticipation of the new school.

Jay O'Grady noted that the Town Council had put out an RFP to move the practice football field and wondered if a supplemental appropriation for the cost of the \$60,000 to move it would be necessary.

Ken Booth noted that a supplemental appropriation was not necessary because there is a mechanism in the charter that allow the reallocation of unused funds in other lines.

Ken Booth thanked the public for attending the public reading of the budget.

Linda Noble made a motion to recess and then rejoin for the regular Budget Board Meeting, seconded by Jack Newman.

The Budget Board recessed and then split into School and Municipal Subcommittees when they reconvened.

Notes from the School Subcommittee meeting can be found as an addendum.

The Budget Board joined as a whole and offered public comment. There was none.

Claudette Lussier made a motion to defer the approval of the minutes of March 9th, seconded by Jack Newman.

Jack Newman made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Greg Leonard.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45.

3/15/06 School Subcommittee Notes

Jeff Weiss, Lori Miller, John Tindall-Gibson, and Sue Sheppard were present.

Jeff Weiss gave a presentation. Handouts of the presentation were distributed.

Jeff noted that people do move to Lincoln for the school system and it tends to be more so on the secondary level.

He noted that the town will continue to grow based on estimates and information from the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor.

In the schools, OT/PT is being taught in public spaces, and the schools have been cited for doing so but Georgia Fortunato was able to get more time to correct the situation and explained that the new middle school would alleviate a lot of the problems.

At Central, the Principal feels that a reallocation and use of empty period spaces could alleviate the issue for that school.

Linda Noble noted that the required changes in Saylesville do not appear on the price listing, It is purely space allocation with no real costs associated.

Cheryl noted that things like the painting at Central should be in capital improvements, not in the bond.

Jeff Weiss noted that most things in the bond are long-term but there are some items that are maintenance or aesthetic.

At Northern, most of the expense last year was for siding and windows and it made the school look a lot better.

At Lonsdale, there will be 4 classrooms proposed, 2 of which will open up to large classrooms.

Kindergarten will have a large surge due to a law change that kept a lot of students from entering last year but who can enter this year.

Linda Noble wanted to know why the schools did move some of the modular classrooms to Lonsdale.

Jeff stated that it would only be a temporary solution, and the modulares only have a 10-year life without being moved.

Also, it is uncertain whether they are able to be moved and remain intact.

Linda Noble noted that the taxpayers were not fully made aware of the intentions at Lonsdale Elementary.

Jeff noted that a letter regarding the bond referendum was distributed to Lonsdale parents and it did mention the 4 classrooms.

Joe Dziobek noted that one of the reasons that the town chose modulars was that they could be moved when the new middle school was built.

Jack Newman noted that \$500,000 in painting and carpeting are things that should be in the capital budget and then \$500,000 more could be accomplished with the bond.

Jeff noted that the town had the process of deciding, through endless meetings, what would be in the bond.

Jack felt that the town could still go back and reallocate so that more long-term items were in the bond.

Jeff thought that the architect's attempt in the allocation was to also make the schools look better, since it was not really possible to do enough with the infrastructure with the amounts given.

Sue Sheppard noted that she thought that the allocation decided upon stayed true to the taxpayers and the bond's intent.

Linda Noble noted that if items, for instance the roof repairs, are put in the capital budget, the taxpayers have the opportunity to turn it down and not fund it where it will definitely be completed if put in the bond.

The Subcommittee rejoined the Budget Board for the public reading of the budget and then rejoined.

Cheryl noted that the subcommittee really didn't have to meet with the Principals of each school.

The subcommittee will not meet with the School Department on March 23rd, and will instead submit their questions in writing so that on March 30th, the final meeting and requests will be heard.

Linda noted that there are rumors that the Budget Board is cutting programs, so she thought that instead of a bottom-line, the subcommittee should give the schools suggested funding for the line items to show exactly what is suggested.

Joe Dziobek noted that he still wanted to have the person who is responsible for billing Medicaid in to meet with the subcommittee on March 30th.

Mary wanted real figures because the information given were projected, and not actual expenses.

The schools do a census report in October and in January, which the subcommittee would like to have a copy of by grade and school.

Joe is going to speak with the Superintendent to discuss an updated program for students who were frequently suspended because there is a new law that doesn't allow their suspension for more than a certain amount of days.

Self-contained had a high teacher-student ratio possibly because teachers could be paid for by grant.

Joe wanted to know what percentage of the budget was for Special Education, and wanted to know the process of hiring consultants versus an agency for OT/PT.

Linda Noble noted that electricity and utilities are increased a lot, and wanted to find out the rate that the town is getting for those, as well as the cost per square footage to provide the new middle school with service.

Joe noted that the new middle school will be more efficient because it is a new building.

It was noted that about \$1 million of the bond is already committed.

It was noted that the architects had never actually stated that the modulars cannot be moved.