1. APPROVED BET Budget Comm. Public Hearing Minutes

Documents:

APPROVED_BET_BUDGET_COMM_PUBLIC_HEARING_MINUTES_02-14-05.PDF
PRESENT

Committee: Valeria P. Storms, Chairman
Jara Burnett, Laurence Simon, Stephen Walko

Staff: Peter Mynarski, Roland Gieger, Finance; Ed Gomeau, Town Administrator; Dr. Larry Leverett, Superintendent of Schools; Pat Chila, Police Department; Dan Warzoha, Fire Chief

Board: Peter Berg, Kathryn Guimard, Michael Mason, Alma Rutgers, Peter Tesei

Board Ex Officio: James A. Lash, First Selectman; Peter Crumbine, Penny Monahan, Selectmen


Ms. Storms called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. She welcomed everyone to the Public Hearing on the 2005-2006 budget. Ms. Storms referred the public to the attendance sheet at the back of the room and the sign up slips for those intending to speak on a particular budget item. She said that also available were the First Selectman’s transmittal letter and the Capital Projects rating sheet.

Ms. Storms reviewed the budget process, the CIP process, the Budget Committee Guidelines and the First Selectman’s ten year Capital Plan. She also noted significant upcoming dates in the budget process: the Budget Committee Decision Day, February 24; the BET Public Hearing, March 22; the BET Budget vote, March 23; the RTM vote on the Budget in May, followed by the setting of a mill rate and the level of contingency by the BET.
Ms. Storms said that each speaker would have a three-minute time limit. Jara Burnett would be the timekeeper.

SPEAKERS

1. SUE ROGERS, GLENVILLE SCHOOL PTA, CO-PRESIDENT
Ms. Rogers spoke in support of the Glenville School Educational Specifications Study in the CIP for the 2005-2006 fiscal year. “We are quite thankful that a year later our project has found its rightful place in the Capital Improvements Project List.” This study is merely the first step in what is sure to be a long process in getting Glenville School the “renovations it desperately needs,” she said. The PTA conducted a survey last month of the approximately 330 families at Glenville School. Two hundred responses were received, of which 4% clearly stated that the physical environment at the school was their greatest concern and 72% felt that the open classroom design is not conducive to their children’s learning. There is an $8 million placeholder in the CIP for 2006-2007. “We need to be clear,” Ms. Rogers said, “That this figure is merely based on a preliminary study taken at Glenville School several years ago.” A full architectural and engineering study still needs to be completed before any costs can truly be estimated. If the completed URS study recommends a figure higher than the original estimate, Glenville School should not be held to the $8 million placeholder.

2. JENNIFER BOONE – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Ms. Boone spoke in favor of the Lockwood Road sidewalk. She said that she has three young children. She cannot walk her children safely to the elementary school the nursery school, the park and the library due to the dangerous nature of Lockwood Road. Three times in the last few months she has witnessed near misses on Lockwood Road where pedestrians have almost been hit by cars.

3. WILLIAM WOLFE – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Wolfe said that he and his wife have lived at 141 Lockwood Road for over forty years, and they are very much opposed to putting a sidewalk on the north side of their street. They think it will be an enormously expensive and difficult project that would provide only minimum benefits to anyone. It has several big disadvantages to residents on the north side of the street. He and his wife are both eighty years old and strenuously object to having the medical burden imposed upon them of having to remove heavy snow from the sidewalk several times a day, following the snow plows, as well as to the liability imposed on them. A sidewalk on the north side of the street would not improve safety very much. They see very few people walking along the road in either direction. Children walking to school would have to cross Lockwood Road since both Riverside School and Eastern Middle School are on the opposite side of the street, and none of the side streets have sidewalks.
Mr. Wolfe and his wife hope the Budget Committee will oppose this questionable project and use the money for more worthwhile programs.

4. FRANKLIN BLOOMER – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Bloomer, an RTM member from District 5, said that he agrees with the write up in the Budget Book: 1) the sidewalk has been requested by residents for many years, and 2) there is strong public support for this project. This is a project which is needed and which the community wants.

