

At the Public Hearing of the Town Council's Preliminary Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2004/2005 of the Town of North Kingstown, County of Washington, and State of Rhode Island, held in and for said Town, County, and State this 22nd day of April, 2004 at the Wickford Middle School Gymnasium, 250 Tower Hill Road, at 7:30 p.m.

PRESENT WERE: Elizabeth S. Dolan, President
Dale M. Grogan
Anthony F. Miccolis, Jr.
John A. Patterson (arrived at 7:40 p.m.)
Robin Porter

ALSO PRESENT: Richard Kerbel, Town Manager
Jeannette Holloway, Acting Town Clerk
Dr. James Halley, School Superintendent
Maureen Buck, School Department Comptroller
School Committee Members:
Donald DeFedele, Chairperson
Carol H. Hueston
Kevin D. Mulvey
Patricia E. Watkins
Denise A. Coppa
Barry M. Martasian
William C. Mudge, III

A tape recording of this meeting was made to supplement the written record.

1. Call to Order

The Public Hearing Meeting of the Town Council of the Town of North Kingstown held on April 22, 2004 was called to order by President Dolan.

2. Salute to Flag

President Dolan led those in attendance in saluting the flag.

3. School Fund Budget

President Dolan explained to those in attendance that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to listen and to take in your comments about the School Budget as it has been proposed. She requested that comments be kept to approximately 4 minutes and to please state your name and address for the court reporter. After the public has an opportunity to speak, then we will hear from the School Committee and the Town Council.

Mark Williams, 272 Boston Neck Road, is a teacher at the high school as well as a parent of school-aged children. He feels that it is necessary to spend more money on education and expressed concern that the high school is over crowded.

Paul Guillemette, 99 Mount View Avenue, stated that he is a 40-year resident and he may have to move in the future. His taxes have increased approximately \$1,200.00 in a year. He asked why Jamestown students are paying less tuition. He would like the Town to hire a controller to oversee the School Budget.

Jane Congdon, 7 Walnut Road, Principal of Davisville Middle School, stated that she has just returned from the Rose Garden where Kathleen Mellor was honored as National Teacher of the Year. She would like the Town Council's support of the School Budget so the schools can flourish and excel.

John Mitchell, 54 Buena Vista Drive, a member of the State Championship Lacrosse Team, asked that the relatively new Lacrosse Program not be cut.

Korinne Erikson, 33 Saratoga Road, wants to defend the School Budget as a parent of school-aged children. She stated that taxpayers couldn't have it both ways. She feels that if the new assessed values are fair market, she has an investment.

Barbara Fitzsimmons, 265 Essex Road, is the Curriculum Director for North Kingstown Schools. The School Committee decided on a 7-year curriculum cycle to maintain the quality of education in North Kingstown. She encouraged the Council to let them continue to maintain and let this wonderful education grow in North Kingstown.

Shirley Shehan, 41 Narragansett Street, congratulated Kathy Mellor. She stated that even with a reduced budget, Kathy would still be wonderful because she is a wonderful educator. She also stated that she felt the full-day kindergarten would cost more in the future. She was shocked to see an article in the paper where some School Committees receive full benefits when they retire. She congratulated the North Kingstown School Committee for not taking those benefits.

Patricia Kirwan, 605 Oak Hill Road, is a teacher in the district. She also just returned from Washington D.C. to witness Kathy Mellor receiving her award. She stated that North Kingstown has great schools, wonderful educators, and students.

Laura Smeraldi, 97 Sweet Lane, has two daughters who were educated in North Kingstown and is a paraprofessional and President of the North Kingstown Association of Paraprofessionals. She stated that her daughters feel that what they are doing now is a direct result of their education in North Kingstown Schools.

Christopher Prata, 135 Winsor Avenue, stated that there is not an unlimited amount of money for our school system and it is time to hold the line on spending.

Christine Stevens, 39 Surrey Lane, stated that she is glad the houses are worth what they are and is glad that the schools are as good as they are. She complimented Kathy Mellor, Davisville Middle School, and the North Kingstown School Department. She asked that the Council support this School Budget to allow the schools to continue to be what they are as well as improve.

John Leventhal, 77 Lawton Avenue, a retired individual, stated that he might have to leave this community because of the taxes. He finds it impossible to make any decision on this budget based on the budget figures as presented. He asked the School Committee whether the breakdown of the Budget Summary is available. He inquired what the line item, total ordinary recurring expenses, means in the budget.

