

Budget: battle brewing over percentage increase

From page 1

dures regarding payroll taxes.

"The state investments have dropped dramatically," Weichsel wrote. "As a result, the Comptroller's office has required an increase in town contributions of \$600,000. It's a very large hit."

Board of Finance member John Moise said

Weichsel and the other department heads could have worked much harder to keep costs down, and blasted the requested 6 percent increase as a "travesty."

"As far as I'm concerned, this budget is dead on arrival," Moise said. "A lot of towns are dealing with problems at the state level and don't come in with percentage increases like this. This budget's not worth the

paper it's printed on."

Part of the problem may be that some departments have requested far more than others.

"I again set a 2.5 percent increase as a goal," Weichsel said, referring to the departments. "Most have met that challenge or had very good justification if they exceeded that percentage. The large increases are from non-departmental

accounts."

Some departments, such as the library and the fire department, did come in at 2.5 percent or less. Other requests are much higher.

The Finance Department is asking for a 7.7 percent increase, while the Parks Department is asking for 8.3 percent.

"When you give a directive to department heads

for 2.5 percent, it should be followed," Moise said. "There's just no accountability [at town hall]. I understand the situation at the assessor's department because of revaluation, and I commend the departments that did what they were told, but the others asking for so much isn't fair to them."

The Board of Education submitted an \$80.4 million

proposal earlier last month. It represents a 4.3 percent increase over the current year's budget.

The Board of Finance will hold a hearing on both the town budget and the Board of Education budget on April 5. They will make their recommendation to the council shortly afterward. The Town Council will decide the final budget on May 10.

Breakfast: legislators tell officials dire fiscal news

From page 1

member Jill Notar-Francesco. "Some of these really hit us hard."

The legislators confessed that unless they are on the relevant committees, they do not often

have a chance to learn all the potential drawbacks of a proposed bill before they vote on it.

However, Zalaski noted that the state's dire situation could potentially have good results in this area.

"The unfunded mandates are being examined more than ever," he said. "Sometimes it takes a crisis to make a real difference."

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Erardi said he was concerned about the future funding for

Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grants. Schools across the state depend on this funding to help with rising costs, and it seems to be consistently in peril when the state deliberates budget issues.

"There is a really

mixed message coming out of Hartford right now," Erardi said.

The legislators responded that they were determined to keep ECS funding level for the foreseeable future.

Towards the end of the

meeting, the conversation turned to how to get concerned citizens and local officials involved together.

"Those are often very informative," Aresimowicz said. "Sometimes those conversations have changed how I voted."

Steps: new committee added

From page 1

One committee will be assigned to deal with major events, another will work on the planned STEPS website, one will deal with marketing and advertising, and another will be devoted to seeking out opportunities for community service.

"We tell them that we would like them to guide the work on these commit-

tees," said Youth Services Director Sue Saucier. "The adults are there to help, but we want to move their ideas forward."

Since its inception in 2008, STEPS has attracted a fairly large amount of ambitious students, many of whom will now be serving on these committees.

"Many people say 'kids are the future,' and that's the truth," said SHS stu-

dent Emily Socha. "Educating kids, teaching them new skills, helping them grow is all apart of what STEPS is trying to do...STEPS is a terrific organization that I enjoy being a leader in."

STEPS Coordinator Kelly Berkmoes said the idea was already introducing them to some new faces.

"We're getting a lot of new kids," she said.

New restaurant on West Street

By ROB GLIDDEN
STAFF WRITER

A new restaurant, Wrapsody Bistro, recently opened on 2176 West Street, right on the Southington-Bristol line.

ESPN headquarters is visible from the parking lot, and the building was once a McDonalds. The new owners have spent a year converting the prop-

erty into an upscale bistro with a full bar.

The menu is primarily focused on wraps and sandwiches, though other dishes are available.

"We wanted to bring something unique to this area," said co-owner Mauro Belli. "People can come here and try something different."

Belli himself also works in the Creative

Services department at ESPN, and expects their employees to make up a large portion of his customers.

The restaurant was already drawing crowds in its first week, and a prepared statement released by the owners said one motivating factor for them was trying to help the economy in the midst of a recession.

Stop & Shop helps raise money for food banks

The Stop & Shop Supermarket Company has announced that its Southington store raised over \$3,330 for the Southington Community Services along with Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis and local food pantries to help provide hunger relief to area residents.

From October 30 until December 3, all Stop & Shop stores from New Hampshire to New Jersey participated in the 2009 Food for Friends campaign.

Through the sale of paper turkeys and fundraising events held at the stores, Stop & Shop associates and

customers donated over \$1.2 million.

Together with a corporate match, Stop & Shop will donate more than \$1.4 million to local and regional food banks.

"In this challenging economic climate, we are so grateful to our customers and associates for supporting the Food for Friends program," said Faith Weiner, Stop & Shop Director of Public Affairs. "We exceeded the amount of money raised last year and that can truly be attributed to people wanting to support their own local communities and neighbors."

Community donations are helping Bread for Life

Recently, members of the Southington community have found a new way to help the less fortunate. Whether it's a birthday, anniversary, a holiday, or other special occasion, people have been asking their families and friends to give them a card and a check made out to Bread for Life in lieu of gifts.

The organization has begun receiving envelopes from these individuals with as few as two and as many as 15 checks of various amounts made out to Bread for Life. The group use these monies to help

fund its lunch time program, our senior feeding program, our shut-in feeding program, our community food pantry (a collaboration of BFL and Southington Community Services) and, most recently, the collaboration with the Southington Board of Education to provide children at Flanders, Derynoski and Thalberg Elementary Schools with breakfast at no cost to them.

Eldon Hafford, Executive Director of Bread for Life, stated "people are taking their

own special occasions and making other members of their community the beneficiary of their good fortune. We have even seen children, as young as seven, asking their families and friends to make donations in their name

in place of gifts. What a wonderful way to make a special occasion even more special."

Donations to Bread for Life can be sent to P.O. Box 925, Southington, Connecticut, 06489.

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