

Minutes of the Town of Farmington
Special Town Council Meeting
March 18, 2017

Present:

Nancy W. Nickerson, Chair
Jon Landry
Peter M. Mastrobattista
Gary Palumbo
Amy Suffredini
Meredith A. Trimble
John Vibert

Kathy Eagen, Town Manager
Paula B. Ray, Clerk

A. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The Council and members of the public recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Public Comment

Beth Kitner of 24 Farmstead Lane, Chair of Farmington Future recognized the Superintendent of Schools, the Board of Education and the Town Manager for their management of their budgets. She felt they had proposed fiscally responsible budgets that maintained services. She believed any cuts to the Town or Board of Education budgets would penalize the good efforts that had gone into creating them. She believed the budgets were very lean and any cuts would have significant impacts on students or residents. She understood the concerns the Council had over the changing level of support from the State and the concerns over raising taxes too much. She told the Council making significant cuts at this time, when meetings had already been set to address budget changes, to get to a particular tax rate would not be good leadership and not be good fiscal management. She believed voters understood their taxes supported all the things that made Farmington a great place to live and were willing to support their services. She asked them not to cut the budget and get the message out to residents of why you support the proposed budget.

A member of the Farmington High School Student Council asked the Council not to cut the Education Budget and keep the students in mind as they deliberated over the budget. He told the Council he had had an excellent experience in the Farmington schools and wanted it to be that way for others in the future.

Emily Petit of 30 Dunne Wood Court told the Council she agreed with Beth Kitner's comments, and that the Board of Education had worked very hard to meet the Council's target. She felt the Council should respect that and not cut the budget.

D. To Consider and Take Action on the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year Budget

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to consider and take action on the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year Budget.

Revenue

The Manager; Erica Robertson, Assistant Town Manager and Joseph Swetcky, Director of Finance and Administrative Services reviewed the Revenue section of the budget and answered Council questions.

Mr. Swetcky reviewed the non-real estate tax revenues: Property Taxes were projected for a slight increase; Licenses and Permits showed a decrease primarily due to building permits; Fines and Penalties showed no change; Interest Earnings showed an increase due to higher interest rates; State and Federal Grants showed a 29% decrease based on the Governor's Proposed Budget; Service Charges showed a small increase due to the tower space rentals and Other Revenues which stayed the same.

The Town Manager's Proposed Budget required a mill rate of 26.83 mills, which was a 1.05 mill increase or 4.1% tax increase in Property Tax Revenues in order to raise enough revenue to balance the expenditures in the Town Manager's Proposed Budget.

The Chair asked the Manager to outline what cuts she would recommend to bring the tax rate down.

The Manager explained she had studied what it would take to get to a 3.5% tax increase, which would require a \$530,000 overall reduction. She looked for cuts to the Town Budget with the least amount of impact on services levels or of impact on the ability of Town workers to do their jobs, which she identified as Level A cuts.

Level A Cuts

\$5,000 out of Patrol Overtime
\$3,000 out of Detective Overtime
\$1,000 Maco Overtime
\$3,000 out of Life Insurance
\$6,700 by bringing the Library down to the new percentage increase of 2.24%
\$5,000 by deferring the lease of one non-patrol vehicle
\$3,000 Technical Equipment
\$2,000 Professional Services Westwoods Golf Course
\$5,000 Professional Services Maco
\$5,000 Police Building Maintenance
\$3,000 Professional Services Grounds
\$2,000 Westwoods Grounds Maintenance
\$5,000 Reduction of hours for the Land Consultant

\$50,000.

She suggested the additional funds necessary to get to a 3.5% tax increase could come from the Board of Education Budget with a cut of \$150,000 which would have been proportionally the same as the \$50,000 reduction from the Town Budget, and then take the balance of \$350,00 from the Capital Improvement Plan Budget. She suggested taking proportional cuts again or \$215,000 from the Town's capital budget and \$115,000 from the Board of Education's budget.

She suggested for the Town's capital reductions:

\$75,000 from the Farmington Center Improvements
\$25,000 for the Open Space Management
\$25,000 from sidewalk replacement
\$25,000 from Fire Station Improvements
\$25,000 reduction from the real estate revaluation account
\$25,000 from the Stone House repairs
\$15,000 from the Plan of Conservation and Development

\$215,000 Total

If the Council wanted to go lower than a 3.5% tax increase, the Manager explained her B Level cuts which would impact the Town workers abilities to do their jobs and would affect the quality of current service levels.

