

Draft Minutes
Board of Finance Regular Meeting
March 11, 2010
7:30 PM - Room 206

Chairman Stegelmann called the meeting to order at 7:37 PM. In attendance were Ms. Banks, Ms. Bora, Mr. Duwan, Ms. Mogenson, Mr. Stegelmann, Mr. Zagrodzky and town Finance Director, Ms. Buch. Ms. Mao was absent. The meeting was taped by Channel 79.

The Board reviewed an appropriation request from the Dept. of Public Works to replace lighting for the parking lot at Noroton Train Station. The existing lights at this location have failed and the State Dept of Transportation (CT-DOT) is requiring us to relocate the existing light poles closer to Heights Road. This changes the project from a maintenance to a capital project. The Board of Finance had previously approved \$36,000 for an engineering study for this project and the proposal is the result of that study. Mr. Steeger is requesting \$173,000 to install 19 new Halide lights on steel poles including 8 lights at the parking lot entrance. LED lights were not appropriate because they do not throw enough light and Halide is more energy efficient than incandescent. Note: CT-DOT plans to replace platform lighting at the station using federal stimulus money. This will free up \$290,000 of the town's capital improvement plan scheduled for fiscal year 2011. Ms. Banks moved to approve the request which was seconded and approved 6-0.

Mr. Zagrodzky moved to begin budget discussions, which was seconded. The Board reviewed the components of the Community Environment budget section, excepting those that were discussed at the 3/4 meeting. Mr. Stegelmann asked that a portion of salary costs related to Development Planning and Management be flagged as a potential budget cut. However, it was noted that there are several new restaurants under development and redevelopment of the Heights business district will also be considered soon.

Ms. Banks offered to help Mr. Duwan in reviewing the Police Dept. budget as Ms. Mao is not available for a time.

School Superintendent, Don Fital, Board of Education Chair Kim Westcott and Board of Education member Clara Sartori joined the meeting to discuss rising CT House Bill #5425. This bill would change the legal burden of proof from the Board of Education to the party requesting a hearing, in disputes related to Special Education services. It would bring Connecticut in compliance with a Federal Supreme Court ruling, as CT is currently one of only two states that do not follow the federal precedent. Mr. Fital noted an increasing level of Special Education expenditures related to lawsuits and settlements and felt that some settlements were done to avoid the high cost of having to provide "the preponderance of evidence" under the current state burden of proof standard.

Board of Finance members noted that rising legal costs divert resources away from the delivery of Special Education services and that this issue has a clear financial impact on

the school budget. Also, this is another unfunded mandate from the State at the same time they are reducing the level of Excess Cost reimbursement related to Special Education.

Mr. Zagrodzky moved that the Board of Finance draft a statement encouraging our state legislators to move and approve House Bill #5425. The motion passed 6-0.

The Board then reviewed budgets for Darien's three fire departments, excepting the Fire Commission. They discussed the use of town grant money awarded to the Fire Departments. Grant funding is generally used to pay day to day facility operating expenses and does not fully cover those costs. Ms. Bora and Mr. Zagrodzky, who met with Fire Dept. officials, felt these funds were being used appropriately.

The Board agreed to look closer at the motor fuel and heating fuel usage and pricing assumptions across the various fire departments and discussed fire related capital projects. It is expected that construction of a new fire tower will require \$200,000 that should be budgeted over several years rather than a large one-time expense. The Board questioned a request from the Darien Fire Dept. for \$23,000 to connect a donated boiler, since the town does not own that building.

Mr. Stegelmann reviewed the Darien Library budget. Their budget request is up 2.3% over last year. Significantly higher than expected energy costs were offset by cost controls related to compensation and benefits. Mr. Stegelmann received a copy of the Library's audit report as requested and did not find issues with it. He did not ask for any budget reductions related to the library and the Board concurred.

Mr. Duwan moved to adjourn which was seconded and the meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Gwen Mogenson
Acting Clerk