Dr. Muriel Camarra, 45 Narrow Lane, discussed the student enrollment numbers over the last ten years, and in that time frame, there has only been an increase of approximately 165 students. Since 1994, the School Budget has grown from \$27,378,000 to \$48,931,000, which is a growth of \$21,550,000 for more or less the same number of students. There is no need to touch a teacher or a program. In East Greenwich, they charge for participation in the sports programs. Why is North Kingstown not investigating implementing the same policy? All we are saying is to be a little more careful and ask the right questions, it's your job.

Paul White, 48 Church Lane, stated that there is nothing more important than education and no child should be left behind. He is retired and he's devoting one half of his taxes to personnel costs at the schools. He questioned whether we are getting the value for our money and is looking toward the future that the personnel costs are clearly going up due to the four-year contract.

Harvey Waxman, 73 Wright Lane, urged the Town Council and the School Committee to adopt the principle of a zero based budget. It's too easy for items to creep into the budget without explanation. These problems could be solved and create a perfect budget and still have residents having to sell their home because we are using property taxes to support our municipalities. The answer would be to have the budget supplemented through State income taxes. It is not an investment if you have to sell the asset to pay your taxes. He encouraged the Town Council to advocate for changing the system of property tax at the State level.

Joseph Kochhan, 124 Walnut Road, a 35 year resident, stated that he is very concerned about the budget process. Our budgeting process is not a good process. He also supports the concept of zero balance budgeting and challenges every element along the line by asking the difficult questions.

Kathy Melanaphy, 24 Bellewood Court, a member of the Girls Lacrosse Team, would like the School Committee to know that cutting a sports team is a huge mistake. Being part of the Lacrosse Team has helped her obtain admission into a good college and has kept her with a strong state of mind. Please do not cut the sports.

Konrad Streuli, 161 Ferry Road, Saunderstown, stated that there was an interesting piece that appeared in the Rhode Island Reporting regarding problems by raising money for property taxes through income tax. There is one problem with those residents that live here six months out of the year but declare their residency in another state and pay taxes elsewhere. There would have to be a way to tax those people or properties. The School Budget is too difficult to interpret. If we were able to separate the property tax issue from the budget's educational quality issues, it would let us take an objective look as to what we are doing.

Bruce Edkin, 831 North Quidnessett Road, a senior on the Championship Boys Lacrosse Team, has been playing for 4 years and these have been the best memories of his life. He feels that the sports programs should not be cut. Since 1990, North Kingstown High School has been awarded Best Athletic Program in the State.

Timothy Schick, 43 Sunnybrook Drive, stated that the so-called fiscal restraint of the past has resulted in the need for many of the expenses we now face. The problem is we have spent a dime to save a nickel for too long. He feels we can no longer afford the false economy and supports the School Budget as proposed.

Dawn Ward, 74 Narragansett Street, does not support living beyond everyone's means. Please try to listen to the people.

Bruce Larson, 51 Gregory Avenue, a business owner, stated that he was in the first graduating class of the old high school that was just knocked down. He stated that his kids attended private schools. The teachers in North Kingstown are fantastic; however, the administration "sucks".

John Leventhal, 77 Lawton Avenue, stated that after reviewing the budget Mr. DeFedele loaned him early tonight, he couldn't understand this budget. He fully supports a zero based budget.

David Vanderpyl, 19 Longfellow Drive, supports the two-tier tax. Businesses that were built in the 1940's are still getting 45-50% depreciation rates. Residential properties do receive depreciation rates that high. It appears that the new assessments on commercial properties are substantially less than market value.

John Englert, 140 Highbank Avenue, stated that he is a father of 4 children, 6 grandchildren, and is 70 years old. With the rate going up so high on our homes, he is not going to be able to stay in his home of 25 years. He supports a quality education and outside activities, but the interest rates are going up and our property values will go down.

Lori Maroni, 46 Brenton Court, is a mother of 3 boys, one in middle school and two in high school. She is also a Nurse Teacher at Davisville Middle School and is very proud of the school system. She totally supports the School Budget as proposed.

Marguerite Pelletier, 127 Deer Ridge Drive, Saunderstown, stated that she is very supportive of education; however, she is concerned that the administration costs in Town have increased considerably. The tone of Dr. Halley's letter to the Standard Times doesn't give her a lot of confidence that the budget was carefully looked over to minimize expenses.

