

TOWN COUNCIL OF NEW CANAAN
Special Meeting
Thursday, March 5, 2009
7:30 PM –Lapham

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mark DeWaele	Stephen Karl
Tucker Murphy	Tom O'Dea
Kathryn Devereaux	Dick White
Paul Foley	
Christine Hussey	
Elizabeth Jones	

ABSENT:

Kenneth Campbell, Penny Young, Johnny Potts

ALSO PRESENT: Jeb Walker; Ex-Officio member, Gary Conrad, Chief Financial Officer, Steve Benko, Dr. David Abbey, Amy Rochlin, Roy Walder, Jim Kucharczyk, Hazel Hobbs, Jennifer Essigs, Alison Wu, Joanne Rocco, Greg Macedo, Jill Correnty, Bunny Potts, Steve Swerdlick, Dr. Mary Monroe Kolek, Rob Miller, Dr. Michael Lagas, Joe Meehan, Kathy Smith.

Item 1 – To hear a budget presentation from the Park and Recreation Department.

Steve Benko presented their proposed budget. See attached presentation. Mr. Benko went through the presentation making note that their budget is down 5.8% from last year. Mr. Foley questioned the location of parking at Irwin and the status of the plan.

Item 2 - To hear budget presentation from the Board of Education.

Dr. David Abbey presented the Board of Education's proposed budget. See attached presentation. Dr. Abbey went through the presentation. He noted there has been a lot accomplished but always room to improve. Dr. Abbey stated that there were less staff turnover and retirement over the year. Each year they hire 3 consultants to help manage the increasing health benefit costs. He noted the technology budget is down \$83,000.

The juniors and seniors will have an opt-in system for busing this year.

Ms. Devereaux spoke in favor of foreign language program. Dr. Abbey noted that they hoped to increase it from K-3 to K-4 next year.

Ms. Jones voiced concern about eliminating the greening program and inquired if there was any State or Federal money available. Dr. Abbey noted that they were always looking for State and Federal money and received it every year, but not as much as we'd like.

Mr. Foley inquired about the health reserve account, gap insurance and the unrestricted account. Dr. Abbey stated that they would use \$1.29 million in 09-10 budget and leave \$1.41 million in there.

Paul Foley asked about Union give backs and Dr. Abbey stated it was very rare but that the teachers union agreed to a \$45,000 give back on their own and the Administrative personnel have given back \$12,000. Dr. Abbey noted that they would be negotiating with the teachers in the spring.

Ms. Young's statement was read concerning the teachers giving more concessions due to the severe economic climate we're facing. Dr. Abbey stated that he understood but noted we have excellent teachers and that he started out as a teacher for the blind and visually impaired and a wrestling coach and made \$8,100 to teach and \$200 to coach. We're in a different world today and in order to attract qualified teachers we need to pay them.

Dick White noted that if the Unions agreed to a pay freeze, it would save \$1,800,000. He also inquired about furloughs. Dr. Abbey stated the savings would actually be \$983,000 and that they could not do furloughs.

It was noted that Danbury and Fairfield had a salary freeze for everyone but BOE employees.

After being questioned about the apparent difference in cost per student between Darien and New Canaan, Dr. Abbey noted that it is not an accurate comparison as Darien does not include much of their capital/operational costs in that calculation that New Canaan includes. In addition Darien does not have an elementary foreign language program (\$250,000), Darien does not have to rent its central office (\$250,000), they handle grant process differently (they front load while we spread it out) and the BOE is billed by the Town for in kind services \$3,323,000 while Darien's BOE is billed \$728,000.

Dr. Abbey stated the BOE was negotiating a new lease for central office and looking at options.

Dr. DeWaele noted that enhanced opt-in for busing will allow flexible reduction in busing costs, capital project dollars can be carried forward a year and noted that the BOE returned \$62,000 to the Town's operating budget. He also inquired about the State Special Ed reimbursement and whether we should estimate it based on historical data. Dr. DeWaele also inquired that with 81% of our children attending the public schools last year, does BOE anticipate more with these difficult economic conditions? Dr. Abbey noted that while it is very difficult to estimate, they are anticipating 100 more students next year.

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom O'Dea, Secretary