5. JENNIFER DAYTON – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Ms. Dayton, an RTM member from District 5, said that a solution for expanded traffic on Lockwood Road is needed. There is an economic benefit to the Lockwood Road sidewalk. Lockwood Road is a connector between the Riverside and Old Greenwich communities. A sidewalk will encourage Riverside families to walk to the Old Greenwich business district and will benefit small businesses. The Lockwood Road sidewalk will strengthen smart growth principles while reducing traffic.

6. SCOTT SMITH – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Smith said that he, his wife and children live on Winthrop Drive. They moved there because of the proximity to the schools, the Perrot Library and Binney Park. They would like to walk to these places but cannot because Lockwood Road is so dangerous.

7. DAVID HOPPER – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Hopper said that one of the reasons that there are not too many people walking on Lockwood Road is because it is too dangerous. He hopes the Budget Committee will support this sidewalk project.

8. RANDY KELEHER – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Keleher supports the Lockwood Road sidewalk project. He said it would benefit children walking to school. It would also benefit older persons in the neighborhood who would love to be able to walk to the Perrot Library. This is a very dangerous road to walk on. He realizes that sidewalks do create some issues related to snow shoveling and liabilities, but offered to shovel snow himself for those feeling it to be a hardship.

9. ALLISON KURAL – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Ms. Kural spoke on behalf of the Riverside Association, and as a parent of two young children, to urge the members of the BET Budget Committee to keep the funding in the budget for the construction of a sidewalk on Lockwood Road. She said that there is an overwhelming safety need and tremendous community support for this sidewalk. There are many people in favor of this project who could not come tonight, she said. She read the names of eight families who live on the north side of Lockwood Road, where the sidewalk will go, who could not be here and are in favor of his project. Ms.
Kural then asked all those present in the room who are in favor of the sidewalk to stand.

10. THOMAS HESLENFELD – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Heslenfeld said that he lives on the north side of Lockwood Road and is in favor of the sidewalk. It is a very dangerous situation, he said.

11. LESLIE MORIARTY – PTA COUNCIL – SCHOOLS BUDGET
Ms. Moriarty, President of the PTA Council, said that the Council, which represents all 15 Greenwich schools, is strongly committed to supporting the schools budget that is before the Budget Committee. The Council supports both the Capital and operating budgets as presented.

With regard to the Capital budget, the Council supports the ten-year plan for funding both school and town projects, as well as the short term financing strategy required to cover the cash flow imbalance. They will lend their voice to gain the support of the RTM, if necessary, because “we believe in a timely completion of identified projects.”

With regard to the operating budget, the PTA Council Executive Board met with First Selectman Lash to better understand his concerns that were presented to the Budget Committee last Monday. They understand his concern over the lack of a long term operating strategy tied to enrollment projections and share some of those concerns. However, they disagree with Mr. Lash on the approach to the budget that is before the Budget Committee. The drop in enrollment has forced the issue of the teachers’ contract to the forefront once again. In order to maintain the programs and services currently delivered, the full 5.9% increase in teachers’ pay needs to be included in the budget expectations. This accounts for $1.4 million of the disputed $2 million. The PTA Council feels strongly that the BET needs to fund this contractual obligation. The remaining $600,000 covers a number of programs that were planned and implemented that are not directly tied to enrollment. The current budget proposal includes over $800,000 in cuts that will take planning and management changes to implement. There is a real change being discussed and happening at the District Administration level. The BET needs to be cognizant of the challenges it takes to implement those changes and the time it takes to make sure they happen appropriately.

The PTA Council asks the Budget Committee to support this Administration in turning the corner to create a more efficient and productive organization. They ask the Budget Committee to support this operating budget as presented and allow the staff the time to adjust their programs, services and delivery models in an organized way.

The Administration recognizes the challenges presented by a flat, or declining enrollment, and will be able to "respond in a way that does not negatively
affect our children. We only have one shot to do this correctly because a lost year can never be regained.”