Level B Cuts

\$3,000 Technical Equipment from the Fire Department account
\$1,000 Technical Equipment from the Police Detectives account
\$2,000 Technical Equipment from the Police Communication account
\$1,500 Technical Equipment from the Highway & Grounds Fleet
\$5,000 from the Snow and Ice account
\$1,500 from the Street Maintenance account
\$ 500 Technical Equipment Building Maintenance account
\$1,000 Technical Grounds Maintenance account
\$16,200 from Engineering Plotter/Copier

\$31,700

The Manager explained the next level of cuts would reduce services.

Level C Cuts

\$21,000 leave ¼ of recreation Supervisor in General Fund
\$34,600 No summer help
\$30,000 No Land Consultant
\$86,000 No part-time administrative staff
\$32,000 No Town Hall receptionist

\$185,600

A, B and C cuts together totaled \$267,300. She explained any other cuts would result in further service reductions and the layoff of full time employees.

The Chair asked what the spending increases were for a 3.5% tax increase. The Manager explained the Town would be at a 2.24% spending increase, the Board of Education would be at 2.37% spending increase and the Capital Improvement Plan Budget would be at a 16.06% spending decrease, which was below the Town's policy of 2.5% of the Operating Budget.

The Chair told the Council she felt, with the Sewer Treatment Plant project and Farmington High School proposed project, a 4.1% tax increase was too much to ask of the Town residents and the community wasn't use to tax increases that high in general. She pointed out even at a 3.5% tax increase supported spending increases for both the Board of Education and the Town or \$2,147,420 more in spending.

Mrs. Suffredini asked if they could hear from the Board of Education as to where they would make their cuts, because she didn't feel she had all the information she needed to make cuts to the budget.

Mr. Fagan, Chair of the Board of Education told the Council he couldn't speak for the Board of Education, and they would have to meet and make the decisions on cuts as a whole.

Mrs. Trimble reminded the Council the Self Insurance Fund was having a good year and believed the Board of Education would have opportunities to balance cuts to their budget from the Self Insurance Fund.

Mrs. Suffredini told the Council she needed the detail of the impact of what cutting the Board of Education Budget would be before supporting any cuts to their budget. She believed she would be operating blindly and completely arbitrarily just to cut the budget to get to a certain tax increase. She went on to say it didn't matter what she did because there were only two of them.

Mr. Vibert said it would be wrong for the Board of Education to violate the Self Insurance Policy and take funds to balance their operating budget. Mrs. Trimble agreed with Mr. Vibert but pointed out at this time it appeared the Board of Education was trending to have funds over the 125% required by the policy, and she was referring to those funds.

The Chair felt the Board of Education and the Town had a very good relationship and worked well together to serve the needs of the Town. She believed after reviewing the Board of Education Budget with the Superintendent and the Board that there were new items that might have to wait for next year and that a \$150,000 cut in a \$64,172,641 budget could be achieved without touching teachers or programming.

Mrs. Trimble felt a tax increase of 4.1% was too high for the Town's homeowners and taking steps to reduce it wasn't arbitrary but appropriate. She believed that a 3.5% tax increase was a thoughtful reduction that didn't impact programs or services. She

was more concerned that the Town may face further revenue reductions from the State and have to make cuts that would affect programs and services.

Mrs. Trimble pointed out that many of the surrounding towns were laying off teachers, cutting services and calling for 0% spending increases because of the cuts in State grants to the municipalities proposed by the Governor, and even with reduction the Board of Education was still getting a 2.37% spending increase, which was within the original target of 2.25-2.75 %.

Mr. Landry told the Manager she had done an excellent job managing the Town and its services. He believed the Town of Farmington was where it was today because of the long history of strong leadership from its Town Managers and Councils. He believed the Town of Farmington was in a difficult position because of decades of poor leadership at the State level. The State was in such poor economic condition Farmington would have to change how it did business. He believed a 3.5% tax increase was still high, but he was going to support it. He felt it showed leadership and was a responsible balance to make spending cuts to mitigate the tax increase for the residents on one side but not in a way that reduced services on the other side. He told the Council it was important everyone worked to not support or accept the irresponsible fiscal behavior of the State.

