

# **SPECIAL MEETING NORTH SMITHFIELD TOWN COUNCIL**

**JUNE 12, 2014**

**KENDALL-DEAN SCHOOL AUDITORIUM**

**7:00 P.M.**

The meeting began at 7:03 P.M. with the prayer and the pledge to the flag. Council members present were Ms. Alves, Mr. McGee, Mr. Zwolenski and Mr. Flaherty. Mr. Yazbak was unable to attend due to a continuing education commitment. Also in attendance were Town Administrator Hamilton and Town Solicitor Lombardi.

## **APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL PROBATE JUDGE**

Current Probate Judge Robert Rossi has a conflict of interest with one of the attorneys in a particular probate matter as does Town Solicitor Lombardi. Attorney Aram P. Jarret has been suggested to act as a Special Probate Judge and all attorneys involved have no objection to his appointment.

**MOTION** by Mr. Zwolenski, seconded by Mr. McGee, and voted 4 to 0 on a roll call vote to appoint Aram P. Jarret as Special Probate Judge to review the case, based on conflicts of interest mentioned this evening, and also that the fee be consistent with the town's fee of \$150.00 per hour.

## **SEWERS FOR GATOR'S PUB**

Mr. McGee recused from this discussion.

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**Professional Engineer David D'Amico was in attendance to request permission from the Town Council to move ahead with the sewer project for Gator's Pub. The owners need to have the line taken over and owned by the town because construction would be in a Department of Transportation right-of-way and the DOT will not allow private entities to install utilities in their right-of-way. Mr. D'Amico gave a brief description of where the line would run.**

**Mr. Flaherty noted there are a host of questions to be answered but at this time Gator's Pub needs confirmation that the Town Council supports the connection.**

**MOTION by Mr. Flaherty, seconded by Mr. Zwolenski, and voted 3 to 0 on a roll call vote to approve the sewer connection as presented subject to an acceptable memorandum of agreement between the Town and the private party.**

#### **OUTDOOR SOUND SYSTEM PERMIT - K. ALVES**

**Ms. Alves is planning on having a family movie night on June 21st at Pacheco Park from 8:30 P.M. to 10:15 P.M. and is requesting an outdoor sound system permit for the evening. This is open to all families with a donation of a canned good for the North Smithfield food pantry.**

**Mr. Zwolenski asked if parking has been considered and if the police**

**department has been notified.**

**MOTION by Mr. Zwolenski, seconded by Mr. McGee, and voted 3 to 0 (Mr. McGee, Mr. Zwolenski and Mr. Flaherty) on a roll call vote to approve the application for a family movie night to be held on June 21st at Pacheco Park from 8:30 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.**

### **PUBLIC HEARING ON FY 2015 BUDGET**

**Ms. Hamilton gave a presentation on her proposed budget that included the following highlights:**

- Presents a conservative approach to providing services for the Town.**
- Does not exceed the mandated 4.00% tax levy increase.**
- Includes a reorganization of the Tax Assessor Department to include an Assistant Tax Assessor.**
- Residential, Commercial, and Tangible tax rates proposed to decrease; rates may be adjusted.**
- Includes State Aid increase of \$210,355 to School Department.**
- Includes a Capital Budget of \$326,082 with \$248,000 restricted for approved School capital purchases. By self-funding, the Town expects to save considerably in interest charges for the next five years.**
- Increase of \$43,550 in Town State Aid. (The Governor's FY15 budget has not been approved. This may require budget adjustments.)**
- Reflects a fully funded RI State pension liability.**

- Includes approximately \$25,000 toward OPEB. Other Post Employment Benefits consists of Blue Cross, Delta Dental, etc. for current and future retirees. Currently, the Town funds 20 retirees. Funding now prevents future liability.
- Includes minimal expansion of the line items for Contingency and Contingency Infrastructure. These budget line items are used to cover infrastructure improvements and unforeseen expenses throughout the Town.
- Identifies a payment of \$95,000 for settlement obligations.

**Proposed revenue: State Aid for School - \$5,553,095; State Aid for Town - \$1,565,11; Local Non-Property (Town Clerk fees, Building fees, Planning fees, Police fees) - \$505,100; Other Revenue (Municipal Court fees, Animal Control fees, Water/Sewer Admin fees, Miscellaneous) - \$392,930; and School Other Revenue - \$60,000.**

**The final proposed net levy is \$30,893,512, an increase of \$1,188,212 or 4.00%.**

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**The proposed residential real estate tax rate is \$15.71, a decrease of \$0.15; motor vehicles - \$37.62, the same; commercial real estate - \$17.24, a decrease of \$0.33; and tangible property - \$42.50, a decrease of \$0.25.**

