

**SHERMAN BOARD OF SELECTMEN
BUDGET HEARING MINUTES
April 12, 2012**

Present: Clay Cope - First Selectman Chris Jellen - Selectman Andrea O'Connor - Selectman

Call to Order: First Selectman Cope calls the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda: proposed budget for fiscal year 2012/2013

First Selectman Cope starts with an overview of the budget & highlights of what the Selectmen have been working on:

Town Budget: \$4,436,692 approx. 3.2% increase

Board of Education Budget: \$8,486,243 approx. 2.8% increase

Total Combined Budget for 12-13: \$12,922,935 approx. 2.9% increase

Selectman's office: 14.05% increase. The increases are from additional hours for Selectman's Grant Clerk and additional hours for the Business Associate.

Line 11-29 - Counsel and Court Ongoing Litigation of \$7,000 is an ongoing litigation that is expected to end in Sept., and is not likely to carry over into the next budget.

Line 14-11- POCD (Master Plan) a 100% increase for POCD Master Plan.

Line 23 -17 SVFD Utilities has an increase, as does Line 23-20 SVFD Facility Maintenance.

Line 32-51 – Life & Medical: The B.O.S. will address this at the April 19th meeting. At this point, it is estimated at a little over 11%, but will likely reach 15%. The plan the school is switching to is not right for the Town. First Selectman Cope will recommend an option to the other Selectmen regarding Anthem at the meeting on the 19th.

Line 32-53 – Compensated Absences line: On the advice of the auditors, that is where that increase came from.

Line 39-01 (Director, Senior Center) and down, including the Senior Center: First Selectman Cope explains that the B.O.S. have discussed a leased vehicle for the center. He learned today that the van is subject to recall. Selectman Jellen volunteered to drive the van to the service center. This is an example of why a second vehicle is needed. The Taurus doesn't handle our weather well. Friends of the Senior Center will help raise the funds for a donated vehicle, which should help the taxpayer.

Senior Center Clerk: The B.O.S. felt there was great value in having another 5 hours for the position.

First Selectman Cope opens the budget up to public discussion, regarding the town side:

Pat Andres is concerned about the additions to the Selectman's Office. Previously, the Selectman's office included work on both the budget and on grants. She thinks in such hard times, to add money to the budget impacts people's taxes. She suggests that since First Selectman Cope was elected to do this job, he should pay out of his own funds if he wants these additional jobs done for him.

Gary Albert mentions that when he was Selectman, some grants included a fee for the writing to pay the person who writes the grants. He is not sure what type of grants these were, but if the grant itself provides for writing they can put that money toward paying the person writing the grants. First Selectman Cope explains that he is capable of writing the grants, and that the B.O.S. had extensive debate over this. He feels there is tremendous value in the STEAP grants.

Sharon Danosky mentions that she is a consultant for non-profit organizations, and she applauds First Selectman Cope for seeking these grants. She says if someone writes a grant and then gets paid, that is unethical. However, she thinks the position would be a great benefit for the town, and non-profits in our community can benefit. She thinks \$4,000 is very little to invest for something that can have such a big return for the town.

Barbara Ireland (arrived late) inquires about line 11-29 Counsel and Court litigation. First Selectman Cope explains he brought it up earlier in the discussion this evening.

Gary Albert thinks it is wrong to give a 3% salary increase to union employees, but not to other Town employees. He thinks if you give to some employees, you should give to all employees. First Selectman Cope wants to bring this back to the B.O.S. for additional consideration (putting that 3% back in) at the April 19th meeting.

Kate McConaghy appreciates the additional funds for the Senior Center, but does not think it is enough of an increase for Beth and Suzette in light of the immense services they provide to the Seniors in town. Her observation is that these two increases combined don't add up to even 1% of the municipal budget. She wonders if funds could be moved around, perhaps from SPARK. She looks at Park & Rec and SPARK – they got more than they used last year. She believes the great majority of the cost of SPARK is covered by parents paying for the program. She hopes some funding can still be moved to Social Services and health and welfare.

Rich Lenihan has a question about line 11-06, General Counsel & Court. First Selectman Cope says the actual is the \$20,853.25. Rich is curious if fees are passed on – is this number including what is passed on to the library. First Selectman Cope says it

would include the library. Rich also notes the Assistant to the Assessor makes more than the Assessor.