Mr. Vibert stated the Town and Board of Education were asked to bring forward budgets that would maintain the current level of services. Both bodies came in within the given target, which resulted in a 4.1% tax increase. He felt the Council was having a dramatic over reaction because 4.1% was such a huge number. He state that over the past 20 years 6 of those 20 years there were tax increases of over 4%. He didn't believe a 4.1% was a large increase. He felt it was arbitrary to move down to a 3.5% tax increase. He said even if we stayed at the 4.1% tax increase, the Town of Farmington would have the lowest tax rate in the Farmington Valley. He felt the difference of a \$20 a month tax increase at 4.1% and the \$17 a month tax increase at 3.5% for the average home owner was only drama and not meaningful to tax payers. He supported the 4.1% tax increase and any reductions were just a show.

Mr. Mastrobattista told the Council he didn't like the position the Town was in because of the State that resulted in a 4.1% tax increase. He believed there were people in the Town that both the \$17 and \$20 a month increase in taxes were going to struggle with. He reminded the Council there were a lot of households that weren't at the average that for them it could be \$100 a month or more tax increase. He believed it was his job to protect the tax payers from the large tax increases coming at the Town because of the State of Connecticut. He told the Council the State should have been more thoughtful and given the Towns time to plan for the grant reductions. He didn't believe the reduction to 3.5% tax increase was going to affect services and making the cuts wasn't drama but was necessary.

Mrs. Suffredini thanked the Council for their service to the Town even if they didn't agree on everything. She told the Council she always strived to spend the tax dollars given to her responsibly and tried to understand what the residents were looking for in their services. She believed any cuts to the budget would impact services and that

wasn't what the residents wanted. She stated that going to 3.5% would be arbitrary. She especially didn't feel it was responsible to make the cuts to the Capital Improvement Plan Budget and simply arbitrary to cut the Board of Education Budget without knowing what the cut would mean.

Mr. Palumbo thanked everyone for their work on the budget. He was in favor of cutting to a 3.5% tax increase. He was concerned about what would happen with the teacher pension costs being shifted to the towns and the debt the Town would be taking on in the near future for the High School project. He wanted to keep the taxes as low as possible for the people living on fixed incomes so they could continue to live in Farmington.

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to set the Capital Improvement Plan Budget for Fiscal Year 2017/2018 at \$2,398,000 or a 16.06% decrease below the current year budget

Adopted

Voting yes were Nickerson, Landry, Mastrobattista, Palumbo and Trimble.

Voting no were Suffredini and Vibert.

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to set the Town Operating Budget for Fiscal Year 2017/2018 at \$28,860,794 for an increase of \$631,423 or 2.24%.

Adopted

Voting yes were Nickerson, Landry, Mastrobattista, Palumbo, Suffredini and Trimble.

Mr. Vibert voted no.

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to set the Board of Education Budget for Fiscal Year 2017/2018 at \$64,172,641 for an increase of \$1,486,566 or 2.37% over the current year budget.

Adopted

Voting yes were Nickerson, Landry, Mastrobattista, Palumbo and Trimble.

Voting no were Suffredini and Vibert.

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to set the Fiscal Year 2017/2018 Debit Service Budget at \$7,315,700 an increase of 7.15% over the current year budget.

Adopted

Voting yes were Nickerson, Landry, Mastrobattista, Palumbo, Suffredini and Trimble.

Mr. Vibert voted no.

Motion to was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to set the Town of Farmington Fiscal Year 2017/2018 Budget for the Board of Education at \$64,172,641 or a 2.37% budget increase above Fiscal Year 2016/2017; and the Town Budget at \$28,860,794 or a 2.24% increase above the Fiscal Year 2016/2017; and the Debit

Service at \$7,315,700 or a 7.15% above Fiscal Year 2016/2017; and the Capital Improvement Plan Budget at \$2,398,000 or a 16.06% decrease below the fiscal year 2016/2017 Budget resulting in a total expenditure of \$102,747,135 or a 2.13% increase over the Fiscal Year 2016/2017 Budget.

Adopted

Voting yes were Nickerson, Landry, Mastrobattista, Palumbo and Trimble.

Voting no were Suffredini and Vibert.

E. To Approve the Warning of the April 17, 2017 Annual Town Meeting and April 27, 2017 Referendum

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) to approve the Warning of the April 17, 2017 Annual Town Meeting and the April 27, 2017 Referendum.

Adopted unanimously

F. Executive Session

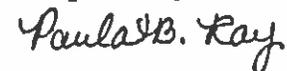
There was no Executive Session held.

G. Adjournment

Motion was made and seconded (Trimble/Mastrobattista) adjourn the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

Adopted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Paula Ray, Clerk