Jean Fasaco, Mesa Drive, is a Hockey Parent. The Hockey Team was the last team organized and she hopes that they are not the first team out. Please support our sports program.

Gary Whitney, 129 Highbank Avenue, stated that he is not in favor of cutting any sports programs. The real problem with the budget is the personnel costs. He has seen his taxes go up approximately 30% this year, his health care costs have gone up, but his income has not. A lot of the problem is the union contracts giving 3% raises across the board and they should consider being more careful in future negotiations. He also commended the School Committee on negotiating co-pays for health care but would like to see a bigger contribution.

Eric Reid, 315 Hamilton Allenton Road, asked that the Town Council give their full support to the School Budget as proposed for the following reasons: the students represent improvement and growth not only for our community but for the future of our country; the teachers are professionals, committed to these students and the Town; the Town, by making a commitment of the new high school and reopening of Fishing Cove School. Support the students, support the budget, and support this Town.

Richard DiMaria, 150 Juniper Drive, stated that he can't understand the budget documents and suggested that the budget be audited so that the average person in Town could understand the document. He also congratulated the National Teacher of the Year.

Ronald Lynch, 46 Kingswood Road, asked why sports are on the front line every time the budget has to be cut. Why can't we look at administrative costs and supplies. Let's keep the sports programs together for our kids.

Keith Maylo, 66 Scrabbletown Road, would like the Council to except the premise of the budget as it stands. He wants the full perks and benefits for his children in the school system. Administrators need to look deep to make that happen. SAT scores coming out of North Kingstown are very high. Please support our teachers so they can educate our students.

Paul Guillemette, 99 Mount View Avenue, is upset that all the kids are stating that they are going to cut sports. He cannot remember any time that a sports program has been cut due to budget cuts. He would like to know who is telling these kids that sports are going to be cut.

Barbara Halavik, 125 Lloyd Road, Saunderstown, stated that she is glad that these kids are seeing how this process works. She has a recent graduate from North Kingstown who is now a student at URI and another son that is a Captain of the Lacrosse Team. Her house has tripled in value and she is now in a position that she has to move as some of her neighbors have. The School Budget is driven by the way we collect taxes and that should be changed. In the mean time, please support the teachers and what they are doing.

Alyson Bailey, 61 Lexington Avenue, stated that she objects to the outrageous values in Town and the School Budget. Good education does not have to be costly, just be responsible, frugal and effective.

Gerald Foley, North Kingstown High School Principal, spoke on student achievement in the North Kingstown public schools. He also congratulated Kathy Mellor. Over the last 20 years, the high school has rated in the top five in SAT, PSAT and Rhode Island Scholar. The average public school has 3 scholars per year, private schools average 10 per year, North Kingstown has averaged 25 RI Scholars per year.

Rhonda Skinkle, 10 Northbriar Drive, stated that as a parent, taxpayer, former high school student, and proud member of the Town, she is very proud of our teachers and academics. However, she feels that there is room in the budget to cut.

Chris Horton, 154 Haverhill Avenue, would like to see budget projections for 2006, 2007, 2008, etc.

Lori Viner, 527 Indian Corner Road, Saunderstown, understands that there has been a lot of emotion during this process, but hopes fiscal decisions are not clouded by these emotions. We can all applaud the schools' accomplishments, but the budget needs to be scrutinized. You really need to strike an effective balance. She stated that she was disappointed that the School Committee did not make a change to Dr. Halley's proposed budget.

Robert Sullivan, 37 Virginia Avenue, is a teacher in Town and President of the Teachers Association. There isn't a teacher who believes that any resident should have to sell their home to support this budget. He believes there is a deficiency in the system on how we go about doing things and funding things. The budget process is flawed. The budget document is unclear and it is difficult to make a decision. Any budget cut should not result in a cut of services to the children. Reducing his position reduces the services these children receive. It isn't about protecting jobs of teachers, it's about what level of servicing you want to provide students. He questioned the political decision on where the cuts are made. There should not be a disconnect on the philosophy. The problem is that the adults do not have their act together and do not have a long-range plan on how the schools are going to be financed.

William Gilbert, 209 Yorktown Road, stated that all cuts are not bad. We don't have a dynamite school system because the budget increases each year. We should ask Kathy Mellor how to teach kids, she has the ideas. Davisville Middle School is a good school. Maybe we should poll the teachers there and see what they do that other teachers don't. Cutting sports is what he calls the "ugly plan". What are you going to do to stop the trend?

