

Proposed School Budget
Projected Increase of One Percent

By Staff
March 3, 2010

The administration and staff of the upper and lower schools of the Byram Hills Central School Districts filled out the majority of the audience at the March 2, 2010 Board of Education meeting.

The hour-long Administration's Proposed Budget meeting was opened by Board of Education member John Grimes discussing the budget proposal, with a presentation that overviewed the expenditure side of the budget. It detailed the breakdown and analyze of funds of the administration's proposed request for a 1% increase from last year's 2009-2010 budget.

Superintendent Dr. Jackie Taylor pointed out the structure and functioning of Public Education is changing and the community needs to decide what it wants for its educational system. Currently the government is becoming more involved in the education process, resulting in the increase in development and popularity of charter schools. A charter school system receives public funds, but are freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to public school systems. In some studies, charter schools have been shown to benefit student's education and development. This is further explained in the January 8, 2010 report entitled, Why Byram Hills Is a Great Place to Learn and is available on the web site. Additional school funding is necessary, seeing as state aid is limited and is based on the "Wealth" status of our tax bracket by only providing about 4.6% of funding.

The tension exists between the rising costs for services and the community's demand for quality education. What amount will community members pay and how will that affect service? The administration doesn't want to reduce services because it would like to maintain a standard of excellence for our students to become successful citizens of the future.

On January 12, 2010 Budget Hearing 1 of the Budget Development Proposal, the Fiscal Trend for 2009-2010 was presented. In the fiscal trend documentation it was predicted that the budget would increase by 5.9% over the 2008-2009 school year from \$72,731,675 to \$79,611,512. However, last year's increase to the Administration's Proposed Budget was cut to 2.8% to \$77,278,623. This year, the Fiscal Trend indicates an increase of 2.5% to \$79,231,925. Yet, at the March 2, 2010 budget hearing, the Administration was able to propose a budget increase of 1% to \$78,048,596.

The 2010-2011 budget was presented at the January 12, 2010 Budget Hearing I of the Budget Development Process. As well, the document of Districts True Tax Rates, highlights 45 Westchester districts, with Byram Hill's ranking 39th out of 45 districts. We are among the lower tier in the county at \$11.44 per thousand for the 2009-2010 school year compared with the highest, Peekskill, which is \$23.42, and the lowest, Garrison, stands at \$8.03.

The Administration analyzed students' needs based on data and observation, recognized community input, and analyzed state and regional economic issues in order to come up with their 1% increased proposed budget. Because education is a service industry, the majority of the funds would be delegated to salaries, addressing state mandated pensions, contractual obligations of benefits and salaries and staffing costs. A quality education and programming is often overseen by quality leaders, and these individuals need to be compensated for their success, just as a doctor, lawyer or businessman would be compensated for their expertise and services.

Acting School Business Administrator and District Clerk Dick Lasalle said funds would continue to support excellence in education through all programs and services from kindergarten through Grade 12. In addition, funds support state and federally mandated programs, all the programs implemented since 1997, special education, pensions for staff, all athletic programs, all extracurricular programs and transportation services (available at www.byramhills.org/curriculum.cfm).

Other costs incurred cover health benefits, which union representatives have worked along with 23 other districts in reducing premium costs by 11%. Additional expenditures come from operational and maintenance issues (such as replacing a leaking roof over the gym facilities this year, and other capital maintenance projects over the next 5 years - see slide presentation page 23), as well as paying down debts and loans.

Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources & Leadership Development Dr. Bill Donohue discussed that a few teaching positions would be cut (around 15 or so, whereas other districts are looking to reduce 20-30 staff members), saving a little under \$1.7 million. This anticipated staff reduction is correlated with a projected decrease in enrollment over the next five years. Other cost effective measures were taken into consideration, but not at the expense of providing quality educational service.

Board member Rick Kaplan summed up the meeting urging the public to submit questions to the Board and Administration about budget issues either through e-mails, or by attending budget hearings. The next hearing is Monday, March 8, 2010, Budget Hearing II, which will focus on transportation measures and the budget's revenue side, as well as addressing questions from the public.

Discussion will continue on Tuesday, March 9, 2010, at Budget Hearing III, with a review of special services, technologies, athletics and fine arts. Questions can be raised on these topics, staffing and building issues, or services at the Budget Hearing meetings. Also at the March 23, 2010 meeting there will be the opportunity to bring up questions in front of the Board. The final adoption of the Board's Budget proposal will be in April 2010.

The public's voting opinions will not be considered by the Board and according to board member Ira Schulman, only facts will be presented. According to the Board of Education President Eve Rice, questions submitted on the Byram Hills web site will be answered within five business days,

Displaying this year's logo, Byram Hills: A Great Place To Learn, designed by art teacher, John Lopez in conjunction with Fine Arts Director, Joy Varley, the image urged for the public to stay informed on the vote to take place this coming May 18th, pointing out that all up-to-date information is available on ByramHills.org - Board of Education: Budget.