

April 24, 2013

To: Town Council

From: Betty Wassmundt

I'm concerned about this part of the Charter which allows you to spend, at your will and without public input, other monies you may receive from the state subsequent to having adopted a budget. You should not do this; it's disrespectful of the public. It makes a mockery of the Town Meeting and it's just plain dishonest.

I regret that Mansfield won't receive all the PILOT money you've been getting. Quite likely you won't be getting so much money in the future either; this town needs to adapt right now. It's time to budget for needs instead of wants and perks.

I ask you to act responsibly towards the taxpayers. Pass a budget based on the state information you have and, live with it. If additional money comes in from the state, give this money back to the taxpayer as a mill rate decrease. If additional money is taken away by the state, tell town management to cut expenses to make up for the shortfall. The taxpayer should no longer be town management's cash cow.

Members of the Town Council,

In the event that I am unable to be present during the meeting when you are discussing the Board of Education budget, I wanted to make a few points and have left this statement with Superintendent of Schools Baruzzi. I have another meeting that I must attend in Hartford and, having just been asked to attend here yesterday, I cannot reschedule.

Just as when the Governor's proposed budget came out, we should keep in mind that the proposed budget from the Appropriations Committee is also only a proposal. While it is certainly concerning that they are proposing a serious cut to the Pilot and Pequot Funds, the budget process is far from over. The concern several months ago was the elimination of the Pequot Grant, Pilot funds being combined with the Education Cost Sharing grant, and the elimination of the car property tax. Those concerns now seem to be gone. The process will take several more months and the final numbers will no doubt be different. As in years past, should there be reason to, budgets can be adjusted downward later in the year. The Board has always worked with the Town whenever that has become necessary.

The Board's budget for 13-14 is a level service budget. There are no new initiatives or increased staffing proposed. In fact, there is a reduction in staffing of a total of 6.5 positions – 3 certified teaching positions, 3 Instructional Assistants and .5 of a secretarial position. The small increase in overall costs, largely as a result of small contractual salary increases comes after 4 consecutive years of zero budget increases. The assumption if the Town Council decides to reduce the Board's overall budget is that there would be a reduction in the current programs or reduction in the already reduced staffing levels, possibly harming the education of our students.

Should the Council choose to reduce the budget, the Board would ask the Superintendent to recommend cuts to consider. Those decisions would be made by the Board in whole, and it would be inappropriate for the Superintendent or myself to discuss which programs or positions might go unfunded with the Council tonight, that is a matter for the Board of Education.

The Superintendent can discuss with you the process the Board undertook several weeks ago where the Board did not renew the contracts of all non-tenured certified staff, and explain how and why that was done.

I would also urge the Council to maintain its commitment to the \$400,000 in funding for infrastructure repairs, security improvements and IT upgrades. After years of delay in the School Building Project decision making process, these are the minimum funds needed to be set aside.

I certainly understand the difficulty municipalities face, particularly Mansfield, having to determine budgets a month or more prior to the state determining municipal aid. In the meanwhile, the Council and Town Manager should work through any means necessary to urge level funding of overall town aid from the state. I am certain members of the Board will join you in that regard. I urge the Council to be thoughtful in any actions taken tonight.

Mark LaPlaca - Chairman, Mansfield Board of Education -April 24, 2013