

The Board of Finance held a special meeting on **August 31, 2011** in the Meeting Room of Windham Town Hall, 979 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226

Members Attending: Barbara McGrath, Jeffrey Smith, Charles Pennewill, Anita Sebestyen, Anna Crawford, and Leo Santucci

Chairman, Barbara McGrath called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

### **Public Comment**

Mary Galvaci asked the Board to consider an additional polling place.

James Flores commented on people not being able to afford taxes any longer and then who will take care of our children? We need to explain to voters the importance to vote.

Lori Jeffers commented in this Town there is no more money. We asked that money be taken from the undesignated fund balance and got yelled at. We need to know where the money is going to be used for the students.

Peter Quercia commented the Board of Finance should be concerned with finances in town. Money is being wasted. Town has taken him to court because of his pets and he won the case.

Thomas White commented he is a taxpayer that didn't vote for the Board of Education budget. He wants to see what the special master has to say. He is asking the board to give the special master time and to have the referendum vote in October.

Dr. Ricki Torres commented children in a lower economic population should be given the same opportunity. People need to step forward to make a difference. Give equal opportunity to all students.

### **Presentation from Board of Education representatives, including Special Master, on 2011-2012 Board of Education Budget**

Steven Adamowski, the appointed special master, gave a presentation to the Board of Finance regarding the Board of Education budget. He wants to improve state assessment scores and create better opportunities for the children of the community. He will develop a three year operating plan. There will be a reallocation of the budget. He has been able to make a review over the past three weeks. The next Board of Education budget will be an all funds budget. He has heard suggestions from citizens that there waste in the Board of Education budget. He has not seen any evidence of waste and the education budget is underfunded in many areas. Not having a budget makes it difficult to proceed.

Anna Ortiz commented that the Board of Education will be giving funds back to the Town. \$82,500 will be returned to the Town. The funds came from the health insurance savings and ARRA grants.

Steven Adamowski recommended an additional reduction of \$300,000 to the Board of Education budget. He has also recommended 5 personnel reductions to include one administrative and two full-time equivalents at the preschool level and 2 full-time equivalents at the high school. He recommended putting the budget out as soon as possible.

We need to raise the bar and close the achievement gap. Some long term considerations are to gather data on districts of similar size and neighboring, and districts with poverty levels. The district is funded at a comparable level to other communities. He recommends merging information technology functions. There will be a savings if there is a change to a self insured medical plan. There is an option to merge with other school districts. He would like to see the Town merge. Would like to come back and talk with the Board sometime in the middle of the year.

Anna Crawford questioned how Windham compared to Hartford with 80% poverty level.

Dr Adamowski replied Windham is poorer than Waterbury but not as poor as New Haven.

Anna Crawford questioned combining financial offices to merge payroll and accounts payable.

Dr. Adamowski replied you can save money by having an organization run the payroll and issue payments rather than individuals.

Leo Santucci thanked Dr Adamowski for the presentation to the Board. The Town struggles with both state and federal mandates. The State imposes a minimum budget requirement without regards to the taxpayer. With this world of technology we have, there has to be a way.

Dr. Adamowski is not concerned with origins of poverty. It is possible to create a high poverty and high performing school. There is technology where courses are taken on line. The Board of Education will be working on a three year operation plan. We need an improvement and development of personnel.

Leo Santucci commented we are all interested in the same thing and want the children to succeed.

Anita Sebesteyn questioned the two preschool positions being eliminated.

Dr Adamowski replied one position is in the preschool bilingual and the other is in the 3 year preschool. He recommends locating the preschool in a neighborhood school instead of a center.

Anita Sebestyen questioned if children are ready to come into the school system.

Students need to have readiness testing. Kindergarteners will have the test and it will be compared to students who had preschool, did not have preschool, and had early preschool.

Charles Pennewill commented on the Magnet School and the taxpayers will feel the effect on the school.

Dr Adamowski replied the Magnet school is a positive choice. Building a portfolio is effective for schools and choice is the key. We need a school that is robust and solid. Focus on a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) model. This is successful all over the State.

Charles Pennewill questioned Towns suing the State over the issues.

Dr. Adamowski replied there is an issue of a district paying for preschool when it is not offered. Most districts offer preschool through the school readiness program.

Charles Pennewill questioned the enrollment drop off of 4<sup>th</sup> graders to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr Adamowski replied we need to have more assessment testing. The current system only recognizes the dropout rate in 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Most dropouts occur in 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Most schools do not combine 5<sup>th</sup> graders with 6-8 graders. There are developmental differences between boys and girls. The middle school needs to adapt to students. The school is too large and students need to explore. The middle school is a major focus.

Barbara McGrath was concerned that continued cuts to the Board of Education budget it could make Dr. Adamowski's job more difficult. She questioned if the Board was to make the \$300,000 would he be returning to ask for additional funding.

Dr. Adamowski replied he needs to know what the budget is to be able to allocate funds and baring an emergency he would not come back to the Board.

### **Discussion and possible action on 2011-2012 Board of Education Budget**

Dr. Adamowski commented one million dollars in State Education Jobs Fund program will run out after this year. The fund balance might need to be used more next year than this year.

Jeff Smith commented not using fund balance. It is a bad idea to use a one time revenue to balance a budget.

Upon a motion by Jeff Smith, seconded by Anna Crawford to reduce the Board of Education budget by 300,000 and not appropriate funds from fund balance.

Charles Pennewill commented a budget with more than a 1 mill increase won't pass.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Discussion and possible action on the meeting schedule for the next referendum**

Upon a motion by Charles Pennewill, seconded by Jeffrey Smith, to set the Budget meeting for 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday September 21, 2011 at the Windham Town Hall

The motion passes unanimously.

Upon a motion by Charles Pennewill, seconded by Jeffrey Smith, to set the referendum vote for Tuesday September 27, 2011 with the time and two locations to be determined by the registrar.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

Lynn Ide commented on benefits where the Board of Education and Town employees can join the State's medical insurance. We need to educate all children and not cast around the population.

Jerry Iazetta commented on the Magnet School and as a Town Council member they have been asking how it will be populated. He was also concerned that the budget for the Magnet School would be increased. If the Town is aware that the Special Master has reviewed the budget and there is a need for reallocation then lets support the budget.

James Flores commented most people live out of town and take their money out of town. There are only three Windham Public School staff members at the meeting and this is an important issue so this room should be packed. To improve education, we need to have more Latino teachers.

Thomas White commented he wanted to hear what Dr. Adamowski had to say regarding the Board of Education budget. He liked what he said and was also glad to hear the Board of Education would be turning over a surplus. Dr. Adamowski has made more improvements in the last two weeks than members of the Board of Education have made in the last 20 years. He will support the Board of Education budget.

Dr. Torres is concerned about the lack funding. Improvements are needed and he hopes things happen. Teachers will do their best with the funding that is available. We need to make a change as a community. Desegregate schools based on income. He suggests legal residents be allowed to vote.

Don Muirhead commented on school readiness. The program offers a half day program, and a full day program. He recommended sharing one insurance broker and he looks forward to working with the Board of Education.

Lori Jeffers commented on the Magnet School and there was a petition for a revote that was denied. Additional funds will be needed for the Magnet School and there are needs in the current schools. How many out of district students will be attending Windham schools this year?

Doug Lary commented on hearing new ideas from the Special Master. He is not sure if the reduction in the Board of Education budget will be enough to get it passed. A number of people are upset about different things.

Upon a motion by Leo Santucci, seconded by Jeffrey Smith, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas Pesce