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Volume 34, Number 3

Published by The Glastonbury Citizen

April 10, 2009



Bacon Academy senior Brooke Bailey was among the Bacon girls' basketball players honored at this week's Colchester Board of Education meeting. Brooke hit the game-winning jumper March 18 to beat Berlin 55-53 in the state Class M championship game, helping to deliver Bacon Academy's first state title in any sport since 1981. Brooke also took home All-Star Game MVP honors at last month's Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference Class S-M game.

Bacon Girls Win B-Ball Championship

by Adam Benson

Hours before the UConn women claimed their sixth national title, dozens of Colchester residents were basking in a championship glow of their own.

Despite an agenda that included major budget talks, a good portion of Tuesday night's local Board of Education meeting belonged to the Bacon Academy girls' basketball team, which was recognized by the school board, community leaders and even the UConn Women's head coach, Geno Auriemma, for its dramatic 55-53 win over Berlin March 18 at the Mohegan Sun Arena.

With the win, the Bacon girls' basketball team claimed its first Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) state title and the school's first championship in any sport since 1981.

"It's been many, many years since Bacon Academy won a state title, and we are ever so proud of you," Superintendent of Schools, and basketball junkie, Karen Loiselle said. "Your game was absolutely the best game I have ever seen."

Led by a balanced group of players including seniors Brooke Bailey, Dominique Demar, Kate Gazdzicki and McKenzie Hyde, the team finished the season 25-2 and earned a reputation in the state tournament for its powerhouse fan base and unselfish style of play.

"Your team's caliber of play reflected the superb preparation that you and your coaching staff put forward before the largest crowd to witness Connecticut high school basketball," CIAC tournament director Dave Maloney wrote to Bacon coach Dave Shea. "In the 20 years that I've been associated with CIAC girls' bas-

ketball as tournament director, I have never seen such student body support."

The victory was another laurel for the legendary Shea – whose accomplishments and service to Bacon Academy's athletic programs is so vast the school's gym is named after him.

At 74 years old and with more than 400 wins under his belt – including the school's last championship in 1981 when Shea coached his son John on the Class S squad that won it all – Shea took the girls' win in stride.

But even he couldn't hide his affection for the relationships he was able to forge with the team over the course of the season.

"We had a very unique group of girls this year that really exemplified teamwork and togetherness. They all had a job to do and they did it. You only get a chance to coach a team with an attitude like that once or twice," he said. "I think they had more sleepovers than any team in the history of basketball."

Shea took over the reins of the girls' basketball team in 1994. He served as Bacon's athletic director until 2000 and won more than 400 games over the course of 24 years as head coach of the boys' team.

Though the talent on this year's team was clear – Bailey went on to win MVP honors in the state's Class S-M All-Star Game after hitting the winning jumper against Berlin – Shea said it was the unflagging support from the student body, parents and community that helped power the team to so many victories this year.

"It's really gratifying having all those people in the stands. They really helped down the stretch," Shea said.

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RHAM Board Sends Budget to Public Hearing

by Sarah McCoy

Residents in the three RHAM towns – Andover, Hebron and Marlborough – will get a chance next week to weigh in on a proposed \$23.90 million 2009-10 middle and high school budget.

The proposed spending plan, which the RHAM Board of Education voted unanimously Wednesday to send to public hearing, represents a \$344,368 increase, or 1.44 percent, over the current year's budget.

The public hearing on the spending plan will take place Monday, April 13, at 7 p.m., in the high school auditorium, 85 Wall St., Hebron.

"The board has a budget but we're looking forward to seeing what ideas people have to share with us next week," RHAM Board of Education Chairwoman Sue Griffiths said after Wednesday's meeting.

Initially, the regional school board considered three budgets to work from during its deliberations – a budget that continued the current service levels, a reduced budget and a budget that featured a zero percent increase in spending from the current year.

Last month, board members agreed to work from the reduced budget, which, at the time, stood at a 1.91 percent increase in spending.

The school board was able to reduce that to 1.44 percent, thanks to clarification on accepted uses for federal stimulus money and information regarding enrollment in the Hartford magnet schools.

The Board of Education was informed in January that 26 students had applied for acceptance into the Hartford magnet schools. School officials have since learned that 15 have been accepted, with another six high on the waiting list. This information led board members to reduce the magnet school tuition line item by \$32,000.

The largest area of reductions in the proposed RHAM budget comes from supplies and materials. The instructional supplies line item was reduced by \$77,401 from the current year's budget. Also, no funding has been included to purchase additional library books or new sets of textbooks.

Griffiths said the only new textbooks that are

included in the budget would be for new students coming into the district or books that need to be replaced due to damage. She added that the library would be able to continue to purchase periodicals but not books.

"The staff from both schools have said they can live without these supplies for this year," Griffiths said. "We listened to them but the following year becomes even more challenging because we don't know what level we can afford to fund these line items."

In terms of staffing, the current budget includes a reduction in the music department, achieved by eliminating a full-time position and reconstituting that as a half-time position. Both Griffiths and Superintendent of Schools Robert Siminski said this was done because of the declining enrollment in the middle school, not necessarily because of budgetary concerns.

There will also be a reduction of a position in the special education department and in the custodial department. Siminski reported that he is anticipating a retirement from the special education department to account for the reduc-

tion in staffing.

Griffiths said she is looking forward to the public hearing to hear what people like and dislike about the budget. "We want to figure out what's most unsettling for people," she said.

Griffiths added that, if the budget does not pass at the first referendum, the proposed spending plan could absorb any further reductions without affecting class sizes or programs. "We've already raised participation fees," she said. "We've reduced funding for athletics. The superintendent is not taking a pay raise. The bottom line is this is a lean budget without much room to go."

The RHAM Board of Education will meet immediately following next Monday's meeting and could potentially make a final decision on a budget to send forth to referendum. If the board is unable to decide on a final number that night then, according to Griffiths, it would meet again that week to finalize a recommended budget.

The tri-town referendum will be held Tuesday, May 5.

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Bailey said the team had a clear focus on winning early on in the season – motivated by their loss in the state semi-finals last year to Avon.

“We’re a really close-knit team,” she said. “Obviously, everybody’s dream going into the beginning of a season is winning a state championship.”

Demar said realizing that goal was “quite possibly the best feeling in the world.”

Bacon Academy Principal Jeffrey Mathieu said that, in addition to their success on the court, the girls’ team became favorites among school staffers because of their exuberance and willingness to share their passion.

“The reason there are so many adults here is this is a very special group of girls who have let us into their lives and let us be a part of this run,” he said.

First Selectman Linda Hodge heaped even

more praise on the team before reading a proclamation issued by her colleagues recognizing their accomplishment.

“You all are just such wonderful ambassadors for the community,” she said. “You’re the epitome of what Bacon Academy stands for.”

In an e-mailed congratulatory note sent to the team, Auriemma said he was hopeful his team could duplicate Bacon’s winning ways.

“Great job,” he said. “You all should be so proud. Hopefully, we can do the same.” (And, of course, Auriemma’s team did – as the UConn Women topped Louisville 76-54 in the NCAA women’s championship game Tuesday.)

For his part, Shea – who also coaches Bacon’s baseball team – is ready to hone his sights on another challenge.

“Right now, I’m trying to win a few ballgames,” he said.

From the Editor’s Desk

Observations & Ruminations

by Mike Thompson

Baseball had its Opening Day Monday, a sign that, though it might not feel like it (a couple of my co-workers said they spotted a few snowflakes Wednesday morning), spring really is here. My Mets got off to a good start Monday, winning 2-1. I wasn’t able to see the game, and it wasn’t just because I was at work. Even if I were at home I’d be out of luck since, for the fourth straight season, the overwhelming majority of Mets games will be unavailable to me on TV this year.

The Mets launched their own cable channel, SNY, before the start of the 2006 season. Since the channel was a new creation, cable systems would have to add it to their lineup. New York-area systems did this in an instant. Many Connecticut ones, though, did not. Fast-forward to 2009, and many Connecticut cable systems *still* have not.

(And while I write this from the point of view of a Manchester resident whose cable company is Cox, I did my research, and none of the cable companies that serve the *Rivereast* towns have SNY either.)

Sure, there will be about 20 games on WTXN, Channel 20, this season (as Channel 20 picks up broadcasts from WPIX, Channel 11, in New York, the Mets’ non-cable home down there). And there will be a couple games on ESPN, a couple more on Fox. But, when you consider there are 162 games in a season, that’s still an awful lot of Mets games you can’t watch.

