

Place: Raymond High School Media Center

Call to order: 7:00 p.m.

Members present: Gail Columbus, Colleen West Coates, , Doug Vogel, Ed Miller, Ed French, Sandy Ellis, Jim Tuttle, School Board Representative John Harmon and Selectmen's Representative Tim Auclair.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Hearing – Town of Raymond Operating Budget

Chairman Gail Columbus opened the Public Hearing on the Town of Raymond Operating Budget at 7:00 p.m. Chairman Columbus gave an overview of the budget process noting that the Budget Committee only recommends the budget bottom line and that the default budget cannot be changed. Chairman Columbus stated that the Board of Selectmen, Town Manager Richard Bates, Finance Director Grace Colette and Department Heads are present to answer any questions the public may have. She invited questions from the audience.

Tim Louis asked why the Town is projecting \$60,000 for the legal line when historically the costs have been double that amount.

Town Manager Bates stated that amount was a five year average.

Tim Auclair stated there are other legal lines that increased, such as Planning. The Planning Board legal line was increased to reflect actual numbers.

Community Development Director Creveling stated that a lot of the Planning Board legal costs are reimbursable. The Planning Department has been establishing legal and engineering escrows that cover those costs for each proposal submitted.

Peter Buckingham asked if there was a way to take these budget numbers and compare them to previous years. He stated for example, take last year's operating budget and compare to this year's operating budget.

Tim Auclair stated that the Operating Budget bottom line is effected by how many Warrant Articles are voted in.

Peter Buckingham stated that now that the Town has been revalued, it means that the Town has to spend "x" amount to increase the tax rate one dollar. The Town still spent another \$400,000 out of someone's pocket. In 1980 taxes went down. We had an increase but the Town gave money back to the tax payer. We need to view the tax impact rather than the tax rate.

Tim Auclair stated whatever increase you see will be taken out of the fund balance.

Finance Director Colette stated the proposed Operating Budget decreased.

Frank Bourque stated that in regards to the fund balance, he thought it was put aside for emergency use. If the Town takes money out this year, what happens when the Town doesn't have it next year to reach the same numbers?

Tim Auclair stated the fund balance cannot be touched without the tax payers approval. The State does have a recommended amount that should be in the fund balance, however, we have not reached that yet.

Frank Bourque asked if we are making a mistake by taking money out of the fund balance. He stated he thinks we are borrowing from our fund balance. People here are hoping the taxes would come down.

Colleen West Coates requested that the fund balance be looked at.

Town Manager Bates stated our fund balance is increasing because of anticipated revenue. The question is do we want to cut back to increase the fund balance?

Tim Auclair stated that there is approximately \$900,000 in the fund balance. The State wants the town to have three to five percent of the total revenue in a fund balance.

Colleen West Coates asked Mr. Bourque if he would prefer services to be provided by using the fund balance or to cut services but not using the fund balance.

Frank Bourque replied we are looking at Exit 4 development as well as potential business parks. We need to tighten our belts. People on fixed incomes want their tax bills to go down.

Tim Louis stated that he understands what the Board of Selectmen are trying to do by using the fund balance, but he didn't think it appropriate until it's time to set the tax rate.

Frank Bourque stated that last year we took a hit based upon the tax rebate for the Wal Mart distribution Center.

Town Manager Bates explained that \$325,000 was set aside for that purpose. It was about seventy cents on the tax rate. The impact was lessened by an agreement with Wal Mart to adjust the settlement over time.

Frank Bourque requested that the budget be put on the Town's web site.

Town Manager Bates stated that there are two issues with that. We do not have a person dedicated to the web site. The budget is a moving target and it would be difficult to keep the budget information kept up to date.

Tim Louis stated that the Public Works Department and Police lines are still up significantly and he asked what the reason for that would be.

Tim Auclair stated that not all of the 2006 bills have been processed so those lines will change.

Tina Thomas stated that there has been a lack of snow. She asked what happens if we do not spend all of that money?

Tim Auclair replied that if it's not expended either on snow removal or elsewhere it will go to the fund balance.

Ed French stated that the Budget Committee does not see the revenue and we cannot say how the town uses it. He stated he thought that Mr. Bourque was saying that the town should reduce expenses in order that the fund balance doesn't have to be used.

Peter Buckingham stated that the Budget Committee should watch expenses as much as possible. Businesses will be hurt by a high tax rate as well as residents.

Tim Louis asked why there was a large expense for the audit.

Finance Director Colette stated that new requirements have to be met.

Tim Auclair explained how the audit system works.

Doug Vogel asked if the people have any recommendations to lower a particular line item.

Tina Thomas stated that recreation is very high and asked if it could be changed.

Recreation Director Gordon explained that there are contractual obligations that must be met. The budget doesn't reflect the revenue.

Frank Bourque stated that he would like to see the Budget committee cut the budget by 3% and that would make up most of the money that may come from the fund balance.

Tim Auclair stated that we are very close to losing services if we do that.

Sandy Ellis stated that a lot of the recreation items are in and out.

Peter Buckingham asked if the overtime issue has been resolved.

Tim Auclair stated that overtime has been cut in most area. The only exceptions are Public Works, Police and Fire.

Town Manager Bates stated that the only recreation programs funded by the tax payers are the summer playground and elderly trips.

Selectman Wood stated that it had been discussed that people should pay for recreation programs at the total cost, however, that would be out of reach for most people.

Chairman Columbus closed the Public Hearing on the Town Operating Budget at 9:05 p.m.

There was a general discussion regarding the Warrant Articles.

Tim Auclair stated the Selectmen decided to reopen the Police contract for wages only which is what is reflected in Article 2. It is an amendment to the contract only.

Chief Salois stated that Raymond is behind other Towns that are similar in size by an average of 17%. The amendment would give a 10% increase to union members.

A discussion on Article 13 regarding the donation to various charities ensued. Ed Miller state that he would rather see this whole article go away because town government doesn't have any business donating money.

Tina Thomas agreed that government should not donate to charities.

Tim Louis stated that having seen these organizations in action, they are very beneficial to the town.

The exemptions were discussed and Town Manager Bates explained that it's not an increase it's keeping the level of exemptions the same.

Chairman Columbus thanked everyone for attending and their input. She announced that the Public Hearing for Town Warrant Articles is scheduled for January 11th, 2007.

Adjournment

MOTION: Sandy Ellis made a motion to adjourn. Colleen West Coates seconded. Voted unanimously in the affirmative. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Bette Patterson