

REPORT OF THE BUDGET COMMITTEE

Budget Committee members, Department Heads, the Town Administrator, and the Board of Selectmen reviewed the Town budget. The Budget Committee, the SAU, and School District personnel reviewed each element of the School District's budget rationale at regularly scheduled weekly meetings starting in November of 2007. The initial School budget was received in December and reviewed by the Committee in the weeks that followed.

A major concern discussed by the Budget Committee was the continuing increases in property taxes, the effect on Fremont homeowners, and whether the continued increases in the budget were sustainable. For that reason, the Committee did not recommend the 3% wage increases recommended by Selectmen on top of the step increases Town personnel were scheduled to receive. This would have meant average wage increases of about 5%. When wages increase, so do payments towards state pensions and/or Social Security, Medicare, and workers compensation insurance. All those who are not on a step scale were recommended 2 % raises. Thus the concern was that 5% wage increases would prove unsustainable and eventually force cuts in other areas. The vote to keep wages to the step increases was not unanimous. In the Police Department, the Budget Committee recommended cuts in the training budget due to concerns that there were individuals receiving training who were not working any patrols. Also, the purchase of new cell phones was not supported. Under Parks and Recreation the Budget Committee recommended not spending the \$5,000 for track drainage and repair. It was thought to wait for the recommendations of the Engineering study to ensure the repairs are done properly and only need to be done once. There were also concerns that the staffing ratio was not reflecting the declining enrollment for the Summer Program. The Budget Committee will revisit that next year. The Library budget request was originally for an increase of \$14,000, a nearly 9% increase. This was considered excessive and unsustainable. The Selectmen recommended about \$2,000 less and the Budget Committee recommended about \$2,037 less than that for a recommendation of \$5,439 over last year's appropriation. Under Financial Administration, the Budget Committee recommended an increase in the line item for Treasurer equipment in support of the Town buying a new computer to be used exclusively by the Treasurer for Town business. Most other line items as recommended by the Selectmen were also recommended by the Budget Committee.

The expense of publishing and mailing the Annual Town report was discussed. As evidenced at the Post Office, a number of them get thrown away. The Town could save money if the number of printed reports was reduced and they were set aside for pick up around town instead of being mailed.

After input and additional information at the public hearing, the Budget Committee recommended Article 13 in the Town Budget for future expansion at the Historic Museum. There is still discussion about this expansion and whether it would require a bathroom and a septic system. The Budget Committee did not recommend article 14 for Great Bay Services. Article 15 was not recommended because the same services (assisting in finding low cost or free medications) can be found for free on such

internet sites as needymeds.com. Overall, the Selectmen recommended a grand total of \$2,675,668; a reduction of \$43,656 from the 2007 appropriation. The Budget Committee recommended \$2,633,513; or \$42,155 less than the Selectmen.

For the School District, the Budget Committee recommended \$9,926,076, which is \$208,855 less than the original \$10,134,931 requested by the School District. The Budget Committee recommended \$21,105 less for general substitutes. Also, the bill for tuition at Sanborn Regional High School is in the dispute and the Committee agreed to recommend \$86,255 less than that requested by Sanborn as that is the difference that the Fremont School District is disputing. The Gifted and ESL was reduced to last year's level of \$73,869. In Other Programs, the Budget Committee recommended cutting the School District's \$5,000 increase in Program Supplies to a \$2,500 increase, which was thought to be sufficient. Also, the Golf Program was reduced by \$500 with the thought that the difference could be made up by participants. Under Speech and Audio, the Budget Committee recommended the elimination of an unfilled position for a total reduction of \$48,752. Under the Superintendent's budget, the Budget Committee decided to be consistent with recommendations for the Town by limiting the pool for salary increases to 2% instead of 4.5%. The Budget Committee also did not recommend \$10,000 for reclassification. This is a recommended reduction of \$28,264.23. This was done in part to offset the new \$22,000 line item for office rent and also to limit future liabilities to the School District for retirement, FICA, etc. All other line items were recommended as the School District proposed.

Lastly, the Warrant Article for the Ellis School Support staff was not recommended. There were numerous individual objections to the contract though the one agreed upon was the cost. The estimated 40% increase in cost was considered unsustainable and would force cuts in education programs just as the current teacher's contract has. Also, the designation of a health care plan (Matthew Thornton) as the only option eliminates the ability of the School District to be flexible and innovative in addressing health care needs.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kohlhofer
Vice Chairman
Fremont Budget Committee

"There is one thing we can do, and the happiest people are those who do it to the limit of their ability. We can be completely present. We can be all here. We can...give all our attention to the opportunity before us."

~ Mark Van Doren