

New Hartford Board of Finance  
Regular Meeting  
Tuesday, February 9, 2016 @ 7 p.m.

**Present** Board of Finance Chairman Jim Fitzgerald, Members Steve Tuxbury, Ben Witte, Dan Charest, Bart Baxter, Alternates Bill Coates, Robert Nilsson, Bookkeeper Annie Witte, Supt. of Schools Brian Murphy, BOE Chairman Sue Lundin, BOE members: Jennifer Zenuh, Jennifer Benaitis, Pat Spaziana, Republican-American Reporter Kathryn Boughton, Members of the Public Tom Buzzzi, Robert Bailey, Carolyn Solak, Kelly O'Dell Longhi, Karl Hermonat, Lou Helt, Jay Bailey, Linda Goff, Kirk Damboise, and several others, Recording Secretary Penny Miller.

**Absent** Reggie Smith, Jr.

Chairman Fitzgerald called the meeting in the Senior Center to order at 7:02 p.m.

**Seating of Alternates** Robert Nilsson was seated for member Smith.

**Adoption / Revision of Agenda** None

**Approval of Minutes: January 12, 2016 BOF Meeting**

As there was a question of which attachments were submitted to the Town Clerk with the January 12<sup>th</sup> minutes, the motion to approve was tabled until the next BOF meeting.

**Communications to Board of Finance**

Chairman Fitzgerald said the he and the rest of the Board of Finance members and alternates received at their personnel home address a letter from *Northwestern Regional School District #7 – Board of Education*. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that it had taken from last April / May for this letter to be written and sent. He feels, in his opinion that it is being written to head off where they are going with this year's budget. He and member Smith had attended their district meeting the night before the referendum along with other BOF members from Barkhamsted. To understand that we had questions about their budget only to find out that hopefully it wasn't intentional that we find it very troublesome that they would budget \$50,000 for Technology and then spend \$150,000 - \$200,000, as an example. When further pressed on the question their response was that if we really budget what we are going to spend the people won't approve it.

Member Witte said for the record the letter refers to Chairman Jim Fitzgerald and not Ben Witte. He has been on this board for 15 – 17 years and was chairman for several of them. He has seen board chairmen and board members advocate their positions. The point of the letter is the manner with which they were addressed and they felt personally attacked. Mr. Witte closed with that we address the tenor as a board and treat them with respect.

Mr. Baxter said we need to have the approach that we are going to try to be respectful and start a respectful discussion. Mr. Tuxbury said that respect goes two ways. Honest and truthful numbers are also important.

**Opportunity for Public Comment**

Chairman Fitzgerald noted that it appeared that there were several residents present to address the Board that he would allow 30 minutes for public comment, with a three minute time limit for each speaker.

Robert Bailey of 575 Main Street recently bought a home in New Hartford. He was a homeowner for less than 6 months when the WPCA contacted him about his home not being connected to the sewer system. The town needs to provide more monetary support to the WPCA through a general tax.

Karl Hermonat of 433 Cedar Lane doesn't know anything about sewerage or the issue but wonders if it is possible to tax everyone in town for the cost but then create a voucher system whether contracting with a local sewer provider or the town buying its own truck and giving everyone in town free sewerage disposal. Would this help to offset the cost? He was really there to urge the Board of Finance to ask the Board of Education to strongly consider the outcome of the upcoming vote. And come back to the Board of Finance with a budget that reflects Bakerville School remaining open. Resolving the per pupil cost in our school system can't be resolved in a year. Instead it should be addressed as a long-term issue. We need review the cost of the administrators we have with our elementary and Region 7 system. It seems irrational to have the number of Superintendents within all the Region 7 school districts for elementary as well as the superintendent managing Region 7 and that should be the focus. He urges the Board of Finance to scrutinize the town budget and cut unnecessary items from the budget. He encourages everyone to attend the Region 7 budget hearings.

Carolyn Solak of 3 Barella Road mailed her letter to all the general mail for the Board of Finance, Board of Education & Board of Selectman. She read her letter in its entirety and it is attached as part of these minutes.

Tom Buzzi of 192 Reservoir Road said that everyone should pay attention to what happens up on the hill. He attended one meeting up there and the first order of business was to discuss buying property next to the school to expand the parking. The cost was \$400,000. To the board's credit they turned it down. There is money at that school to buy property so that the students don't have to walk so far to class. If they cut that number in half that is money they have to spend on additional parking. We as a public have been hammering our town boards to reduce their budgets. As a group we need to take the fight up the hill and make them feel the presence of our town. I was the only member of our town besides our representatives at that meeting. We need to keep the pressure on their board. Mr. Fitzgerald asked Mr. Buzzi if he had a copy and would share it with the Board of Finance. He replied that he would.

Kelly O'Dell Longhi of 9 O'Keefe Lane said the administrative costs are of a big concern to her. She finds it interesting that we are keeping all of the administration but cutting staff – a nurse, custodian and secretary. We are not losing any children. There are 60 children moving up to Antolini and only 1 secretary with 60 more students. You are cutting a nurse and if someone gets hurt on the playground who is left in the building to help with emergencies. She can't justify closing a school with the size of the classes. You still have class sizes from 19 – 21. The class sizes will go up this spring when people start looking for a new home here in New Hartford. She moved here for the low class sizes and thought the

class sizes were unique. Education is the top priority for my children. I think I made a bad moving to New Hartford.

