



ORANGE, CT
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Board of Finance Budget Hearing

Thursday, April 21, 2022

High Plains Community Center Cafeteria - 7:00 p.m.

(Unapproved)

Attendance

Board of Finance Members Present: Chairman Kevin Houlihan, Vice Chairman James Leahy, Kevin Moffett, and Kevin McNabola

Board of Finance Members Absent: Joseph Nuzzo and Ajeet Jain

Staff: First Selectman James Zeoli, John Cifarelli, Finance Director; Audrey Geer, Assistant Finance Director; Mary Shaw, Town Clerk; Robert Brinton, Town Engineer; Deborah Satonick, Recording Secretary

Guests: Dr. Vincent Scarpetti, Superintendent of OBOE; Dr. Jennifer Byars, Superintendent of Amity; Members of the OBOE and Amity BOE

1. Call to Order & Introduction

- Chairman Houlihan called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. The meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Houlihan introduced the current members of the Orange Board of Finance, making note of the two new members as well as the previous members. Mr. Leahy advised that the meeting could be viewed live on YouTube through the Town website.

2. Discussion of the Budget for 2022-2023

The 2022-2023 Proposed Town Budget - Chairman Houlihan & Vice Chairman Leahy

- Both Chairman Houlihan and Vice Chairman Leahy presented the proposed 2022-2023 Town budget. Beginning with the budget development process, Mr. Leahy outlined the full scope of responsibilities of the Orange Board of Finance.
- Mr. Leahy highlighted the factors that have contributed to the Town of Orange maintaining a AAA credit rating. He also illustrated the impact of annual compound increases. Mr. Leahy reported that there was a 5.4% increase in the net Grand List this year, largely due to United Illuminating. He noted that this anomaly is unlikely to repeat itself in future years.
- The budget considerations included union wage increases, safety and security, medical

insurance, gas prices, home heating costs, and inflation. The Orange Board of Finance voted unanimously to approve the Town budget with a 2.96% increase in spending.

The Orange Board of Education 2022-2023 Proposed Budget – Dr. Scarpetti

- Dr. Scarpetti began his presentation by acknowledging numerous members of the Board present in the audience. He proceeded to discuss their Mission Statement. Dr. Scarpetti also commended the teachers and all of the staff for their efforts in facing the many challenges during COVID.
- Dr. Scarpetti discussed the major budget drivers that had to be considered when preparing their budget. He noted that while Special Education decreased, the services provided to students have not be decreased. Their 2022-2023 budget increase is 3.06%.

The Amity 2022-2023 Proposed Budget – Dr. Jennifer Byars

- Dr. Byars acknowledge the many Board members present in the audience. She discussed the “Portrait of a Graduate,” academics, athletics and the arts at Amity. Several additional positions have been requested in this new budget that include a School Security Officer, an Information Security Support Technician, a Special Education Teacher, a Mental Health Clinician, a part time Pupil Services Administrative Assistant, a middle school Life Arts Digital Media Teacher, and a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Instructional Coach. The total budget increase is 3.99%.
- Mr. Leahy noted that the Town of Orange has included a \$700k refund from Amity in the 2022-2023 proposed budget. Chairman Houlihan confirmed that the Fund Balance will not be used in the new budget and that while the Capital Expenditures have not been fully determined, they will not be included in the 2022-2023 operating budget.

3. Town Budget Overview

- Mr. Leahy discussed the projected revenue in terms of property taxes, the Amity refund, our Fund Balance, and Intergovernmental Revenue. The Intergovernmental revenue of \$700k is to off-set the lower mill rate on motor vehicle taxes. The expenditures for the Town were reduced in seven areas by a total of \$410,400.
- In the proposed 2022-2023 budget, Amity’s share of the overall budget is a 59%, followed by the OBOE at 30% and the Town at 15%. Mr. Leahy highlighted the top ten taxpayers in the town, with United Illuminating being number one, followed by Southern CT. Gas Company as number two. Lastly, Mr. Leahy encouraged everyone to come on May 18th to vote on the 2022-2023 budget.