It’d be easy to blame the cable company in this instance. After all, they can’t give me my Mets games but they can give me like five different MTV channels? (Actually, I shouldn’t be so quick to complain; I do find myself watching those stations sometimes.) Or four different home shopping channels? But it might not be all the fault of the cable company. A Cox employee told me once that they wanted to add SNY, but they only wanted to add it to the digital tier of stations (the ones you pay a little bit extra for on your bill to get). The SNY folks balked at this, telling Cox they wanted the station added to the entire cable system. Cox opted against it, because apparently they would had to have paid a fairly substantial carriage fee to SNY to add the station (sports cable channels frequently charge higher carriage fees of cable systems than, say, TNT or USA, due in large part to the channels themselves paying so much money for the right to broadcast baseball and football games; you hear from time to time about ESPN having disputes with cable companies, about the same thing) and they’d then be forced to pass that expense down to their customers. If they limited the station to their digital package, then they wouldn’t be forcing *everyone* who subscribed to Cox to pay extra.

Granted, the story Cox told me might not be true (the cable company comes out smelling just a little too rosy in the end), but I could see it happening. The Yankees basically did the same thing when they came up with their own channel a few years back. Cox did add the channel for everyone (of course, the digital tier wasn’t much of an option back then anyway), and everybody’s cable bills did go

up a few bucks. You could argue that, if Cox did this for YES, they should do it for SNY, but the sad but true fact is there are more Yankees fans in Connecticut than Mets fans (especially in this part of the state). So Cox could wind up dealing with a lot of angry customers, upset their bills went up for a team they don’t even follow.

Of course, all this should be a moot point. For the past several seasons, Major League Baseball (MLB) has been hyping its [MLB.tv](#) package. You pay a (fairly large, to be honest) fee, and you can watch games on the Internet, at MLB’s website. Only thing is, you have to abide by MLB’s woefully outdated blackout policy. Simply put, if you are determined by MLB to be in the “home” market of a team, you can’t watch their games live on their website. It doesn’t matter if your cable system is actually showing the games on TV or not. (The same blackout rules apply to the “Extra Innings” package of channels many cable systems carry.) It really doesn’t make much sense, particularly from a business point of view (and you wouldn’t think MLB would shy away from making a buck). If the Internet were the only way I could watch my team, I would gladly fork over my 80 bucks a year and watch the games on my computer. But since the games are blacked out, then why should I pay? So I can watch the Pittsburgh Pirates all season?

Actually, as far as the blackout rules go, I have it fairly easy. Like I said before, at least I get those 20 or so games on Channel 20. And New York’s close enough I could get down to CitiField to catch a few games over the course of a season. A lot of other people in the country aren’t so lucky. For example, if some poor soul in Des Moines, Iowa, sat down at his computer to watch some baseball, he’d find no fewer than six (six!) teams unavailable to him. The Minnesota Twins, Chicago Cubs, Chicago White Sox, Milwaukee Brewers, St. Louis Cardinals and Kansas City Royals are all blacked out if you live in Des Moines. Riddle me this, Batman: just how exactly does Des Moines have six “home” teams? And I highly doubt all those teams are carried on Des Moines cable systems. The Internet would be your only option to follow them....and MLB does its best to make sure it’s not an option.

Like I said, it’s just woefully outdated. The Internet represents a whole new revenue stream (through both ads on the site and that aforementioned \$80 annual subscription fee) and, again, MLB generally really, really loves making money. I can understand blacking out the games on the Internet if a person is perfectly capable of watching the game on their TV; those TV contracts are expensive, and the cable channels would obviously prefer you watch their commercials in between innings, instead of check your e-mail or play online Scrabble. But if the *only way* for you to watch your team is through the web....I just don’t understand why MLB says you can’t do it.

* * *

See you next week.

Adults, Not Kids, Taking Part in Spelling Bee

by Sarah McCoy

Spelling bees aren’t just for kids anymore. The newly incorporated RHAM Educational Foundation will host an Adult Spelling Bee and Silent Auction next Thursday, April 16. The event will serve as both a fundraiser as well as a forum for continued learning.

“We hope people will come and have a good time,” RHAM Educational Foundation Beth Fitzgerald said. “It involves a lot of people coming together to have fun.”

The Spelling Bee will be in a team format. Groups of three or four will write their answers on a white board for judging. And, if a team is really stuck, they can buy a “free Bee” to skip the word.

Fitzgerald estimated that 20 teams have signed up to compete so far. Teams include members from the middle and high school administration, the math department, the area boards of education, and employees from the Curves in Marlborough and Hebron.

“People are nervous when they hear ‘Spelling Bee,’” Fitzgerald said. “I don’t know if they were traumatized as a kid, or what. But this tournament is to bring the community together and not embarrass anyone.”

Those interested in participating in the Bee can still do so by calling Fitzgerald at 228-4710. The deadline to register teams has been extended until Tuesday, April 14. The cost is \$100 per team. Teams will receive dinner courtesy of Subway.

The Spelling Bee begins at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 16, in the cafeteria at RHAM High School, 85 Wall St., Hebron. Tickets are also available for \$5 for individuals interested in watching the event and participate in the silent auction.

Items up for bid include memberships at Bodyworks and Healthtrax, a flower arrangement from Daisies and Daffodil’s, and four tickets next to the dugout to watch the Bos-

ton Red Sox battle the Texas Rangers.

All proceeds of the event will go to supporting the RHAM Educational Foundation.

According to Fitzgerald discussions about forming an educational foundation began about five years ago when the district opened the new high school and renovated middle school. Plans got put on the back burner until last fall when a group of volunteers came together wanting to support the school and the community at large.

“Elementary schools have PTOs or PTAs, RHAM doesn’t have either,” Fitzgerald said. “The purpose of our group is to support adult education and classroom initiatives that might not otherwise happen without a little extra funding.”

RHAM Educational Foundation President Bill Chapman said he sees two main charges for the group. The first is to provide for lifelong learning through adult education classes. Chapman said he expects these to kick off in the fall with topics such as computer applications, cooking, or crafts. “Right now adults have to drive a half-hour to attend a class,” he said. “At some point that commute gets fatiguing. By having a closer option we hope to promote learning through the community.”

The second purpose for the group, according to Chapman, is to offer mini-grants to school staff looking to do an activity in class. These would be competitive grants offered to programs the Educational Foundation saw value in. “Especially in this economy we want to support our teachers,” Chapman said. “While it might be \$50, \$100, or \$200 to start, our hope is that we continue to grow and are able to provide opportunities for school staff and students.”

The upcoming Spelling Bee and Silent Auction are the first fundraiser for the group.

Unions Offer Concessions to Help Save Colchester School Programs

by Adam Benson

Faced with an additional \$350,000 in cuts to its proposed 2009-10 budget, the Colchester School District found a way to close that gap dramatically, in an unprecedented agreement between its six labor unions and administrators.

Superintendent of Schools Karen Loisel and Board of Education Chairman William Hettrick announced Tuesday night representatives from each of the unions have agreed to contract concessions totaling more than \$225,000 in an effort to preserve classroom programming, afterschool sports and activities and other core services to students.

"It's unheard of. I've been on the board many years and have never seen anything like this," Hettrick said. "We have a staff that's stepping forward for the benefit of kids. They don't want to see programs reduced to that kind of level."

According to Hettrick and Loisel, Colchester is the first school district in the state that has gotten across-the-board consent by its unions for salary reductions.

The concessions will come in the form of two furlough days for district personnel – one a professional development day in which employees are foregoing salary and benefits and

the other is an extra day of the academic year.

State law requires districts to offer at least 900 hours of classroom instruction and have schools open at least 180 days a year. Hettrick said Colchester was well above both benchmarks before the unions opted to renegotiate their contracts.

Even before agreeing to the move, Colchester's teachers were already among the lowest-paid in the state, Hettrick said. But for months, hundreds of parents, teachers, paraprofessionals and residents have pleaded with the Board of Education and Board of Finance to preserve services for students – especially in the area of sports.

Loisel – who gave up her entire salary increase for the upcoming year early on in budget talks – said the unions' stance is an indication of how important education is to the community.

"I think it's truly a testament to their genuine concern for the students that they serve. They value the educational programs that are offered to students and wanted to do anything that they could to ensure those programs could continue," she said Wednesday. "If they didn't have that spirit, this could not have happened."