Lou Helt of 55 Birdsvie Avenue said when looking at the school budget on Page 9 where they list the decreases due to the closing of Bakerville School - it shows \$90,000 in expenses for maintenance and repairs and that will go to the town. Personnel staff \$120,000 for cutting the custodian, nurse and secretary. In the short term we will need to pay their unemployment. We will still need custodian to maintain Bakerville. We will pay unemployment for the one we let go and then pay for someone new. These numbers don't add up to enough savings to warrant closing a new school when New Hartford Elementary will be at capacity. Three new subdivisions came to P&Z in the last few weeks. If we see an increase in the population of the schools are we going to put an addition on Antolini? It doesn't make financial sense to me.

Jay Bailey of 2 Davis Road asked the board if they were going to comment on the issues. Mr. Fitzgerald said they were here to listen to the public. They have attended the meetings of the Board of Education. Jim said we need to look hard and fast at the numbers. The Board of Finance advised Mr. Fitzgerald to write to the Board of Education to cut costs and stay within the budget. We are here to listen and we are going through the budget season now.

Mr. Fitzgerald said that Mr. Jerram as a former member of the Region 7 BOE might speak as to their process. Mr. Jerram said that tomorrow night is the next meeting at Region 7 and it starts at 6 p.m. Some of the comments are true. We do pay for two superintendents. We pay per student and is based on proportional attendance from last year. Our budget costs to them – they do their budget and then look how the children change. If our 500 students remain the same but the population changes to 900 – they can keep the budget line item the same but our cost still goes up proportionately. Our budget has gone up 2.1 million to Region 7.

Mr. Jerram continued that most people came here interested in the process for Bakerville. The selectmen have just finished and the informational vote will be on March 15<sup>th</sup>. The Board of Finance has their first budget meeting on Saturday, March 12<sup>th</sup>. There is still time to make changes to the budget. We don't vote on the budgets until the first week of May. A mailing will go out on or about February 19<sup>th</sup>. There will be a town meeting before we adjourn to the referendum on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Kirk Damboise of 24 Barberry Drive asked if the Board of Finance can request two budgets from the Board of Education. One with the school open and one with it closed. Mr. Fitzgerald responded that the Board of Education will submit a budget to the Board of Finance and they might submit multiple revisions. They did submit one last week to the BOE and the public. From the Board of Finance standpoint we don't go into detail but they do go through it line by line and the BOE justifies their increases and decreases. The Board of Finance will plug in the bottom line number to the overall budget. It is up to the Board of Ed to submit one, two or three budgets. Mr. Damboise asked if the budget they submit is approved and then through the year it is doubled do monies still get allocated to it? Mr. Fitzgerald said the only variable they deal with is the special education line item.

Linda Goff of 291 Maple Hollow Road said at the BOE meeting Mr. Murphy said he had locked in a rate of \$1.95 for heating fuel. Does this mean when it comes time to purchase and we can purchase at \$1.49

who will see the savings? When he says we are locked in at \$1.95 does that mean we are paying \$1.95 no matter what? If we could get fuel at a lower fuel rate we could save \$15,000 to \$20,000. Do we negotiate our phone & electric rates every year? We should try and re-negotiate. The little things add up to big things. I wouldn't be proud of locking in at \$1.95 when the fuel prices are dropping. We should try to renegotiate. Mr. Fitzgerald said that he hoped they would. The BOE has their responsibility to do what they can do to manage the budget and hopefully negotiate the best across the board. He said that the town does. Once we give the BOE their number they can do with it what they want to do. If you want to make sure they are negotiating then show up at their meetings as the BOF can't tell them what to do. Mrs. Goff responded that they don't get much say at their meetings.

Kelly O'Dell Longhi said thank you for listening and explaining the budget process. Mr. Fitzgerald thanked her for attending.

Jay Bailey said you didn't reply to the WPCA issue. He realizes that the children and Board of Education are more important but we need to stop putting the WPCA on the back burner. Mr. Fitzgerald said from the Board of Finance standpoint the WPCA is a taxing authority and report to the Board of Selectman. The WPCA is responsible for their budget. They bring their package to the Board of Selectman and that is brought to the Board of Finance. So far it hasn't been presented this year. To put an appropriation into the budget it needs to go to the Board of Finance. Mr. Jerram said there was a study done last year and at the last meeting they approved transfers of \$20,000 to do another study. Mr. Bailey went on to say that he sees the support for the school and that seeing that makes him support Bakerville School and would pay additional taxes to keep it open and he hoped that the town would be willing to support paying for the sewer treatment plant because that is a town asset as well.

### **Reports & Updates**

**New Hartford Board of Education** – Superintendent Murphy and Chairperson Sue Lundin

Mr. Murphy said the initial budget was presented at the last BOE meeting with a decrease of 2.72%. There will be several more meetings regarding the budget. If you need additional information – call him and he will talk it over with you.