**Proposed expenditures: Finance Administration - \$1,425,864, an increase of \$306,405; Public Works - \$2,475,062, an increase of \$199,928; Public Safety - \$4,617,709, an increase of \$200,749; General Government - \$870,856, an increase of \$80,631; and Other - \$1,885,407, a decrease of \$82,885. Debt Service: School Principal - \$1,570,000, an increase of \$70,000; Town Principal - \$485,552, an increase of \$64,262; School Interest - \$1,312,158, a decrease of \$71,880; and Town Interest - \$64,467, an increase of \$12,364.**

**The proposed Town Appropriation for the School Department is \$18,581,205, an increase of \$364,337.**

**School Committee Vice-Chair Christine Bonas commented that the report from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges has been received. The high school was commended on several different levels but, although accreditation has been achieved, they are on warning status. The principal has until March 1, 2015 to submit a progress report. Reasons listed for the warning are non-compliance with the Basic Education Plan and non-compliance in the area of community resources, specifically inadequate financial support. A two-percent increase is not enough. Mrs. Bonas felt there has been a misunderstanding regarding Medicaid reimbursement. It can only be used for special education funding and cannot be used to supplement the general fund.**

**Teachers Kimberly Rawson, Tracey Nangle and Natalie O'Brien all expressed great disappointment with the budget recommendations put forth by both the Budget Committee and Ms. Hamilton. Not nearly enough funding is being proposed. Some felt that neither the Administrator nor the Council members take enough interest in school programs and activities.**

**Paul Vadenais shared many concerns related to revenues, revenue bond debt payment and assessments and tangibles. He is unable to locate in the budget certain revenue streams such as Third Party Billing, police details and cruiser fees and some School Department sources such as field rentals. In regards to the School Department, Mr. Vadenais feels these funds should be allowed to accumulate in separate accounts to be used in the future for capital items.**

**Mr. Vadenais spoke about the revenue bond debt payment. It was to be paid with revenues generated by savings in utility costs from the improvements and upgrades made. The bond was sold as a lease revenue bond which cannot be paid with taxes as can a general obligation bond.**

**Mr. Vadenais worried about the Town's increased spending while homeowners have paid less in taxes. He noted that over the last five years the Town's gross assessment has only increased \$18.4 million, the net tax levy has increased \$3.86 million and the tangible property tax has increased \$3.99 million, a 282 percent increase. However, Mr.**

**Vadenais continued that tangibles are a depreciating item, anywhere from five percent to ten percent per year up to eighty percent of the value. That income will more than likely level off and drop once National Grid finishes the regional reliability project and Dowling Village is completed. Homeowners' whose taxes have been decreasing, will be inundated to cover all the increase as well as the depreciated value.**

**David Lowe and Michael Moore, members of the school custodial staff, argued against hiring an outside maintenance firm to replace the custodial staff. Mr. Moore commented that the staff not only cleans but are highly concerned with the safety of the children.**

**Tony Guertin read the duties of the Budget Committee and the School Committee as it is written in the Town Charter. He feels the Budget Committee has overstepped their duties in regards to the school department. He urged the Council to fund the schools appropriately.**

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**Ms. Votta of 440 Buxton Street, who has a daughter who just recently graduated, feels the town is not offering enough support to the schools and students and needs to raise the educational bar.**

**David Lowe questioned Ms. Hamilton's support of an academy school saying that it will take money away from town schools.**

**Ms. Hamilton explained she serves on the board for the mayoral academy school and believes it offers parents a choice. It is not the intent to take away from our schools and she does not believe that it will.**

**Teacher Claire O'Hara feels the town is not meeting the needs of the children.**

**Teacher Marianne Lowe, while looking over the budgets for the last five years, has determined that the town has given the school an average of 1.5 percent per year. She wonders why every year she has to come and battle with the town for more funding. Mrs. Lowe feels the Town Council is not qualified to critique teachers.**

**Former Finance Director Brian Silvia came to express his praise for Chris Belair, the town's former Tax Assessor. He stated she was one of the best assessors he has worked with. Mr. Silvia also spoke about the Tax Anticipation Notes that have been mentioned, claiming that he did not feel they were an answer for this town.**

**William Nangle does not feel the school audit report is being respected. He felt it was clearly stated that the school was being underfunded and he also urged the Council to give Superintendent Lindberg the money he needs to do his job.**

**Former School Committee member George Hemond would like kids in**

**North Smithfield to get at least the same quality of education that he received in Woonsocket fifty years ago.**

**Superintendent of Schools Stephen Lindberg asked the Administrator and the Town Council to reconsider the recommendations of the Administrator. He will review some accounts and knows there is already an issue with special education for 2015. An increase of only two percent means a cut of \$350,000 to \$360,000.**

**James Fournier, head custodian, commented that his staff takes a lot of pride in their work and they do a tremendous job.**

**MOTION by Ms. Alves, seconded by Mr. Zwolenski, and voted 4 to 0 on an aye vote to close the public hearing.**

**MOTION by Ms. Alves, seconded by Mr. Zwolenski, and voted 4 to 0 on an aye vote to adjourn at 9:01 P.M.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Debra A. Todd, Town Clerk**