

## A Community Member's Guide to the Stonington Public Schools' Budget Process

| Timeframe       | What Happens?  | What Role Can Community Members Play?   |
|-----------------|--|---|
| <b>Fall</b>     | <p>The Superintendent meets with principals to develop individual school needs; Principals discuss budget process and anticipated needs with SBITs; Capital Improvement budget also is developed. (This is the budget for larger capital projects and usually encompasses items such as roof repairs and computer leases.)</p> | <p>Provide input to School-Based Improvement Teams. This can be done by attending meetings held at each school or by sending written communications to SBIT Chairpeople. (Meeting and membership information are available on school websites)</p>  |
| <b>December</b> | <p>The Board of Education approves a proposed Capital Improvement budget that is then sent on to the Board of Finance. At this point it becomes part of the Town budget, rather than the Board's budget. It can be changed before the end of the budget process. The Board also discusses and adopts a budget goal.</p>        | <p>Attend monthly Board of Education Meetings and provide input. (Regular Meetings of the Board are held on the second Thursday of the month at Central Office, 7pm)</p>  |
| <b>January</b>  | <p>The Board of Education receives proposed budget from the Superintendent. Board conducts weekly budget workshop sessions.</p>  | <p>Attend Board of Education budget workshops to listen, ask questions and provide input. (These meetings are held each Thursday at 7pm. Locations alternate between Central Office and SHS Commons. Please check district website for details. <a href="http://www.stonington.org">www.stonington.org</a>)</p> |

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| <b>February</b> | The Board of Education approves a recommended budget that is then sent to the Board of Finance.   | Continue to attend Board of Education budget workshops. Keep asking questions!<br><u>Have you registered to vote? If not, contact Town Hall.</u>  |
| <b>March</b>    | The Board of Education makes its formal budget presentation to the Board of Finance which deliberates on school and town budgets. By the end of the month, the Board of Finance will approve a recommended budget to send to the town's taxpayers.                                | Attend Board of Finance meetings. The schedule for these meetings can be found on the Town of Stonington website.<br><br><u>Have you registered to vote? If not, contact Town Hall.</u>   |
| <b>April</b>    | Public hearings on the budget take place this month. Dates available on Town website.<br><br>Town meeting on budget. Legally, budget can be approved by those in attendance at this point, but usually Board of Selectmen vote to send the budget to a town-wide vote/referendum. | Residents can voice their concerns, ask questions and make requests to Board of Finance. Finance board then takes another look at its recommendations and can make changes.<br><br>Attend Town Meeting. Share concerns with Board of Selectmen.<br><br><u>Have you registered to vote? If not, contact Town Hall.</u> |
| <b>May</b>      | Budget referendum. If budget is rejected, Board of Finance adjusts and brings to a second referendum. This process is repeated until taxpayers accept a budget at referendum.   | <u>You may register to vote up until 4:00pm on the day prior to the referendum.</u><br><br><b>VOTE!!!</b>   |
| <b>July</b>     | New fiscal year begins on July 1.   |   |

## **More Important Budget Information:**

**Q: What role does the Board of Finance play in the school budgeting process?**

**A:** The Board of finance cannot dictate line item cuts on the Board of Education. For example, the finance board cannot stipulate that the schools eliminate a particular program or add specific personnel. The board of Finance is restricted to making bottom line dollar amount adjustments to the school budget. If the Board of Finance recommends a school budget that is less than what was recommended by the Board of Education, the Board of Ed then revisits its budget and can make tentative adjustments before the budget is sent to referendum.

**Q: What happens when a budget is rejected at referendum?**

**A:** Traditionally, if a budget is rejected at referendum, the Board of Finance has cut more money before sending it back to referendum. This year, the finance board will include advisory questions on the ballot when taxpayers vote on the budget at referendum. The questions will be designed to help the finance board determine why residents voted as they did.

**Q: Why do some costs remain fluid throughout the budget process while others are finalized?**

**A:** Because the budget must be developed so many months before it actually goes into effect, some costs are not finalized and remain somewhat fluid during the process. For example, there is always the potential for new enrollment of students. On occasion, new students will arrive with special education needs that are unbudgeted or long-time teachers earning higher salary amounts may decide to retire late into the budget process, providing more dollars for salaries than anticipated. Conversely, expenses such as those for heating oil and gasoline might jump during the process, necessitating transfers from other accounts.

**Q: How can I best support public education in Stonington?**

**A:** The budget process in Stonington can be long. It is common for there to be two, three or more referendum votes before the budget is adopted. Because usually more reductions are made each time a budget is rejected, a most important way to support public education in town is to register to vote, and actually vote at each and every referendum.

## A Reconstruction of the Budget Process for 2009-2010

**December 2008:** Board of Education adopts the following budget goal: “To fund SPS programs that are effective, current and aligned with the district’s philosophy and long term goals.”

**January 2009:** Superintendent, Mike McKee, presents his budget to the Board of Education. Continuing to provide the school district’s 2008-2009 level of services would require a 6.17%. After informal consultation with the Boards of Education and Finance, he recommends a comprehensive list reflecting \$694,659 in reductions which results in a 2.29% recommended budget increase.

The Board of Education deliberates.

**February 2009:** The Board of Education continues deliberations and adopts a budget which includes a 2.81% increase. Reductions included:

- Not replacing 4 retiring elem and ms teachers
- 1.0 Administrator
- 1.0 DMS teacher (enrollment)
- 1 section of HS AP Bio
- Reduce HS PE requirement by .5
- Moratorium on library books and supplies
- MS Tech Ed program
- Elementary Library Media Specialists
- Grade 1 Literacy Paras
- Reduction in Custodial hours
- 1.0 School Secretary
- All non-competitive fieldtrips
- Reduction in late buses
- Cost of AP exams
- Reduction of conferences
- Limit athletic contests to CIAC
- Reduction in professional development
- Reduction in textbooks
- Reduction in repairs/maintenance
- Reductions in instructional and non-instructional supplies
- Reduction in dues and fees

**March 2009:** The Board of Education presents its budget to the Board of Finance.

Board of Finance reduces \$368,263 from BOE budget

**April 2009:** Due to concerns voiced by those in attendance, Board of Finance returns \$368,263 to the Board of Education Budget

**May 2009:** Budget referendum. Budget passes on first vote.