

**Town of Marlborough
Board of Selectmen Special Meeting
Marlborough Senior Center
April 7, 2004
7:00 p.m.**

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTION

Nancy Bader called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. in the meeting room of the Marlborough Senior Center. Nancy Bader and Sharon Reiner were in attendance. Nancy Bader stated that the purpose of the meeting was to hold a public forum on the RHAM Budget for fiscal year 2004/2005. Nancy Bader introduced members of the panel which included Al Covino, Mike Turner as members of the RHAM Board of Education and Mike Gut, Chairman of the Marlborough Board of Finance. Tom Hanley, another member of the RHAM Board of Education, joined the meeting a short time after it began. Nancy Bader stated that there will be a public hearing on April 26th for the town budget and a town meeting on May 10th.

2. RHAM BUDGET TO DATE

Al Covino began with a PowerPoint presentation on the RHAM budget process for FY 2004/2005 and copies of the data were distributed to the public. Mr. Covino explained that the RHAM BOE started with an austerity budget of \$15,932K. The first thing the Board did was restore co-curricular items totaling \$91,377. During the month of March there were various changes which brought the budget to \$18,475K or an 8.8% increase over the previous year. Mr. Covino explained that the RHAM BOE heard presentations from each department, program by program, so the members had a very clear understanding of what each department wanted to be included in the budget. Items that were added to the budget included interscholastic sports (\$300,000), textbooks (\$80,000), a High School Hall Monitor (\$25,000), the late bus (\$21,000) and various part-time teaching positions (\$176K), among others. He stated that there were many items that teachers/administrators wanted but that could not be included in the budget. Such items included a ½ time High School Guidance Counselor, computer replacement and video projectors. Mr. Covino stated that some major cuts to the budget included the reduction of facility management personnel (a \$55,500 cut) as well as the elimination of the IT Director (a \$67,897 cut). Mr. Covino explained that he felt pressure to reduce the budget given the twelve budget referendums last year. Additional possible reductions could include the assistant superintendent, Mr. Covino stated.

3. MARLBOROUGH FINANCIAL ISSUES

Mike Gut gave a brief overview of Marlborough's fiscal years 2004-2008 budget. The 2005 budget has not yet been passed, so the figures provided were preliminary. He noted that two years ago the town had virtually no debt. He explained that the town's five-year outlook includes no new capital expenditures. Instead, the five-year budget only includes financing for projects that have already been approved. Mr. Gut stated that that town is looking at other projects (such as the library expansion). His worksheet showed total town expenditures for FY 2005 at \$16,229K. The largest pieces are the RHAM budget (\$5,727K) and the local school budget (\$6,097K). Town operations are estimated to be \$3.5MN and debt service \$814K. He pointed out that taxes are estimated to increase 4.8% in 2005, 11.2% in 2006, 9.2% in 2007 and 2.7% in 2008, for a

cumulative increase in taxes of 30.7% over the five-year period. 1996 and 1997 will be heavy debt-paying years for the town as a result, primarily, of the various school bonds. Mr. Gut stated that the town's ability to put on new items will be constrained.

Nancy Bader made some brief remarks before moving onto public comments. She noted that the town has many groups competing for the same funds and there are a lot of demands on town services at present, i.e. the heavily used library and the outdated Town Hall building. She stated that several of the computers in Town Hall are DOS-based and they will not be supported in the future. She also mentioned Middlesex Hospital and its decision to begin charging the town for life support services it provides to the town. She cautioned residents not to think that the proposed business park will solve all the town's problems. She stated that the benefits of a business park will likely not be felt for several years out. Nancy Bader told everyone that the Board of Selectmen is in the process of forming a Community Development Advisory Group that will act as advisors to the Board and will manage projects that are currently underway as well develop a strategic plan for the town going forward.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ken Hjulstrom asked why the \$10K for the leased garage added to the RHAM budget couldn't be included in the building project. Al Covino stated that perhaps it can be wrapped up under the building project, but contingency funds are low at approx. \$200K.

Bob Wilcox asked whether the reassessment would affect the increase in taxes. Mike Gut stated that overall the re-evaluation won't have an impact on percentages, however some people's taxes will be slightly higher and others will be slightly lower. Bob Wilcox also asked what the rationale was for eliminating the IT Director position. Mike Turner replied that the Board looked over the previous years' budgets and many items were already below previous years' levels (supplies, library media center) and there weren't many areas they could cut. Tom Hanley stated that he disagreed with the Board's decision to cut the IT Director position.

Steve Schaus spoke on behalf of a large group of residents who have formed to help support the RHAM budget. Mr. Schaus stated that the group has followed the budget process and is advocating "cost excellent education". He stated that the group feels the proposed budget of an 8.8% increase is reasonable and necessary. He stated that the communities are not supporting the schools and it is hard to attract teachers and administrators. He stated that the Board has done a fine job scrutinizing the budget and looking at costs. He pointed out that 6.2% of the 8.8% increase represents bonding, salaries and basic needs. He stated that his group recommends that the IT Director position be reinstated. \$2.5MN of technology has been invested in the school and the towns have not yet received the educational value of this investment. He also recommended that the Board not cut the Assistant Superintendent position. He stated that the schools cannot improve education without this position. He stated that the Board needs to work with the community on consensus building. He also stated that his group can help sell the budget to the residents. He also stated that the C.O.C. issue should be treated separately.

There were several residents who spoke out against the RHAM BOE's decision to eliminate the IT Director position. Many residents stated that the towns had invested \$2.5MN in technology at the schools and didn't want to see that investment wasted. There were also several people who asked that the RHAM BOE not cut the Assistant Superintendent position.

Joanne Goode suggested that the Board use exit polls for the next budget vote. In the event the budget does not pass, exit polls could be very useful for the Board to help determine why the budget failed.

Eric Dawson offered the Board some suggestions on ways to reduce the budget without eliminating the IT Director position. He stated that an increased use of technology results in increased achievement for students. He also stated that RHAM needs an instructional IT Director and that education is moving away from leader-led instruction and is becoming more interactive and dynamic.

Mike Turner stated that the C.O.C. issue is not going to be resolved before then budget vote.

Overall, the majority of the residents felt very strongly that the elimination of the IT Director position was done in haste and they urged the RHAM Board members to reinstate the position. In addition, the majority of residents at the meeting were in favor of keeping the Assistant Superintendent position.

5. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Sciano