Last month, the Board of Education unanimously approved Loisel's proposed \$35.4 million budget – a spending plan that included the district's first round of layoffs in 17 years and a spending freeze for new library books and technology supplies.

Without the newly restructured contracts, Loisel said the district would have been forced to look at even more staff reductions to come up with the \$225,000. She's already informed 14 teachers they wouldn't be retained next year after the initial round of layoffs was approved by the Board of Education in March.

"There would have to have been more layoffs to get to that number," Hettrick said. "Many of the employees will be taking a concession higher than the average tax increase. They're going to take the brunt of it for the kids."

Each teacher will get paid roughly \$700 less a year through the two furlough days, but shuttering the schools on those two days is expected to generate thousands more in energy and transportation savings.

Loisel was attending a seminar at Harvard University with 20 other Connecticut school superintendents when she learned Colchester's union signed off on the proposed concessions.

The other superintendents "were just astounded and wanted to know how we were able to achieve that level of commitment from the staff," Loisel said. "They were in disbelief."

The agreement was also met with gratitude by Board of Finance member Ronald Goldstein.

"You cannot underestimate the significance of this move, and I commend the administrative team more than you can imagine for having this happen," he told the school board Tuesday. "It shows that we are trying to work together to get to a point where we can accept the budget, and to have the unions and everybody step up to the plate truly helps in our process as well."

Loisel said she hopes the school district's gesture will generate public support for its budget at next month's town meeting. Should voters reject the plan, officials said the unions could withdraw their support for the concessions.

"I truly hope that the community recognizes that the school system is aware these are difficult economic times, and that we did everything within our power to bring in the most fiscally responsive yet educationally responsible budget that we could," she said.

Colchester School Board OKs Pay-to-Play Increase

by Adam Benson

Middle school and freshmen sports have again been spared from the chopping block in Colchester, but not without a cost.

On Tuesday, the Board of Education voted 5-2 (with Elizabeth Ciccone and Mary Lynn Burke opposing) to approve a plan that increases pay-to-play fees in town from \$100 to \$150 per sport, with a \$450 family cap.

The move is expected to generate more than \$31,000 in revenue and will allow boys' and girls' soccer and basketball programs at William J. Johnston Middle School (WJMS) and boys' and girls' freshmen basketball and soccer at Bacon Academy to remain in place.

It marked the first time since 2005 the district's pay-to-play fees have been altered, though school board members said they felt the changes were fair given the economic climate surrounding this year's budget talks with town officials.

"We really need to make a commitment to the community that we're not going to do this year after year with the sports," Board of Education Chairman William Hettrick said. "Other districts are looking at us and saying 'what the heck is Colchester doing?'"

For months, district leaders have heard passionate pleas by student-athletes, coaches, parents and alumna about the importance middle school and high school sports has in the community both as feeder programs for varsity

teams and social outlets for adolescents and teens.

But with the Board of Finance initially requesting a \$1.8 million slash to the district's 2009-10 budget and then further cuts of an additional \$350,000, Superintendent of Schools Karen Loisel and board of education members said it would be impossible for those athletic programs to stay in place without additional financial support from taxpayers.

While several Board of Education members are opposed to concept of pay-to-play in general, they said Tuesday passing on the extra costs to community members is the most equitable way of doing business – especially on the heels of union concessions that will save the district \$225,000.

"I have a really hard time asking for and accepting concessions from our unions without raising pay-to-play," Burke said. Union members have "really done their best to help us out."

(Burke did support increasing pay-to-play, but only to \$125; after it became \$150, she voted against the fee hike.)

For the more than 70 people in attendance at Tuesday's meeting, the significance of Colchester's middle school sports programs was impossible to ignore – officials spent the first 40 minutes celebrating the Bacon Academy girls' basketball team's state title.

Senior Dominique Demar told the room the program's success would have been impossible

had it not been for middle school basketball at WJMS.

Mary Ellen Mahoney – whose daughter Katherine played on this year's championship team – said cutting lower-level sports from the district would strike a blow for the hundreds of students and parents that rely on them.

"Interscholastic sports really does help develop the entire student in a lot of different ways, not just their athletic prowess or their ability to win a state championship," she said. "I value the education they are receiving so I don't want to diminish how important I think a great education is, but I think it's a total process and there are a lot of stresses for kids that sports in particular really helps quell."

Throughout the budget process, board members have made deep cuts across the board, to personnel, supplies, instructional programs, maintenance and energy, in an effort to present a budget within the parameters set by the Board of Finance.

By not asking parents to share the burden, board members would be unfairly targeting certain aspects of the budget over others, member Michael Egan said.

"When we formulated this budget three or four months ago, one of the things we brought to the table was shared sacrifice, and these kinds of times can really show what we're made of as a community," he said. "For the kids who

are playing sports now at \$100 a pop, increasing it to \$150 so other kids can play in the middle school or other freshman sports, that's part of the same theme we've been carrying all along."

Ciccone – who has developed a reputation as a harsh pay-to-play opponent – said upping the cost by \$50 a sport will disenfranchise even more families in the community.

"I don't support it because pay-to-play to me is an extra tax for those who want to play. I really can't support this if we have to increase it to \$150 because it makes it very inequitable to all students," she said. "As a board, we are charged with thinking about equal access for everybody."

Ciccone's colleague, Monica Swyden-Bolles, said installing higher pay-to-play fees might not be the most popular idea, but is a matter of necessity both economically and for sending the right message to voters.

"I think that in this climate given the concessions, we have to do everything we can to try and maintain some sanity in this district with how people are trying to get by," she said. "We were already not to have these sports, so even if it is a higher pay-to-play, it's better than sacrificing how well schools in our district function. When teachers have to count every single stinking piece of paper, it's ridiculous and I don't want to have to do that."

Hebron Finance Board Sends \$33.28 Million Budget to Public Hearing

by Sarah McCoy

The Board of Finance this week sent to public hearing a proposed \$33.28 million 2009-10 budget, a plan that calls for a 1.47 percent increase over current year spending.

The public hearing will be held Monday, April 27, at 7 p.m., in the RHAM High School auditorium, 85 Wall St. The Board of Finance will meet immediately following to set the final budget number to go to referendum on Tuesday, May 5.

The spending package approved by the BOF Tuesday includes spending for town operations, the local Board of Education, and the RHAM Board of Education.

The BOF does not have control over the budget for the RHAM Board of Education. Their recommended budget includes a 2.57 percent increase in spending for the school district. On Wednesday night the RHAM Board of Education put forth a \$23.9 million budget for a public hearing next week. That represents only a

1.4 percent increase in spending. The public hearing on the RHAM budget will be held on Monday, April 13, at 7 p.m. at the high school auditorium.

In January the local Board of Education (BOE) recommended a 2.98 percent increase in spending. That number was revisited at the request of the BOF. Last week, the BOE was able to trim the budget further, to \$11.7 million, a 1.92 percent increase over the current. This was due largely to anticipated federal stimulus funding. Additionally, Superintendent of Schools Ellie Cruz and Director of Special Education Brenna Kosicki have offered to forgo salary increases.

BOF Chair Mike Hazel reported that he requested the BOE to evaluate what a zero percent budget increase would look like. "It wasn't a demand for a zero percent budget," Hazel explained. "The Board of Finance members wanted the Board of Education to be able to

speak to what a zero percent budget would look like in terms of programming, services and class sizes."

Hazel said he believes the BOE did a "tremendous job in creating savings without sacrificing services."

The school board had asked the local teacher's union to consider salary concessions; however, according to BOE Chair Jane Dube, that request was denied. "They said that the appropriate time to discuss concessions would be during collective bargaining," Dube said.

The district isn't scheduled to begin negotiations with the teacher's union until 2011 with the next contract taking effect July 1, 2012.

Hazel said the BOF will use the upcoming public hearing to gauge support for the town's budget. "There's the potential for adjustments but we need input before making those difficult decisions," he said.

Items that Hazel said could be revisited in-

clude funding capital projects and open space. "In terms of capital projects it's a situation of pay-me-now or pay-me-later," he said. "Open space is another area that the town has support to preserve the character of Hebron but is this a year to continue funding it? I don't know. We need the public's input."

He continued by saying that, in his opinions, those are the last possible areas the town can cut without cutting services. Even as it stands Hazel said he's unsure the town can make it through the year without having to make a supplemental appropriation. "This budget is so bare bones that if something comes up I don't see where we can absorb any type of hit," he said.