Paul Dion, 34 Salem Drive, questioned the presentation of the School Budget and the lack of information incorporated into the budget. He feels it is very difficult to read and understand and would like to see a line item budget. Clearly this is no connection to what the spending is versus the services. He also discussed the governor's budget in regards to personnel costs.

Kathleen Brown, 160 Prospect Avenue, stated that a 5-year trend of a 25% increase is just way too much. She has heard that there is going to be a \$364,000 surplus from this year's budget. She supports education and feels we have a great education system here in North Kingstown; however, she can't trust the numbers reflected in the budget. She is concerned on the modernization of our school buildings and does not necessarily agree that bonding these projects is the answer. She would like to see fiscal accountability and be able to trust again.

Dr. Muriel Camarra, 45 Narrow Lane, stated that the Asset Management Commission has stated that one of the problems with our elementary schools is that the maintenance was so poor and if we don't spend some money soon to maintain them we will be in big trouble. The Bacon and Edge report completed in 1998 stated that the Data Department should be looked at. The Town has one IT person responsible for the Town, and the School has four IT people. I know that everyone feels bad about the athletics, but the athletic budget has increased \$200,000 in two years. What percentage of children participates in sports? We add personnel and nobody says do we need them.

Christopher Prata, 135 Winsor Avenue, stated that there are a lot of people that are doing a lot of work during this process and it seems that they are the ones that are the least appreciated.

Barry Martasian, a School Committee Member, stated that he is concerned about the impression that is out in the community that students are not performing at the high school. Last year we had 297 graduates, 86% of those students went to a 2-4 year college, an additional 2% went to a two-year business school, and 4% went into the military. He's very concerned about cuts and the cost of education and people with fixed incomes that feel a pinch in taxes. He has faith in the youth of this country and wants to support them. He's fearful that if it is necessary to cut, then we will be affecting programs.

William Mudge, School Committee Member, stated that he is appalled that the rumor was circulated that they would be cutting sports. The booster club at the high school has added another \$100,000 to the athletic programs, never mind the volunteer hours. Jamestown should be paying \$800,000 more for their students to attend our schools. He recommended the following cuts:

- \$500,000 to the School Capital Reserve
- \$300,000 to Capital Expenditures (equipment)
- \$400,000 to Capital Expenditures (capital projects)
- \$160,000 to Administrative Costs
- \$364,000 excess revenue this year

Mr. Mudge feels that no one can understand that budget. He suggested that they postpone the all-day kindergarten for one year until the numbers can be confirmed. He also suggested that a one-year moratorium for training of teachers, curriculum development would save \$200,000. Legal costs of \$30,000 were not needed in this year's budget. He would like to see all nonunion administrators pay 30% of their health costs in the future. This would be a bargaining tool when negotiating the next teacher's contracts. This year's budget does not reflect any Medicaid revenues as it did last year. He complimented Councilor Miccolis for recognizing that some things could be cut from the School Budget.

(***Amended June 7, 2004. See amendment on Page 495a.)

Carol Hueston, School Committee Member, stated that she started teaching in 1970 in Warwick and they were the shining star in the state. North Kingstown has far surpassed Warwick and is now the shining star. Davisville Middle School is the only school that is not whole and we need to make it whole.

Donald DeFedele, School Committee Chairperson, stated that a lot of information has been shared this evening and feels it is important that some clarification be made. The School Committee voted on the all-day kindergarten. We expect a 30% reduction of kindergarten-aged children and we will have to have more teachers, but we will be saving on transportation. Narragansett has been thrown as the "model for education". Narragansett spends \$12,937 per student and North Kingstown spends \$10,228 per student. Since 1998, Narragansett has increased 40.6% and North Kingstown has increased 31%. The School Committee prepares their budget before the state aid numbers are decided on. Often times when there is a surplus in the budget, it is because the state aid received is more than anticipated. We negotiated a contract this year and one of the key negotiating items we looked at is where we fall in comparison with other cities/towns. Teachers this year are contributing to health care for the first time ever. He does believe that we have a tax relief problem in Town. There was a subcommittee that negotiated the contract for the tuition for Jamestown students. They have been attending our schools for 25 years. They pay for their own special education costs as well as transportation. We felt it was very important to have the Jamestown students at our schools. We have also submitted a plan and a Phase 2 plan for capital improvements, which is continually looked at by the Modernization Committee. We also have a plan to upgrade Davisville Elementary School, which is sorely needed. We have a plan to upgrade our existing Wickford Middle School or look at other alternatives for that school. We need to maintain these facilities as we have a tremendous investment in them. He thanked the audience for their time and comments.