Mr. Fitzgerald said that's a \$217,208 decrease from last year that's \$7.9 to \$7.7 million. He expects that this number is still fluid. Mr. Tuxbury asked if there were any changes to the expected revenue. Mr. Murphy responded there has been a decrease in the ECS funding of \$17,000 that money goes to the town. Mr. Fitzgerald asked if the number was based on the current plan for two schools. Mr. Murphy said he is working with the chairman on a number if there are three schools.

### **Bookkeeper's Report**

Ms. Witte reported that the collection rate from the tax collector is 92.42%. Mrs. Sheffield turned over \$5 million this week. We do have a bonus from Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and we will see a decrease of \$37,910. She is waiting to hear on excess cost and we won't have that number until April of this year. Mr. Tuxbury said there are additional line items that weren't in the original budget. Ms. Witte said the \$2 million is for the construction projects that we received and will go back to the general fund. Preschool tuition is a pass through, the school tuitions and special education costs were all lumped together and not specifically broken out. That is how they came in on the checks from the state and she has broken them out. Mr. Tuxbury asked if we are short and she replied, yes. Mr.

Fitzgerald said on the taxes the collection rate is 92.42%. Ms. Witte said her reports are always a month in arrears. She still feels confident. The only question is next year with motor vehicles.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

Mr. Fitzgerald said that Mr. Ross was not able to attend the meeting. He did submit a report. It is the bi-monthly update.

#### **First Selectman's Report**

Mr. Jerram reported they are doing pretty good with expenses. We had a big invoice for salt about \$15,000. There haven't been any significant repairs. The grand list shows about \$3.5 million but that does not include the development down on Route 44. That will happen with next year's budget. The Carpenter Road Bridge is going forward. The permits & easements are done, wetlands review is in process. A grant was done \$540,000 for downtown improvements all to do to with Rails to Trails. The budget timeline is shifting into high gear. We made some revisions to the capital plan. Some administrative stuff with the voting has been taken care of. We do have sales of two wetland lots to be sold to abutters that will offset \$15,000 to the general fund.

#### **FY 2016-2017**

##### **Budget Discussion, Grand List Status, Current Projections**

Mr. Fitzgerald sent the grand list number out to the board. The estimate total with the real estate personal property and motor vehicle Ms. Paul has taken an average and came up with the supplemental number of 6.37690. Document filed with these minutes.

Mr. Tuxbury said hearing what he heard from the auditors we don't have a lot of surplus when we go into the budget. He is interested to see where we will be with the revenues.

#### **Quick Review of the Budget Timeline for 2016**

Mr. Fitzgerald said it is published every year and is subject to modification. We typically end up with more special meetings than are listed. The timeline is filed with these minutes. The public is welcome to attend the meeting on Saturday, March 12<sup>th</sup>. There is no chance to speak but you are welcome to attend. The public hearing on April 6<sup>th</sup> is when all the entities, local BOE, Region 7 and Town Government, come together to present their budgets to the public. It is open to discussion as the three entities are there to answer your questions.

If the total 'no' votes from New Hartford voters overrides the votes of the other 3 towns in Region 7, then the Region 7 budget could be voted down and Region 7 would need to redo it.

#### **CAPEX**

##### **Capital subcommittee CAPEX plan draft – Update on Capital Plan Submissions**

Mr. Coates reviewed the School Capital Plan last fall with Supt. Murphy and BOE member Josh Adams. There are no changes. For the FYE 2017 there is \$89,000 in capital. Mr. Tuxbury asked Mr. Murphy is the Antolini kitchen and the doors are separate? Mr. Murphy said they are separate.

Mr. Jerram didn't complete the entirety of the 5-year plan. He did present the 2016-2017 Capital Project List (filed with these minutes). Last year the town supported a major move on upgrading the

town vehicles. With these purchases we have reduced the average age of our vehicles. The Capital Plan has not substantially altered from what was presented last year. We want to buy another large truck. A grant was done for Downtown Improvements. We propose working on the downtown sidewalks. Mr. Fitzgerald asked Mr. Murphy if the phone system they are doing is the same vendor that the town is talking to. Supt. Murphy will meet with Mr. Jerram to see if they can use the same vendor for upgrading the phone system and save some money. The five-year plan will be available at the next meeting.

**CAPEX Chair Assignment**

Mr. Fitzgerald said that Bill Coates has done a great job. He will be finishing up this year. We will be picking it up after budget referendum. It has been relatively easy now that we have a five-year plan for both the town and schools.

**Other Items to Come Before the Board**

None

**MOTION:** by Witte, second Charest to adjourn at 8:57 p.m.

*Unanimous*

Respectfully submitted,

Penny Miller  
Recording Secretary

**Attachments:**

Letter from Northwestern Regional School District #7 – Board of Education  
Letter from Carolyn Solak to all boards  
Revenue Report  
Expenditures Report  
Grand List Change 2015 vs. 2014  
Budget Time Line  
Capital Plan – New Hartford BOE & Town Government