First Selectman Cope asks the Board of Education to Speak:

Superintendent Don Fiftal gives an overview of negotiations. This year, they got the teachers to agree to a “hard zero” – no ongoing salary increase. They have the opportunity to increase instructional time for Sherman children (previously had below average for state instructional time). As part of negotiations, teachers will teach a 10% longer day, entirely devoted to instruction. The teachers agreed to work 10% longer days in perpetuity, and next year they will receive a single 4% bonus for doing this. That will be a one-time \$117,000 payment. The second part of the negotiations had to do with health benefits. The Board of Education has now mandated that all employees be in a HAS (health savings account). The savings to the contract is \$120,000 – they are putting that savings back into the teaching staff on a one-time basis. He sums up his comments with an overview of where Sherman stands in relation to other regional schools. The regional average budget increase is 3.03%. Sherman is 2.79%, in the lower third of the region (lower is Ridgefield and Region 1 (Kent/Sharon/North Caanan), region 12 – 0.46%). However, there are six school districts with higher increases: Bethel, Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, Newtown, New Milford,

Bob Gamper from the Board of Ed says the total funding request is a 2.78% increase. The actual spending increase is 2.36%. Actually spending about \$200,000 more – have to request \$230,000 because losing around \$30,000 in state/federal grants. He notes that High School expenses increased about \$136,000 due to 51 8th graders graduating, 35 high school students graduating from grade 12, there are 10-15 additional high school students. High School is about 2/3 of the increase in spending. He also notes additional costs from 2 or 3 new special ed students to the district. They tried to keep it down, and there is one less full time teacher in the pre-K to 8th grade. He says the high deductible health care plan will save the district approx. \$120,000 per year in premiums. This is a much more affordable health insurance plan for the entire staff.

Vernoica Scheer asks how many students are in the school. Bob explains they pay for 186 high school students, next year projected is 199. There is a larger pre-K enrollment next year. He thinks the total is around 390. He would like to ask the Board of Selectmen to do a more efficient enrollment study, which will be helpful to them, to see if the downward trend will level off or go up again. A University of CT study says they should expect enrollment to level off.

A woman named Jane (note: last name not audible) asks how many hours teachers teach. Don says it is a minimum of 900 hours per year. The school currently has a 6 hour day, which includes lunch time and passing in halls. Next year it will be 6 hours and 40 minutes, with the extra 40 minutes being all instruction. This will put Sherman above the norm (high 900's) when the state average is 930-940.

First Selectman Cope has specific figures from Jamie Spannhake: 392 pre-K to 8, and 182 public high school.

Barbara Ireland wonders what the per capita expenditure for students is in surrounding towns. Don says this information is available on the State of CT Dept. of Ed website school profiles. He believes the average this past year was around \$12,000 statewide. Sherman is around \$11,000 per pupil, about \$1,000 less. Bob says they are dropping from three 5th grades to two 5th grade classes this year. Don says while some years enrollment decreases, the distribution does not work in your favor. For this coming year, they are in an enviable position of being able to reduce one section.

Kate McConaghy wants to know when the 40 minutes will be added. Don says students will arrive around 10 minutes earlier at 8:20, and stay until 3:00 (the extra 30 minutes at the end of the day).

Linda Haberman would like to know how Sherman students compare on standardized tests. Don says student performance fluctuates from year to year on the CT mastery tests. Sherman students generally perform favorably, above the state average. This information is seen in the DRG (Demographic Reference Group) which compares like communities. In many cases, Sherman is equal to or better than our DRG. Our students do at least the average. Rich Lenihan asks if the schools mentioned earlier are in the DRG, and Don answers "no". There are 8 or 9 different DRGs. The DRG provides socio-economic comparisons.

Joe Keneally of Rt 37 East asks what the mill rate would be. First Selectman Cope says they expect a mill rate increase to 16.1.

Adjournment: Selectman O'Connor moves to adjourn the April 12, 2012 Budget Hearing Meeting at 7:58 p.m., and moves to move to a public hearing on April 19th at 7:00 p.m., to be followed by a Board of Selectman Meeting, Selectman Jellen seconds, all in favor

Respectfully Submitted,
Laura J. Pettinato, BOS Clerk

Clay Cope

Chris Jellen

Andrea O'Connor

Minutes are not considered official until they have been approved and signed by a minimum of two Selectmen