4. Questions and Answers

Misty Barnes – 23 Whitney Lane

Ms. Barnes indicated that she intends to vote “No” on the Amity budget as she does not want

her taxpaying dollars to be used to fund a full time Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Instructional Coach. She does not approve of this curriculum as she believes that this is the responsibility of the parents, allowing the school to focus strictly on academics.

Warren Mudrick – 411 Prudden Lane

Mr. Mudrick distributed copies of an eight page article in the New American Magazine discussing the Critical Race Theory. He felt that this topic has no place at Amity. He also stated that the United States spends more money per student than any other country but we have some of the lowest test scores.

Liz Nucifora – 356 Lambert Road

Ms. Nucifora does not approve of sex education in the school that teaches multiple genders, sex between same sex, or Critical Race Theory. She asked if she can sign a waiver to opt her own children out of this curriculum. (No answer was given from the superintendent at the meeting.)

Michele Tenney – 327 Ann Rose Drive

Ms. Tenney is concerned that Amity's curriculum is overstepping its boundaries by teaching topics that should be discussed between parents and their children in the privacy of their home. She feels that this type of curriculum is causing division rather than unity.

Jude Toohey – 606 Grassy Hill Road

Ms. Tooney feels that parents should be allowed to parent their children as they choose fit and that Amity should be solely concerned with their academic education. She also stated that a 59% increase is extreme in light of the current economy.

Glen Ketchian – 380 Wildwood Drive

Mr. Ketchian thanked Mr. Zeoli, Dr. Scarpetti and the entire Orange Board of Education for putting together a fiscally sound budget. He spoke about the organized racial protest at Amity two weeks ago and the negative consequences of this event. Racial slurs were screamed out, students were out of control, and extra police were required, and the entire event was obscene. This event was sponsored by Dr. Byars. It was ultimately posted on YouTube and felt it had negative consequences to many students. Mr. Ketchian will not be voting for the Amity budget because of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Instructional Coach.

Chris Browe – 160 Ohman Avenue

Mr. Browe is on the Amity Board of Education and advised that he will stay after the meeting to discuss any concerns parents may have regarding their proposed budget.

Anthony Scarinzi – 290 Oakview Drive Ext.

Mr. Scarinzi noted that student enrollment is declining, Amity continues to have over 3 million dollar surplus, and their budget requests each year continue to increase. He will not be voting for the 2022-2023 budget.

Maryellen Holden – 814 Grassy Hill Road

Ms. Holden spoke on diversity in the schools and did not see an issue with a bit more

diversity. She felt that open communication between parents and the school administration is very important and a balanced approach to sex education and related topics is equally as important.

Mitch Goldblatt – 291 Drummond Road

Mr. Goldblatt spoke in favor of an additional security guard at the Amity High School. He felt that diversity, equality, and inclusion are all positive goals in light of the past anti-Semitism in Orange. Mr. Goldblatt also requested that any undesignated funds in the budget be used for paving, as some of the side roads are in dire need of paving.

Bonnie Pelaccia – 419 Orange Center Road

Ms. Pelaccia is unhappy with the Amity curriculum and has spoken on several occasions to the Amity Board of Education and claim that they refuse to listen to their opinions. She is no longer interested in engaging in futile conversations.

First Selectman Zeoli – Old Tavern Road

Mr. Zeoli advised that he has received a number of emails from parents concerned about the Amity curriculum. He noted that residents in Woodbridge and Bethany might have a different viewpoint on this topic. He felt that everyone has a right to be heard. He, likewise, expressed some reservations regarding the curriculum at Amity.

Mr. Zeoli mentioned that the property revaluation will be postponed until next year and discussed economic development within the town.

4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah Satonick
Recording Secretary