12. NANCY SHEALY – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Ms. Shealy lives with her mother at 151 Lockwood Road, toward the bottom of Lockwood at Sound Beach Avenue. She said that proponents and opponents of the sidewalk agree that the road is very dangerous, very curvy and very narrow. In her opinion, it is not the best road for a sidewalk, particularly at the bottom because it is so narrow, there is a curve, and the grading is bad. There have been a lot of documented accidents, with cars skidding into her property and crashing into the stone wall at the east end of the property, precisely where the sidewalk would be. A much safer alternative would be to go down Linwood, down Peters, and down Old Greenwich Lane to Sound Beach Avenue. She and her mother are not pleased with the liability issues and snow shoveling, but the biggest concern is safety.

13. SYL PECORA, SR. – FRIENDS OF GRASS ISLAND – GRASS ISLAND FACILITIES
Mr. Pecora is the co-chairman of Friends of Grass Island. Mr. Pecora reviewed the history of the Grass Island Master Plan. Although the Planning and Zoning Commission approved the Master Plan, funding for the plan “disappeared.” Mr. Pecora said that “we are over that,” but we still need to keep up this park, boatyard and marina “in order to maintain it as the multimillion dollar area that it is.” The ramp for launching the boats is so bad that the boats get stuck, and it is not a safe launching ramp. The fencing around the maintenance shed that Parks and Recreation is asking for is necessary to contain valuable things such as generators for the islands. A new barrier to protect a walkway and to stop cars from going into the Sound needs to be completed around the perimeter. “We need to pass on the Police dock. We have a $400,000 boat tied to a dock that we should all be ashamed of.” Docks in that condition can cause an accident. The pavilions, designed pro bono by an architect, are needed to give the look of a quality entrance to a marina and a place to wait without getting wet in a rainstorm.

14. SUE STERN – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Ms. Stern lives with her husband, Peter, at 119 Lockwood Road, on the north side. They have three children ages 6, 4 and 1, and like many of their neighbors, they wish they could walk to the Riverside School, but it is too unsafe.

15. SAM ROMEO – GENERAL BUDGET AND BONDING
Mr. Romeo said that he is opposed to bonding because he believes it will send us down a slippery slope. Also, not included in the Capital Plan, is another $13 million that will be needed if a court settlement on the Tuchman property
is reached. Taxes will increase considerably even with bonding to fund a $300 million budget over the next ten years. A 3.79% increase (even a 3.5% increase) in today's dollars compounded over the next ten years amounts to considerable increases in the overall budget and in the mill rate. Over the last ten years the annual rate of inflation averaged 2.5%, while the Town's average yearly growth in spending was 4.8%. Although improvements and repairs need to be done, maybe we should be looking at them in terms of a "wish list" and a "must do" list. The civilian dispatcher will not reduce the budget, but will increase it. If we add $10 million to $11 million a year to the budget over ten years, plus $30 million a year for Capital improvements, this will be "a big bone for us to carry."

16. JULIE FARYNIARZ- RIVERSIDE SCHOOL PTA- LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK AND BOE BUDGET
Ms. Faryniarz, co-president of the Riverside School PTA, said that the Riverside School PTA supports the sidewalk on Lockwood Road. There are 110 elementary school age children (nearly one quarter of students attending Riverside School) that live on Lockwood Road, or streets right off Lockwood Road. This does not include the students that attend Eastern Middle School. The Riverside School has only one bus. This is from Indian Head Road. Children in the Lockwood Road area do not have the option to take a bus.

The Riverside School PTA Executive Board fully supports the Board of Education's 2005-2006 school budget as it was presented to the BET.

17. JOHN WALDRON – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Waldron lives on the north side of Lockwood Road. He lives in the community and wants to be able to walk his children safely to and from school. He also walks to the train and has almost been hit a dozen times in the night. While he fully supports the sidewalk, he would also like to see some traffic calming measures taken.

This concluded the list of speakers who had filled out written slips indicating a wish to speak on a particular topic. Ms. Storms then asked if there were others, who had not signed up, who wished to speak. A number of people came forward.

18, ROBERT PAPPAS – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK
Mr. Pappas lives with his wife and two children at 145 Lockwood Road. He is opposed to the sidewalk project 1) because of liability concerns, but also 2) because of safety issues (it will be dangerous to walk on the sidewalk unless there is traffic calming), 3) because of the need to shovel snow and 4) because of the lack of transparency (a map showing the
impact of the sidewalk on properties was not made available)

19. **WALTER SLACK – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Mr. Slack said that he supports the sidewalk. He said that, concerning liability issues, the homeowner is only held responsible where there has been negligence on the part of the homeowner.