A supplemental appropriation is when the town would dip into its reserve fund to cover expenses above what the approved budget can afford.

Portland Selectmen Send Budget to Voters, Restore Library Funds

by Michael McCoy

Local bibliophiles rejoiced Tuesday, when the Board of Selectmen (BOS) voted to restore about half of First Selectman Susan Bransfield's proposed library cuts.

School supporters, however, might not be quite as thrilled.

The move came during a selectmen's budget meeting Tuesday, at which the selectmen voted 7-0 to send a \$28.81 million 2009-10 spending plan to referendum on May 11. The proposed budget is \$21,262, or .074 percent, less than current year spending. The spending package also features an anticipated mill rate of 27.24, a 0.25 mill increase.

When Bransfield first pitched her proposed 2009-10 budget last month, the plan called for cutting the Portland Library budget by \$155,650 from library director Janet Nocek's request for the 2009-10 fiscal year. Bransfield's library budget called for the laying off of one fulltime and three part-time employees, which was anticipated to result in operating hours being cut from the current 52 per week to 40.

But the selectmen's vote Tuesday restored \$78,350 of those cuts, a move that Nocek said would prevent any layoffs.

"I'm very happy that the selectmen proposed keeping our staffing at the level we're at now," Nocek said, and added that, should this budget pass at referendum, the library should also not have to cut any operating hours. She did, however, acknowledge that new materials will be relatively scarce during the 2009-10 year, but figured the library could "probably get by for a year." Furthermore, she called such a cut in

materials "the lesser of the evils."

However, Nocek said, she and her staff were waiting until the referendum to allow themselves a full collective sigh of relief.

Twice in the past month, library supporters stormed budget meetings, and begged the selectmen to reconsider the proposed cuts. When asked Wednesday if the restoration of funds was a result of this public outcry, Bransfield said, "I'm certain that was a large part."

Bransfield added that people often wonder why they should go to budget meetings, working under the assumption that the selectmen wouldn't listen anyway. Bransfield said this week's move is proof that "we listen to the people."

The other big news from the vote is \$264,000 in further cuts to the Board of Education's approved budget. With the cuts Bransfield announced last month, this comes to \$538,999 in cuts to the school board's request for 2009-10. All told, the BOS cut \$237,000 from the town government budget, which comes to \$501,000 in total cuts Tuesday night.

Major cuts to the town side of the budget (the Board of Education has yet to meet to discuss Tuesday's school budget cuts) include \$120,000 in salaries. While the BOS budget allows for just one layoff (the part-time zoning enforcement officer) instead of six, it accounts for all town employees forfeiting raises. However, with the exception of the police union and Bransfield herself, no town unions – or non-union employees for that matter – have formally agreed to this. (Bransfield said all unions, ex-

cept for the Public Works union, have made verbal agreements to forfeit raises, "there've been so many conditions," that the BOS has not yet found them acceptable.

Bransfield added that if a sufficient agreement could not be worked out with a specific department, the BOS would probably have to revert to layoffs to account for the money.

Still, when asked if she felt a level of relief voting forward a budget with far fewer layoffs than previously proposed, Bransfield responded, "Oh yes. It's very important to do all we can to maintain jobs."

Other reductions to the town side of the budget include \$45,000 from road materials, \$41,000 from capital expenditures and \$23,000 from unemployment. The latter cut is a result of fewer layoffs built into the budget. Medical insurance was reduced by \$30,000, though this was not exactly a cut. Bransfield simply expects that item to increase by 2.8 percent, as opposed to the earlier estimate of 6.9 percent.

Board of Education Chairman Chris Phelps said the education cuts "were proportional" when looking at the reductions made overall. The selectmen "didn't just cut the Board of Education budget," he said.

However, he said, just how the school board deals with those cuts will "obviously" pose a challenge, "but this is a challenging year to say the least."

Phelps said the school board will meet at Tuesday, April 21, at 7 p.m. in the media center at Portland High School, 95 High St., for a

special meeting. That night, board members will begin discussing how to deal with the cuts. However, Phelps said, no decisions would be formalized until the budget is passed at referendum.

As of press time Thursday, Phelps said it was "too early to speculate" whether layoffs are probable. He also said starting a conversation with "How many people are we gonna lay off?" would be the wrong strategy. "We would be irresponsible to go there first," he said, instead saying such action would be a last resort.

As far as ironing out concessions with teachers and other staff, Phelps said, "We're talking," but said it would be inappropriate to expound any further.

In regards to the overall budget voted on Tuesday, Bransfield said, "I'm very proud of my board," and praised her colleagues for navigating a particularly difficult budget cycle. She also lauded finance director Tom Robinson, and said, "I can't count how many hours he spent on this budget."

Bransfield said she is not aware of any Portland budget that contained an overall decrease in expenditures, prompting her to comment, "Everyone's maintaining... This is not a time for expansion."

Bransfield anticipated the budget would be posted on the town website, www.portlandct.org, next week.

The referendum will be held Monday, May 11, from 6 a.m.-8 p.m. at Portland Library, 20 Freestone Ave.

War of Words Waged over East Hampton Historic Commission

by Michael McCoy

As far as town boards go, the Middle Haddam Historic District Commission (MHHDC) sounds like it may be one of the few immune to controversy.

However, as a recent slew of letters to the editor in the *Rivereast* indicates, it is anything but.

Middle Haddam is a sleepy village located in the south of East Hampton. It holds a rich history dating back to the 18th century, including its old, understated churches and a ship-building heritage. In an effort to celebrate the village, East Hampton set up a nationally-recognized historic district in 1977, and created the MHHDC to preserve it.

The MHHDC is composed of five regular members and three alternate members. The commission's handbook, published in December, states its *raison d'être* as "to preserve and protect the many architectural phases of Middle Haddam, to encourage and honor the periods of construction, the historic nature and detail of property over time."

Though it seems discord has not been a signature of the commission, a one-year-plus period was rife with tension, and the aftershock is still being played out.

Margaret McCutcheon Faber is a former MHHDC member who provided the *Rivereast* with an exhaustive written narrative of her perception of this rift.

According to Faber, who carries a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from Oxford University, the Middle Haddam Association (MHA) – a separate, nonprofit entity concerned with the interests of the village – asked her in 2005 to "write a history of Middle Haddam and its architecture." When she presented her history to the MHA, she said the group's president, Barbara Angelico, was surprised to learn that the Samuel Taylor House, which she had recently purchased, was built in 1860. Angelico allegedly had plans to "demolish" it, Faber said.

Faber said that, before long, the MHHDC issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for the demolition. When efforts to persuade the commission to change their mind failed, Faber said she contacted the State Historic Preservation Office, which imposed a "90-day demolition delay." Faber said that Angelico then changed her mind and decided to "work with the structure," via renovation. "Unfortunately the demolition was essentially accomplished anyway," Faber lamented.

Faber reported this episode to then-Town Manager Alan Bergren, "who suggested that the only way to affect positive change was to be-

come a commissioner." So, in September 2005 she applied to become a member of MHHDC, and was called for an interview in December of that year. She said of the commission, "Needless to say, they were surprised to see me there," and alleged that her presence threatened the commission's "status quo."

Faber then said that a petition circulated, signed by 64 residents, endorsing the reappointment of Ray Krupa and Doug Mackeown. Faber alleged that, along with this petition, rumor spread that she was "appointed inappropriately 'through the back door' based on political connections with the Chatham Party-another false accusation."

She said that then-commission chairman Doug Mackeown was among those who tried to thwart her appointment. This included a Feb. 27 letter to the Town Council and appointment subcommittee that requested the council reject her application on the grounds of her stating ownership of a degree in "Historic and Cultural Preservation" when it is indeed in "Cultural Anthropology."

His letter concluded, "I understand that it is the town's policy that if any false information, omissions or misrepresentations are discovered on an application, that application may be rejected. There is a difference between a degree in Historic Preservation and Anthropology." (Mackeown was unavailable for comment.)

"For whatever reason," Faber wrote in the narrative she gave to the *Rivereast*, "the MHHDC and their supporters could not accept that I might have been appointed based on merit or experience."

Faber was appointed nonetheless by the Town Council in February 2006.

In May of that year, Faber said, it was unanimously decided that she update the MHHDC ordinance. Faber said Mackeown took advantage of her absence from an October meeting to accuse her of "overstepping boundaries" in her unauthorized proceeding of the ordinance update. She confronted him the following month, and he issued a written apology that December, she said.

