

The Board of Finance held a public hearing on **May 18, 2011** in the meeting room of Windham Town Hall, 979 Main Street, Willimantic, CT 06226

Members Attending: Barbara McGrath, Charles Pennewill, Anita Sebestyen, Leo Santucci, Anna Crawford, and Nina Ricardez

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

Public Comment

Barbara McGrath asked the Board of Education to make a presentation on their budget.

Mark Doyle of the Board of Education gave a presentation of their budget. He is hoping for only a three to five hundred thousand dollar reduction. The sports program at Windham Middle School will hopefully be kept in the budget.

Ana Ortiz superintendent of schools gave a power point presentation on the budget. Reductions in salaries were discussed as well as State vs. local costs, the reduction in staff, supplies, text books, and capital equipment. Math intervention is a requirement of the State. This is for K-12 grades. They are required to increase these positions. The ELL position in the middle school is needed as they have not had one in 10 years. What will the children lose – opportunity to succeed, proper academic services, closing the achievement gap, federal and state monies if mandates are not complied.

Murphy Sewell presented a handout to the Board members. The budget has gone up over the past five years. There has been a four million increase in last five years. The argument is that the budget has gone up but the schools haven't gotten better. The cuts have added up over the past five years. The costs have increased eight million dollars over the past 5 years. Even if we passed the last budget, the Board of Education would still be short.

Tracy from the Board of Education talked about the changes in the classroom in the past five years. There were responsibilities, homework, and field trips. There was a Reading First Grant from 2004 to 2010. Certified librarians are down to 1 to go between all the schools. Classrooms had para-professionals. Special needs students have gone up. Arts and music has been cut. Gym time has been cut. DRA testing has been added. Instrumental music has been eliminated. How can we show what our kids can do when the program has been eliminated? When you give the resources that are needed, the kids will do well. Cutting the budget hurts the children.

Peter Quercia commented the high school principal is being released and no information has been made available. He is disappointed that people don't come out and vote on the budget. Throwing more money at the problem won't work.

Joe Tomenly a teacher at the middle school commented so many wonderful things are happening in the schools and no one comes to see them. People should come to see the play put on at the high school or the music show at the middle school. Come to the schools and see what is going on. Windham is an exceptional Town with things to do here.

Henry Crane of Willimantic commented he hopes the Board doesn't cut the budget too much but realizes the Board will need to do something.

Nathan from Windham Middle School commented if the school system could open the door the possibilities are endless. Education is important.

Belinda Clark of Willimantic commented her children graduated from the school system and she supports the Board of Education budget. Education is important for children. We need to put money up for our children.

Nicole of Willimantic commented on a good experience she has had with the teachers in the school system. Increasing the class size has made it more difficult to teach. The school system can't keep losing programs.

Pat Calvo of Willimantic commented this is hard times but a community will thrive with a good education system. Education need to be supported by the entire community. Look at tax base in the Town and the housing market.

Kevin Hoxie of Willimantic commented this is becoming a college town. Nineteen homes have been up for sale and the new owners are renting the homes to college students. The Town needs something more than homeowners paying the majority of the taxes. We can't afford it. Schools need sports, music, and art programs. There is \$20,000 from recreation for the sports program and this was to be matched \$20,000 by Board of Education but it is not in the Board of Education budget.

Beverly Lemire commented on teaching in Windham and making a difference in the school system. She has \$900 in budget to purchase supplies and materials for her class. Most science classes are larger, there are no aids, and there is no spending money. Most teachers spend their own money. There are no science labs because there is no funding. She asked the Board to not cut any more from the education budget.

Pamela Viens commented on an independent study she would like the board to read. She read a few quotes from the report. She feels the special master should come in before the board makes a decision. Come up with a creative way to get the money to the kids.

Nicole of Windham commented we need to come together to make the education system work. The result of a no vote hurts the children. If the intent is not to hurt the students then what is it?

Sandy Jarvis of Willimantic commented she is proud to be a Windham school teacher and to live in Willimantic. She hopes there are very few cuts to the budget

Jim Hudson a technology teacher in middle and high school commented the teachers are hard working. Kids that have competed in technology have placed in the top ten.

Madeline Negron principle of Windham Middle School commented on the Latino community and is committed to this community and being an ELL student. Give the kids what they need. She chose to come back to Town and work here instead of going somewhere else. Come together as a community and make the education system work.

Jose Bonet of Willimantic commented educators are here for the kids. The Shelter English Program is looking to expand from 5 to 8 grades. The kids will eventually be taking care of us.

Felicia O'Brien of Columbia and teacher at Sweeney School commented she doesn't have enough time to work with kids and needs another person to help out in the classroom.

Omar Rosario of Windham and the Windham after school program. He works with the kids as a tutor or mentor. He will not leave Windham because he cares about the kids. Salaries are not going up as the cost of living does. The Town said yes to snow plowing and cleaning the streets but no to education.

Bernie Dauteuil of Willimantic commented if you build it they will come. It's our responsibility to take care of the kids. Properties are going up for sale and people are leaving Town. Kids are the future. Monitor the Board of Education and how money is spent.

Dr. Ursin from Windham High School commented on the alternative school. The kids that were attending the alternative school are now in the classrooms at public schools. The kids need more time devoted to them. He asked the Board to bring back the alternative school.

Dan Little of Willimantic commented there should be no cuts made to the budget. The budget affects the kids. He asked to Board to not make any cuts and send the budget back out as it is.

Luz Osuba of Willimantic commented she supports the school system and is involved in the PTO. She asked the Board to not make any cuts. The kids need the best education.

Lori Jeffers of Willimantic commented on families leaving Town. The school system is failing and people don't trust the Board of Education. She asked the Board to appropriate funds for books, sports, music programs. She cannot support the budget.

Bill Powers of Windham and a teacher at the high school commented on the reports handed out by Mrs. Viens and urged the board to read the report.

Melanie of Windham commented the schools do not have the resources in the classrooms. Please give the schools the money they need.

Randall Dumas of Windham commented he can't afford to pay more so he cannot support the budget.

Sidney Gilblair of Windham commented on working to pass the budget. The Board of Education does pay for health insurance. If you want to live in a good community, then fund education.

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Barbara McGrath adjourned the meeting at 8:25 p.m.