Patricia Watkins, School Committee Member, agreed that it is imperative to maintain our facilities. In the past, the School Committee had elected to cut the School Capital Reserve and not programs and our facilities suffered for it and ended up costing more in the long run.

President Dolan asked that the following letter be entered into the record on behalf of David Burnham who was unable to attend tonight's meeting:

“TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET HEARING COMMENTS
CAPITAL PROJECTS, BONDING, & SCHOOL CAPITAL RESERVE
April 22, 2004 Budget Hearing

HISTORY OF SCHOOL DEPARTMENT MAINTENANCE/REPAIRS/UPGRADES

PRE 1989 - *Small maintenance budgets regularly reduced to cover other budget area shortfalls.
1989 - *TC created School Capital Reserve (SCR) Fund but never funded the account.
1994 to PRESENT - *TC/SC agreement to fund SCR Fund at .5 million annually with TC oversight/approval on spending.
*1994 Bonded Hamilton, Stony Lane and 2001 Quiddnessett Elementary additions and upgrades at 6.5 million and cash. 1999/2000 new high school bonded.
*SC approved feasibility study May 2003, results identified 46+ million.
*TC request for planning/phasing of needs.
*SD/SC sought TC approval to request RIDE review/approval of Phase 1, 25.4 million for much needed addition/systems upgrades at Davisville Elementary School along with addition/systems upgrades for Wickford Middle School or new middle school.

IMMEDIATE AND FUTURE NEEDS

*Phase 2 would require increased funding of SCR Fund with an additional 1 million this year and annually thereafter to allow for cash funding of the systems upgrades to the 3 remaining elementary schools at 2 year intervals (FP, FC, WE).

*Phase 3 includes modernization of the three remaining elementary schools.

I am here this evening because the Council asked me to serve on the School Modernization Committee. As many of you know, I am an advocate of paying cash for projects that the Town needs up to 2 million dollars or thereabouts and bonding of the larger projects.

Based on the quick history, we have done a lot but there is always more. The school has a 75 million dollar physical plant based on the last insurance assessment. In industry, a maintenance budget for that size facility would be 2.5% to 3.5% of the annual operating budget. In this case, our School Budget should contain an amount of 1.225 million to 1.715 million dollars to properly maintain the facilities. We fall far short of that with the .5 million annual appropriation to the SCR Fund thus driving the citizens to pass bond issues with all the associated legal and financing costs when we could pay cash, save money in the long run, and keep up with the responsibilities of our facilities.

I am here to ask the Council and the School Committee to do what probably no one else came here for this evening.

That is:

#1 Consider funding the 2004/2005 SCR Fund at the level of 1.5 million dollars and continue to fund the account at that level or greater into the future so we can catch up on the necessary upgrades to our school facilities. I know there are citizens that want you to reduce expenditures but in this case you won't be saving any money, you'll just be postponing the burden to future taxpayers. If letting our buildings deteriorate and failing to protect our Town's infrastructure is the result of our Town leaders goal to hold down taxes, then we need to re-examine our goals. This is not the legacy we should leave.

#2 I ask the Council to place the bond issue question of 25.4 million for Davisville Elementary School and Wickford Middle School on the ballot this fall for the General Election. I would further ask the Council to fully explain a plan to the citizens to show how the bonds could be used/sold so as to phase in the expenditure to allow Davisville Elementary School for example to proceed to contract and construction at 7.4 million ASAP while completing design/construction documents for Wickford Middle School upgrades and additions at 18 million in the very near future.

I know these are bold requests. I would ask the Council to consider how we can move forward on these capital investments because there are considerable costs to taking no action.

In the March 23, 2004 issue of the Providence Journal, we read of how many millions of dollars over estimate the Kent County Court project would be. Clearly, postponing these projects 1,2, 3, 4 years will add tremendously to the costs.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I apologize for not being able to attend this evening's budget hearing. I have another long-standing commitment.

David R. Burnham"

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 11:00 P.M.

Jeannette Holloway
Acting Town Clerk

***The following amendment was made to Book 97, Agenda Item Number 3, Paragraph Number 51, Sentence Number 3 at the Town Council Meeting of June 7, 2004:

Davisville Elementary School is the only school that is not whole and we need to make it whole.