Faber recalled a similar episode in March 2007, when Mackeown questioned her role of "Vice Chair/Clerk," saying she was only voted to the position of "Clerk." Faber said two other members echoed this a week later. However, a transcript of the May 2006 meeting cites nominating committee member Ned Costello as moving for Faber to "be elected as the vice chair/clerk." Faber added that Mackeown went door-to-door on March 25 "supporting his accusation."

Faber said that in April 2006, the MHHDC commissioned her to write guidelines, of which she said, "After sharing them with professionals for review, they were praised widely, and, in fact, Jan Cunningham, Historic Preservationist...and the author of Middle Haddam's National Register application, praised the guidelines and suggested I pursue a career in historic preservation." These guidelines were then scheduled to be discussed at a February 2007 workshop. However, in the time leading up to a workshop, Faber said her opponents held "secret meeting," sent an e-mail to the MHA members warning them that the guidelines threatened their property right, distributed a flyer that read, "Don't let a *select* [the word was italicized on the flyer] few decide for you."

It seems like the vice chair controversy was the straw that broke the camel's back, as Faber wrote, "At this point it became clear that no matter what I did, no matter how many times the commission's allegations were proven to be completely baseless and without merit, they would not stop. Mr. Mackeown and the others involved were relentless and ruthless in their personal attacks and attempts to discredit me, and I reached the point where my focus was completely distracted from commission work by the continuing necessity to defend myself."

Faber resigned in April 2007.

"Almost immediately following my resignation," Faber wrote, "the MHHDC stopped posting agendas or minutes at the Middle Haddam Post Office and sank back into obscurity."

However, Faber wrote, the actual "coup de gras" came later. In November 2008 they adopted their handbook. Among other things, she complained that, despite commission members' criticism of her work on commission guidelines, she said, "At least 50 percent was plagiarized verbatim..."

She continued, "That they plagiarized my work after the treatment I endured is unethical and demeaning..."

Faber later commented, "I think they felt threatened for some reason... They kept accusing me of things that weren't true."

Further grievances from Faber include her voicing support of term limits. Instead, she said, some members have served for more than 20 years. She also voiced disapproval of their recognizing all buildings in the district as equal instead of focusing on historic ones. She also alleged that the commission has repeatedly denied any district structures being listed in the National Registry, when she said there are indeed.

Current MHHDC Chairman James Royster addressed this in last week's *Rivereast*: "The Middle Haddam Historic District as a whole is on the National Register of Historic Places. But as the quoted handbook statement indicated, no individual properties within the historic district are on the National Register as worthy of specific recognition."

Indeed, Faber, whose mother used to serve on the commission, said the commission got derailed the mid-1990s when she said it "began being run as a casual, social club."

Faber further said, "If I didn't think it would turn into a circus, I would definitely file and ethics complaint."

James Royster was appointed to the commission in April 2008, a full year after Faber resigned. However, she said Royster was nevertheless one of the major players who led to her resignation.

Royster, who was voted as chairman in January of this year, said of commission members, "We are conscious of what we are permitted to do and what we are not permitted to do," though he declined to explain anything beyond what he has written in *Rivereast* letters.

He did say, though, that the bulk of this saga is "ancient history," continuing, "Frankly, I deeply regret that there remains a controversy and bitterness."

Royster also noted that he did not initiate any dialogue in the *Rivereast*, and that "It seems to me that if Ms. Faber has complaints... it would be more appropriate for her to take those complaints to the Town Council or Town Manager." Instead, he said, he figured Faber was attempting to "try this case in the press."

Faber responded that she brought this to the Town Council, as well as Bergren and current Town Manager Jeff O'Keefe, but to no avail. "No one gave me any time," she said, figuring the powers that be view it as an "inconsequential commission."

Town Manager Jeff O'Keefe said, "Regardless of under whose leadership, the Middle Haddam Historic District Commission has continually tried to move their progress forward."

"The bottom line" he continued, "is the handbook is together and that's a good effort." He added, "The work creating a handbook of that magnitude is extensive."

Furthermore, he figured that differing philosophies in commission such as this is par for the course.

The Middle Haddam Historic District Commission meets at 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall on the last Thursday of the month.

East Hampton Finance Board Cuts \$100,000, Sends Budget to Council

by Michael McCoy

Monday's Board of Finance (BOF) public hearing basically boiled down to a matter of \$100,000, which seemed to have the audience split down the middle.

By the time the meeting was over, the BOF had formally cut the school board's proposed budget by the \$100,000, after a small parade of speakers had voiced their concerns.

The cut left the proposed 2009-10 budget at \$37.43 million, a \$486,590, or 1.32 percent, increase over current year spending. The budget also anticipates a 24.19 mill rate, a .38 mill increase over the current year. This would translate to a 1.60 percent tax hike.

The spending plan now goes to the Town Council. The BOF will present it to the council at its Tuesday, April 14, meeting, and the council is expected to vote on it. Then, the public will have its say during a referendum Tuesday, May 5, from 6 a.m.-8 p.m., at the high school.

Last week, the BOF collected a 6-1 consensus among its members to present a budget at the hearing that included a \$100,000 cut to the Board of Education (BOE) budget. And that is the spending package that was presented Monday night.

The budget breaks down to \$25.26 million for education, \$10.20 million for town operations and transfers and \$1.97 million for debt service. Breaking the increases down, this is a \$515,952 jump in education, a \$62,620 increase in debt service, and a \$91,982 decrease in town operations and transfers.

BOF Vice Chairman Sharon Kjellquist added that the board is anticipating an unspecified decrease in state money, as well as 31 and 49 percent drops in licenses, permits, fees and investment income respectively.

Well over 100 people populated the high school auditorium, and they were given their chance to speak after the presentation. However, before turning it over to the public, Kjellquist vowed, the BOF was "not anticipating any layoffs, as it currently stands."

As a result of the \$100,000 BOE cut, the mill rate was reduced from a .47 increase in Town Manager Jeff O'Keefe's initial budget presentation to the aforementioned .38 increase. Several speakers Tuesday said this was such a minimal change in the mill rate, a \$100,000 cut to the school board budget was unwarranted.

"I think it would be a disservice to the town," said Roger Abraham of the \$100,000 cut.

Cindy Harrington said, "I'd really hate to see further cuts to the education budget," and worried that such cuts may result in teacher layoffs, which would, in turn result in class size increase.

"I don't like my tax dollars going up any more than anybody else in this room," said David Telep. Furthermore, he shared that he expected his wife to lose a job. Despite this, he commented, "I'm willing to pay," to avoid education cuts.

Ellen Nosal, who lives on Main Street, said, "There's no quick way to get to East Hampton High School from my home these days," referencing the long-delayed Main Street Bridge construction. She went on to use that bridge as a metaphor, saying, "We build bridges as part of a community, and the most important bridge we can build is our education." Seemingly criticizing cuts to education, she proposed, "It might take more than nine months to get it back."

Jeanne Peaslee said Center School was already operating with a "skeleton crew" and said the town spends \$400 less per pupil than their District Reference Group (DRG) average.

John Ciriello also discouraged cutting education spending, and said, "the only reason I am where I am is education." Instead, he proposed shaving some money off the town employees with the highest salaries, figuring this could allow everyone to keep their job. He also figured employees could forfeit some vacation time. "Education is everything," declared Ciriello.

Joanna Mercaldi said that because of her husband's medical condition, her job alone supports their household financially. "We are making sacrifices at home for our children," she said. But, she added, "We both believe education is not an area we can say 'no' to."

However, while noting the validity of those who spoke before him, Ron Buccilli said, "These are extraordinary times. People are losing jobs."

"If not now, when would we ever be able to exercise fiscal discipline?" Buccilli wondered. When it comes to spending, he admitted, "It's hard to say 'no;' it's easy to say 'yes.'" Still, he said, "this would be the time" to adopt a budget with a zero percent tax increase.

Lori Wasilewski seemed to concur with these comments and opened by saying, "I'm a little disappointed the entire Board of Finance is not here tonight." (Of the seven BOF members, only five – Kjellquist, Kurt Comisky, George Pfaffenbach and Barbara Moore – were present.)

She continued, "I would like to see a zero percent increase in our budget. We're in extraordinarily difficult times. ... Our family has been hit hard." She added that, while the \$100,000 cut might not result in a significant per-person savings for some people, "it's not the same for everyone." Furthermore, she noted

Kjellquist's comments that the cut would not result in teacher layoffs.

