

BOLTON BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING
7:00 p.m., April 27, 2015
BOLTON HIGH SCHOOL GYM

Minutes & Motions

The Board of Finance (BOF) held a Public Hearing on April 27, 2015 in the Bolton High School gym. The purpose of the public hearing was to hear comments on the proposed Board of Education and Board of Selectmen budgets for Fiscal Year 2015-2016, copies of which were available for review.

Members present were Chairman Robert Munroe, Barry Stearns, Robert DePietro, James Bruner, Judy Wilson, Ronald Rousseau, and Morris Silverstein. Also present were Interim Finance Director Linda Savitsky, Administrative Officer Joyce Stille, First Selectman Robert Morra, Superintendent Kristen Heckt, Board of Selectmen members, Board of Education members, and members of the public.

Chairman Munroe opened the public hearing at 7:05 p.m. He gave introductory remarks on the budgets and the work the BOF has done. The BOF had reduced the budgets to propose a tax increase of 4.35%.

Board of Selectmen Budget

First Selectman Robert Morra spoke on the difficult position of the town. He gave an overview of the BOS budget and its two major considerations: 1) The resident trooper program makes up 70% of the requested increase, because the governor's budget pulled its 30% state funding without warning. There is some legislative work on it but the best he expects is only a portion of the 30%. 2) The personnel amount includes shared building services with Columbia, and is expected to be offset by revenue.

Board of Education Budget

Chairwoman Karen Bergin reviewed BOE priorities and spoke to their motivation for the budget increase. Referring to the PTA's distributed booklet, she said an 8% increase, which would be closer to the requested budget, would mean an additional \$50 per month on an \$8000 tax bill. She said it was a worth the investment.

Public Hearing

Katy Desrosiers disagreed with the number put forward and did not understand how they could give the \$173,000 when the town approved the contracted salaries. She also voiced concern that cuts would make it harder to attract Columbia and outside students to offset debt, and to continue high performance. She disagreed with the strategy of cutting first because she thought the town is not educated on the budget and will assume the first proposed amount is inflated. She asked to clarify that the town charter does not allow money to be added back into the budget after referendum, which the Chairman confirmed. She wanted the opportunity to vote on the higher number.

Robert Galle said the budget is an annual ordeal that polarizes the town. He said they are hurting themselves with cuts and taxes, and they need growth. He said the contract was well received by the BOS and town attendees. He thought the BOF was overstepping since a previously approved line item is affected.

Several others thought the amount too low given the contracted salaries. Many also asked that the BOE budget or both budgets be presented at the referendum without any cuts. Nicole Sullivan read several emails into record that also supported the BOE budget and voting before reductions. A few parents said education was their only motivation to live in town, and they might look elsewhere otherwise.

Christopher Davey asked if he understood correctly that the proposed budget amount was higher than the BOF's estimated revenues. Judy Wilson explained the difference in estimated revenue and the proposed mill rate.

Milton Hathaway said his children went to the schools and they are important, but Bolton needs more income than expense, and a long-term view. While raising taxes is an easy way of adding revenue, it discourages business. He said Bolton needs in-depth analysis on why it is not attracting people and business, and to pursue multiple revenue sources at the same time. He also gave some comparative research on mill rates in similarly sized towns, among which he found Bolton's to be the highest. The documents were provided to Chairman Munroe after the hearing.

Adam Teller reminded attendees that elections are every two years and they can run for office themselves or vote for someone with the vision they want to see. He recommended that they vote the state election and speak to the state legislature about the burden on towns, and pay attention to school funding structure. He also pointed out that the Board of Selectmen is the legislative and policy-setting body of the town, and the other boards and groups can do no more than regulate.

Edward Del Signore said he moved to Bolton not for the schools, but because he liked the town. He said the BOF should not propose an amount too high to expect to pass, because that wastes money on multiple referendums. He also asked attendees how acquainted they were with the budget itself, to which a little over half said they had read it. He said while the boards do very good work, the budgets need to be revisited and gone through meticulously to be affordable for the town.

Other comments included:

- Bolton needs to pursue business and additional revenue sources
- The town needs to look at affordability in revenue options, for example, senior housing
- The schools need to attract outside students for revenue until Bolton can attract business
- The need for higher voter turnout to reflect support for the BOE budget
- Concern that the town is making short-term decisions with counteractive long-term effects
- Concern that even with cuts, the mill rate will continue to rise because the schools will degrade and Columbia and real estate values will decrease
- The budgets are increasingly skewed towards the BOE whereas in the past it was more evenly split between the BOE and BOS

- The debt service was not proportional to the budget
- Expand and itemize other expenditures in the budgets for greater public understanding
- Inquiries about methods of coordination between municipal bodies to pursue long-term goals

The Chairman thanked the public and adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Benitez

Please see minutes of subsequent meetings for approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.