20. **KAREN MEYER – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Ms. Meyer said that she lives on Verona Drive, off Lockwood Road. She said that Lockwood Road is very dangerous. Something needs to be done. Her concern for the Town is the existing liability situation where the official policy of the schools calls for children walking to school when, in fact, it is too dangerous to do so.

21. **JANICE RICHARDS- GREENWICH HIGH SCHOOL PTA- BOE BUDGET**
Ms. Richards is co-president of the Greenwich High School PTA. She said that the BOE and the Administration have done a very thoughtful analysis. The Greenwich High School PTA supports this budget.

22. **JIM DAINÉ – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Mr. Daine, an RTM member from District 5, spoke in support of the sidewalk. He lives off Riverside Avenue. He said that he has always found it interesting that Lockwood Road invites walkers with sidewalks at the Riverside Avenue end of Lockwood and then the sidewalks "just leave you in the middle of nowhere."

23. **CHRIS COLE – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Mr. Cole lives at 101 Lockwood Road. He finds it strange to be addressing a $1 million sidewalk budget when the traffic has not been addressed first. He supports the sidewalk but feels that between Druid and Lockwood Lanes it should be on the other side of the road because of the school. The biggest concern is the speed of the traffic and the lack of stop signs. These things should be addressed at the same time as the sidewalk.

24. **ERYNN ARNOLD – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Ms. Arnold lives on Winthrop Drive. She said that she wants to thank "the wonderful Arline Lomazzo" who is the head of the Pedestrian Safety Committee and who has been terrific "helping all of us to try and get our sidewalks that we so desperately need." Arline Lomazzo could not be here because she is in California. Ms. Arnold just wanted to point out that this project is the top priority for the Pedestrian Safety Committee.

Ms. Storms said that we all know how hard Arline Lomazzo has worked and that Arline was upset that she couldn’t be here this evening.
25. **NEIL RITTER – CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS**
Mr. Ritter said that he is a proponent of bonding for Capital projects. It makes immanent sense, he said, for this town to use long-term bonding for long-term projects. He said that one of the reasons we have had a build up of these Capital projects over these many years is that a Pay As You Go policy does not allow for the separation of Operating and Capital spending. It is high time that the BET, RTM and First Selectman look at this in a serious manner. The five-year term for bonding is “long-term bonding light.” It is a responsible way to respond to a build up of these Capital projects, and projects with a useful life of thirty to forty years shouldn’t necessarily be paid over a short-term period.

26. **STEPHANIE LARSON – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Ms. Larson lives on Lockwood Road and has two small children. She opposes the sidewalk and cites three reasons: 1) What is the real safety issue on Lockwood Road? It is the speeding cars. There should be traffic calming. 2) Lockwood Road is the second oldest road in the Town of Greenwich. There are historical elements on this road that will be destroyed and can never be replaced when this sidewalk is built, including stone walls and trees that are hundreds of years old. 3) This is an enormous tax expenditure for the benefit of a very limited number of people. The money should be spent instead for sidewalks on Mallard Drive where older children are walking to the High School.

27. **JIM O’BRIEN – COS COB SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM**
Mr. O’Brien, who is Chairman of the Cos Cob Safe Routes to School Program, thanked First Selectman, Jim Lash, and the BET for putting so much money into the budget for this program.

28. **PAM HUGHES – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Ms. Hughes, who lives on Crescent Road, said that she has never felt safe walking on Lockwood Road.

29. **CATHY BLOOD – LOCKWOOD ROAD SIDEWALK**
Ms. Blood, who lives off Lockwood Road, said that she has been involved in this process for a very long time, for over six years. There have been many studies, she said, and many things have been tried, including a traffic calming proposal that failed. This proposal has been very well thought out, and the need for those sidewalks is very clear. “Now is the time to act,” she said.

There being no more speakers, Ms. Storms thanked everyone for coming, saying “we hear you.”
The meeting ended at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alma Rutgers, Recording Secretary

Valeria P. Storms, Chairman