Directly after, Margie Wilson said she respectfully disagreed with the last two speakers, and made her point in a choppy rhythm: "No cuts to education. None. I'm struggling too. No cuts to education."

At this point the BOF asked, by a show of hands, how many people wanted to see the budget high or lower than proposed that night. It appeared that about 20 people wanted it lower, while about 30 wanted to see it higher. This left about half the audience not raising their hands at all.

At the hearing, BOF members said they would not answer public questions that night, but would post answers later. This prompted resident Mark Philhower to comment, "I'm a little disappointed in your not answering questions," a remark that was met with the night's loudest applause.

Philhower went on to ask why a new town planner was being hired when the BOF anticipated a decrease in license and application fees. He also said the Connecticut State Police recently forfeited their raises for the next three years, and wondered why East Hampton employees have not offered something similar. (O'Keefe later addressed some of the night's questions, and said "that town planning position is significantly different from the building official's.")

As for the \$100,000 cut from the BOE, Philhower commented, "We miraculously found another hundred thousand dollars. That happens every budget cycle." He added that this makes any BOE submitted budget "suspicious," seeming to suggest that anticipated cuts were built in.

Town Council Chair Melissa Engel also spoke, and said, "I applaud the Board of Education, Board of Finance, and Town Council. On a night like this, we are hammered by people."

She continued, "If I was on the Board of Education, I would be as adamant as [BOE Chairman] Mike Vasquenza to get their budget through." Furthermore, she figured, "I don't think there is a member of the Town Council who would want to see a teacher laid off." However, she said she was "privy to conversations with Jeff O'Keefe and [Superintendent of Schools] Judy Golden" that said the mill increase could be as little as 0.25 mills without lost jobs.

Engel added, "I am not in favor of laying off teachers. ... so, I don't want to pit the town council against the Board of Education."

Furthermore, she said she was not enamored

by the idea of multiple referenda, and instead declared, "I'd like to get it right the first time."

Golden later remarked on the 0.25 mill increase version that Engel alluded to, "Mrs. Engel, I think we have a misunderstanding," although she wouldn't elaborate. She also upheld the earlier comment about the per pupil costs compared to the DRG. She added a further dimension, reporting that East Hampton spends \$1,000 less per pupil than the state average.

Town Council member John Tuttle noted some of the questions about fund balance that night. "We should leave that fund balance alone."

Finance Director Jeff Jylkka then explained how the fund balance has grown from \$1.6 million to \$4.6 million since 1999. "Having a strong fund balance is a positive in the eyes of the rating agencies," he said.

"Down the road, that's going to pay dividends," he said. "It will make us a little more competitive." More immediately, he said, the fund balance "certainly helped with our [bond] rating upgrade." (A more detailed article on this bond rating upgrade is in this week's *RiverEast*.)

After the public hearing, the board voted 4-1 (chairman Ted Hintz was present via cell phone) to send the budget, which upheld the \$100,000 cut, to the Town Council. Only Pfaffenbach voted against it, saying, "I was not for that cut in the first place. It's worth the difference."

"My feeling is, I would love to see it lower," Hintz said, who added that he didn't "want to do anything that will cut any teachers."

Comisky said, "The budget... was pretty austere to begin with." Furthermore, he noted the perception some have that the BOE might build in anticipated cuts to their budget, and added, "I don't think that happened this year." But, he said, "The \$100,000 reduction should have no impact. ... I support this; it's appropriate for the time."

Kjellquist said, "This is a good budget," once again saying it involved no teacher layoffs.

When asked if they were as confident as Kjellquist that no teachers would be laid off, Golden and Vasquenza both declined to agree or disagree. Vasquenza noted that, between O'Keefe's reductions to the BOE-adopted budget and the BOF's, the BOE budget has now suffered more than \$220,000 in cuts. However, he added that the board would not start trying to account for the cuts until a budget is adopted by the public and vowed the board would make "every effort to keep cuts from impacting children."

Menzo Preparing to Bid Farewell to Marlborough School System

by Adam Benson

After four years at the helm of Marlborough's only school, Superintendent Sal Menzo will leave the district June 30, when he becomes head of the Wallingford School District.

On Monday, the Wallingford Board of Education formally appointed Menzo to run its 12-school, 7,000-student district.

"My experience in Marlborough has been nothing but a pleasure and a great learning experience for myself," Menzo said Tuesday. "I had such high expectations and I truly believe they have been met and exceeded."

Under his direction, Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary School was named Connecticut's 2008 School of the Year by the state Association of Schools, and, in their appointment of him, Wallingford board members noted Menzo's close working relationship with district officials in data delivery and curricula.

Board members also pointed to Menzo's collaborative approach to purchasing fuel, supplies and health insurance by partnering with Marlborough town leaders and neighboring officials to cut down on costs.

Marlborough Board of Education Chairwoman Maria Grove said Menzo informed the body about his standing in Wallingford about a week ago. She said Marlborough will miss hav-

ing him at the district but understood his reason for moving on.

"I think it would have been unrealistic to expect someone who's such a rising star in our state would want to stay in a one-school district for more than four years," Grove said. "He continues to be happy here but it's time for him to move on with his career."

Menzo, 38, said choosing to leave Marlborough wasn't easy, but he was attracted to the challenge of overseeing a school system that offered a kindergarten through Grade 12 education to students. (In Marlborough, the school system is K-6. Grades 7-12 are served by the RHAM middle and high schools in Hebron.)

"I think it was an inevitable decision in the sense that I want to continue to grow as a professional," Menzo said. "I was very deliberate in the next step I needed to take."

Though Marlborough only runs one school, its participation in the RHAM school district puts educational leaders in a unique position. Menzo has spent much of his time helping to coordinate curriculum at the middle and high school levels to ensure Marlborough students entering the regional district are well prepared to succeed.

Though news of his departure became public in the heat of budget negotiations with the town, Menzo said his elevation to Wallingford's top school post was unrelated to the current climate in Marlborough.

Menzo said he plans to help the Board of Education transition its new superintendent into the job and remains committed to getting a budget approved that provides Marlborough students with the kinds of services and classroom teaching the town has become known for, he said.

"I was not arbitrary or capricious in trying to find a new position," Menzo said.

Grove said board members understand Menzo's reasons for leaving the district, and stressed the board members' support for him despite the current heated budget situation.

"I'm sure that he's saddened that people would even consider that" he is leaving due to the budget situation, Grove said. "He's entirely committed and he'll be working up to that moment he leaves and probably well beyond for our town and our school."

Menzo – who earned his doctorate in educational leadership at the University of Connecticut – began his administrative career in Wethersfield as principal of Silas Deane Middle

School.

He said he loved being a part of the small-town atmosphere offered in Marlborough and is heading a district so large its total enrollment equals Marlborough's population.

Grove said the Board of Education will form a search committee for Menzo's replacement later this month, with the hope somebody can be in the job by the time the new school year begins.

"This gives us an opportunity to explore the different options that we have," Grove said, including the prospect of hiring a part-time superintendent. "At this point, we have no decisions made because it's all new information to us."

Menzo had high praise for the Marlborough Board of Education, and he said the friendships he's developed with its members over the past four years made his decision to leave even harder.

"They are a very kind group of people and definitely understand education. This community is positioned very well with this board," he said. "I've been blessed to be a member of this community and I'm struggling to write my letter of resignation because I do connect with people here very deeply."

Marlborough Finance Board Scales Back School Budget Reductions

by Adam Benson

After a rollercoaster week featuring a pair of high-profile meetings between the Board of Finance (BOF) and Board of Education (BOE), the town's school budget picture is finally starting to take shape.

On Wednesday, the BOF directed the school board to cut \$250,000 from its proposed 2009-10 budget, just two days after initially asking for \$350,000 in reductions.

BOF Chairwoman Catherine Gaudinski said Thursday she doesn't anticipate the \$256,445 figure to change again before the body holds its town wide public hearing on the budget April 27.

Currently, Gaudinski said the town is facing about a 4 percent overall budget increase, and voters could sign off on the deeper education cuts to bring that number down.

But Gaudinski said the board's stance marked a compromise with district officials and parents who have turned out in the hundreds with pleas to keep classroom services intact despite the difficult financial times.

"We're still higher than what some of the members (of the BOF) expressed an opinion on at the beginning, and we're trying to see where we can go," Gaudinski said. "To get to a lower number, there will have to be services cut whether it's on the town side or the school side, and that's what we need to hear from residents at the public hearing."

On Monday, the BOE convened following a BOF budget workshop and quickly crafted a revised \$7.03 million budget for the upcoming fiscal year that reflected \$350,000 in reductions.

Superintendent of Schools Sal Menzo said Thursday the new figure could allow the district to sidestep layoffs and cuts in classroom services, though the exact shape of the reductions won't be known until the BOE meets next

week.

BOE Chairwoman Maria Grove said before Wednesday's meeting the "absolute best we can hope for" were reductions of no more than \$200,000.

Last October, Menzo enacted a district-wide spending freeze to help keep costs under control, and Grove said that policy has left very little fat to trim from its budget next year.

"We feel like \$200,000 is what we can comfortably cut without affecting services," she said.

But on Thursday, Grove expressed confidence board members will be able to find an extra \$56,000 in savings without impacting classroom services.

"It's not ideal, but it's progress, and it's better than we were expecting and we're happy that both of the boards were able to compromise," she said. "Based on the numbers, we are very hopeful and resolved to keep the staffing levels as they are."

Menzo presented the BOF with an array of options that could be explored to reach the \$256,445 benchmark that include cutting the district's summer literacy program, reducing contingency funds, turning over weekend custodial and building scheduling to the town and reducing instructional supplies from \$300 per teacher to \$100 per teacher.

It will be up to the BOE where the reductions will come from, though Menzo said he was grateful the BOF gave educators a small savings cushion that could spare district employees their jobs.

"I'm appreciative of the Board of Finance for reconsidering the initial reduction," he said. "The Board of Finance really did show some respect for the fact that the parents were concerned about reducing personnel."

Woman Charged in Fatal 2008 Crash in Hebron

A Berlin woman was arrested this week in connection with a 2008 crash that claimed the life of an Andover man, state police said.

Kellie Kubica, 48, of Berlin, turned herself into State Police Troop K in Colchester April 6, on an outstanding arrest warrant on charges of negligent homicide with a motor vehicle and making a restricted turn.

The charges stemmed from a June 12, 2008, collision with a motorcycle being driven by Mark Bergeron, 47, of 45 Windbrush Ln., Andover. According to police, Bergeron was traveling southbound along Route 85 in Hebron when he was

struck by a car being driven by Kubica. Police said Kubica was attempting to make a left hand turn onto Brian Drive from the northbound side of Route 85.

Bergeron was transported via Life Star Helicopter to Hartford Hospital, where he was pronounced dead, police said.

Kubica, meanwhile, was transported to Middlesex Hospital in Marlborough, police said, and released later that day.

Following her arrest, Kubica was released on a \$5,000 non-surety bond and is due in Rockville Superior Court April 21, police said.

Colchester Police News

3/31-Jeffrey Rouleau, 46, of Bristol, was charged with driving under the influence and failure to maintain the proper lane, State Police said.

4/1-Francis Corrado, 47, of 58 Hi Lea Farm Rd., was charged with driving under the influence and failure to maintain the proper lane, State Police said.

4/2-David Gazdzicki, 21, of 773 Middletown Rd., was charged with fourth-degree larceny and conspiracy, State Police said.

4/3-James Otka, 22, of 489 Old Hartford Rd., was charged with evading, failure to drive upon the right, driving without insurance, failure to carry registration and making a false statement, State Police said.

4/6-Daniel Otka, 29, of Willimantic, was charged with third-degree assault and sixth-degree larceny, State Police said.

Hebron Police News

3/31-Joseph Lanford, 18, of 444 Wall St., was charged with third-degree assault and risk of injury to a minor, State Police said.

Marlborough Police News

4/4-Meghan Welch, 19, of Hebron, was charged with driving while impaired, failure to drive upon the right and illegal use of cell phone while operating a motor vehicle, State Police said.

4/4-Jason Jackson, 26, of East Hampton, was charged with driving while impaired and failure to drive in the established lane, State Police said.

Portland Police News

3/31 — Russell Baker, 21, of 107 Quarry Hill Ln., Haddam Neck, was charged with second-degree failure to appear and violation of probation, Portland Police said.

4/1 — Justin Jones, 19, of 315 Main St., was charged with misuse of plates, operating unregistered motor vehicle and operating motor vehicle with no insurance, police said.

4/2 — John Holland, 42, of 42 Bartlett St., was charged with criminal violation of protective order and second-degree harassment, police said.

4/3 — Claudette Worth, 48, of 463 Main St., Newington, was charged with second-degree harassment and criminal trespass, police said.

4/4 — Joshua Hawk, 20, of 880 Summer Hill Rd., Madison, was charged with threatening, breach of peace and second-degree harassment, police said.

4/5 — Robert Berry, 49, of 13 Fairview St., was charged with DUI, police said.

East Hampton Police News

3/29 — Edward Markham, 34, of 41 East High St., was arrested for disorderly conduct, two counts of third-degree assault, risk of injury to a minor, two counts of third-degree strangulation, interfering with a police officer and refusal to be fingerprinted, East Hampton Police said.

3/31 — Frank C. Stella III, 26, of 4 Cliff Dr., Old Saybrook, was arrested pursuant to a court-ordered warrant for violation of probation, police said.

3/31 — David Benjamin, 42, of 12 Hayes Rd., was arrested for operating while under suspension, police said.

3/31 — A 16-year-old male juvenile was issued a ticket for traveling too fast for conditions and passenger restriction, police said.

Obituaries

East Hampton

Mildred Gustine

Mildred (Kaiser) Gustine, 84, wife of Nelson Gustine, passed away Sunday, April 5, at her home in East Hampton. Born April 24, 1924, in Meriden, she was the daughter of the late Frederick Sr. and Clara (Sheldon) Kaiser.

Mildred spent summers in East Hampton for 50 years until moving to East Hampton with her husband 15 years ago. She and Nelson built and maintained Nelson's Family Campground in East Hampton 45 years.

She was a member of the CT Campground Owners Association, a member of the East Hampton Historical Society and an active member of Christ Episcopal Church in Middle Haddam. Mildred was a former member of the Women's Club of St. Andrew Church in Meriden and many years ago worked for the former Miller-Johnson Printing Company, also in Meriden.

Besides her husband, she leaves two sons and daughters-in-law, Glenn and Michele Gustine and Bruce and Kelly Gustine, all of East Hampton, and give grandchildren, Parker, Clara, Carter, Rebecca and Joshua.

Mildred was predeceased by her brother Frederick Kaiser Jr.

The funeral service for Mildred was held Wednesday, April 8, at Christ Episcopal Church, Rt. 151, Middle Haddam. Burial will be at the convenience of the family. Calling hours were Tuesday evening, April 7, at Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Alzheimer's Association, 279 New Britain Rd., Kensington, CT 06037. Friends and family may leave an online condolence by visiting www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

East Hampton

Isabella Denman

Isabella (Hull) Denman, 96, of East Hampton, widow of Wayne H. Denman Sr., passed away Thursday evening, April 2, at Middlesex Hospital. Born June 26, 1912, in Clinton, she was a daughter of the late Charles and Nellie (Stevens) Hull. Isabella enjoyed making a home for her family and attending Haddam Neck Covenant Church.

She is survived by one son, Richard S. Denman of East Hampton; a stepson, Wayne H. Denman Jr. and his wife Janice of East Hampton; a daughter and son-in-law, Nancy D. and Jack Szymaszek, also of East Hampton; two grandchildren and their spouses, John IV and Barbara Szymaszek and Todd and Dawn Szymaszek and one great-grandchild, Amanda Szymaszek.

Isabella was predeceased by her brother Walter Hull and her sister Ruth Terray.

There will be a committal service Saturday, April 11, at 11 a.m. at Lakeview Cemetery in East Hampton. Spencer Funeral Home, 112 Main St., East Hampton, is in charge of arrangements.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Middlesex Hospital Hospice Program, 55 Crescent St., Middletown, CT 06457. Friends and family may leave an online condolence message at www.spencerfuneralhomeinc.com.

Marlborough

Robert J. Smith Jr.

Robert James Smith Jr., 62, of Marlborough, went home to be with the Lord, whom he loved and served, on Sunday, April 5. He was the beloved husband of Beverly (Dayton) Smith for 41 years.

Born in Orange, TX, he was the son of the late Robert J. Smith, Sr. and Ruth (Davenport) Smith. Bob was a captain in the U.S. Army. He served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, earning the Bronze Star and the Air Medal with seventeen Oak Clusters. Bob was a senior vice president at the Hartford Insurance Co. for 30 years, retiring in 2001.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by a daughter and son-in-law, Katherine A. and Robert W. Hansen III of Berlin; a son, Robert D. Smith of Madison, WI; two daughters and sons-in-law, Kristin A. and Neal B. Patel of Galena, IL, Karen E. and Michael A. DeCorleto of Marlborough; his 11 grandchildren, Evan, Ethan, Nathaniel and Elizabeth Hansen, Vivian and Rosalei Smith, Dylan, Emma and Noah Patel, Andrew and Lucy Grace DeCorleto; two sisters, Jane Fleming and Rebecca Bates; three brothers; Peter, David Scott and Jonathan Smith; and several nieces and nephews.

A memorial service was held Thursday, April 9, at the Colchester Bible Baptist Church, 38 Chestnut Hill Rd., Colchester. Burial, with full military honors, will be at the convenience of the family in the State Veterans Cemetery, Middletown. Calling hours were Wednesday evening from 5-8 p.m. at Mulryan Funeral Home, 725 Hebron Ave., Glastonbury.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

Portland

Zygmund Dombroski

Zygmund Dombroski, 94, of Ames Hollow Road, Portland, died Wednesday, April 1, at Middlesex Hospital. He was the husband of the late Albina Yudysky Dombroski. Born in Meriden, June 30, 1914, son of the late Stanley and Salomeja Dombroski, he was a lifelong Portland resident.

He was a graduate of Portland High School, Class of 1932, where he was a 14 letter athlete, and the University of Alabama, Class of 1936. Among his classmates were Paul "Bear" Bryant, legendary football coach, and Mel Allen, the voice of the New York Yankees. He became a physical education instructor first with Old Saybrook High School, then with the Hartford Trade School, now A.I. Prince Technical High School, where he was the Baseball and Basketball coach until his retirement in 1972. He was a member of the Portland Sports Hall of Fame and a parishioner of the Church of St. Mary.

He is survived by his son Robert Dombroski of Monroe; his grandchildren Laura Rochette of Durham, William Lodge, Jr., Kara Dombroski of East Lansing, MI, and Ariel Dombroski, currently a student at Temple University in Philadelphia, PA; his great-grandchildren Erin and Samantha, and several nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his daughter Patricia, his sisters Zem, Ceil, Stella, and Emily, Florence and brothers Ed and Joseph.

His family received relatives and friends in the Portland Memorial Funeral Home, 231 Main St., Portland, Tuesday, April 7. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Wednesday, April 8, in the Church of Saint Mary. Interment will be private in St. Stanislaus Cemetery in Meriden.

In lieu of flowers, gifts in his memory may be sent to the Church of Saint Mary, 51 Freestone Avenue, Portland, CT 06480.

For directions, or to leave an online expression of sympathy, visit www.portlandmemorialfh.net.

Colchester

Fannie A. Fidrych

Fannie A. Fidrych passed away Tuesday, March 31, after a brief illness, at the age of 97. She was born Sept. 25, 1911, in Jersey City, NJ and was the daughter of Frank and Julia (Kuchinski) Wasniewski and moved to Colchester as a small child.

On July 6, 1936, she married Anthony Fidrych. They enjoyed 69 years together until his death in 2005 at the age of 100. She was graduated from St. Francis Hospital School of Nursing in Jersey City, NJ, in 1934. She postponed a nursing career to raise her family. At the age of 65 she took a refresher RN course at Backus Hospital in Norwich, then worked part-time on the night shift at the former Elmachri Nursing Home, retiring at the age of 80. She was a communicant of St. Mary's Church in Norwich.

Devoted to her home and family she is survived by a daughter, Elizabeth McDermott and husband Jim of Hanson, MA; sons Edmond Fidrych and wife Joyce of Portland and Robert Fidych of Platteville, WI. Lovingly referred to a Babci, she is also survived by four grandchildren, and six great grandchildren, as well as many nieces and nephews and her caring and devoted caregiver, Ela Kujawa; by a brother Ira Wasniewski of Colchester and sisters, Teophila Mikolajcik of Norwich, Pat Swider of East Hartford and Florence Bystrowski of California.

She is predeceased by brothers George Wasniewski, John Wasniewski and sisters Cecelia Shaffhauser, Stella Gostkiewicz and Clara Dubiel.

Fannie's home was the gathering place for her family and friends to enjoy the warm welcome she extended to everyone. And especially to savor her special cooking delights, her fabulous tomato soup and strawberry cake. Knowing she is having a grand "kielbasa party" brings comfort to the family. Thinking of all the good times the family shared with her, her caring and loving ways, will always be remembered.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Connecticut Humane Society, 169 Old Colchester Rd, Quaker Hill, CT 06375 A calling hour was held Monday, April 6, from 9:30-10:30 a.m. at the Woyasz & Son Funeral Home, 141 Central Ave., Norwich, followed by a Mass of Christian Burial at St. Mary Church. Burial followed in Maplewood Cemetery.

Portland

John Paul Peterson

J. Paul Peterson, 89, of Portland, passed away Thursday, April 2, in the Weiss Hospice Unit at Middlesex Hospital surrounded by his family. Born in Cromwell he was the son of the late William R. and Clara Emelia (Bergeson) Peterson and had been married to his best friend and wife for 57 years, Sherrill H. (Prisk) Peterson.

Paul had been a resident of Portland for 88 years and was a graduate of Portland High School and Upsala College and furthered his studies at the Hartford Graduate Center where he earned a degree in Solar Energy. He was a Veteran of World War II serving in the US Army Air Corp. in the European Theater, and was held captive as a P.O.W. in Germany where he was forced into the 500-mile, 86-day forced march across Germany (Feb-May 1945).

He was part owner of the Wm. R. Peterson Oil Co. and retired as chairman of the Board of Directors, is a member of the Zion Lutheran Church in Portland and was a former chairman of the Board of Trustees of the church, was a two time Past Chairman of the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce, recipient of the Middlesex Chamber Good Guy Award, recipient of Distinguished Citizen of the Year Award, Corporator of Middlesex Hospital, 61-year member and past President of the Middletown Rotary Club and recipient of the Paul Harris Fellow, member and past Commander American Legion Post No. 69, long time member of the Portland Board of Finance, past Chairman for the Portland United Fund, former member Board of Trustees for Upsala College, former Director Rockfall Foundation, former Director American Red Cross, former Director City Savings Bank, former member Advisory Board for United Bank and Trust, former Corporator of Farmers and Mechanics Bank and member Warren Lodge AF & AM. Paul received the Connecticut River Council, Boy Scout of America Good Scout Award in 1996 and received a proclamation from the City of Middletown that Saturday, June 14, 1998 was J. Paul Peterson Day.

Paul is survived by his sons, John F. Peterson and his wife Marlene of Portland, R. Mark Peterson and his wife Lucyne of Moodus; his daughter, Lisa J. Peterson of Portland; his brother, Ernest Peterson and his wife Phyllis of Portland; three grandchildren, Melissa Couch and her husband Lee of Portland, J. Eric Peterson of Columbus, OH, and Marcy Herlihy and her husband Rory of Ivoryton; one great grandchild Rowan Pearle Herlihy; many nieces and nephews including his goddaughter, Kristina Peterson of Portland; his caregiver Michael Rakhmonov of Portland and his special friend Irene Cosgrove of Middletown.

Besides his parents and wife he was also predeceased by his brother W. Arthur Peterson.

Funeral services were held at the Zion Lutheran Church, 183 William St., Portland, on Monday, April 6, with the Rev. James R. Reemts officiating and interment will follow in the Swedish Cemetery in Portland with full military honors. Friends called at the Doolittle Funeral Home, 14 Old Church St., Middletown, on Sunday evening, April 5, and in lieu of flowers may make donations in Paul's memory to the Middlesex Hospital Weiss Hospice Unit, c/o Dept. of Philanthropy, 55 Crescent St., Middletown, 06457 www.middlesexhospital.org/donate, the American Red Cross, 97 Broad St., Middletown or to the Zion Lutheran Church Memorial Fund, P.O. Box 202, Portland, CT 06480.

Messages of condolence may be sent to the family at www.doolittlefuneralservice.com.