

Budget talks fail to draw interest from residents

By Dotti Farrington

Town Administrator Bruce Keiser presented his 2007-08 budget plan to small audiences, mostly town workers, at three relatively short Town Council workshops, totaling not quite five hours, earlier this month. A mid-April session for council adoption of the budget is due to be scheduled.

Some town and school leaders discussed details about their department needs, with no apparent pressure to defend their requests. Only one resident spoke briefly.

Internal praise

The five councilors, with only two members missing one session each, mostly repeated the praise that Keiser heaped on his workers, and the councilors in turn praised Keiser and Finance Director Christina Collins for good news about town finances.

The three councilors at the workshop on school needs also

praised school leaders for the sparse budget they proposed, and spent a little time discussing long term changes in the local school system with declining enrollments.

The only citizen opinion was expressed by Sav Rebecchi a resident of the Jamestown Shores area, who worried about Keiser's plan to delete the usual appropriation of \$100,000 from the water resources protection account. Councilors also were uneasy about the deletion to interrupt the annual allotment for that account, while saying they understood that the proposed bond for \$3 million for farmland preservation was the influencing factor. Some councilors wanted to budget at least \$50,000 for the water resources account and asked Keiser to compile a report about the history of the account.

Keiser said in an interview that he talked by phone to each coun-

cilor and believed they gave him a consensus in favor of the farmland fund.

School position

Cathy Kaiser, chairman of the School Committee, introduced the education spending request, by saying, "The cost of sustaining high-performing schools remains the greatest challenge facing the school committee. This challenge has intensified with the descending tax cap and the continuing lack of state funding for mandates and departmental regulations."

She continued, "Working within these constraints, we continue to focus on supporting and improving programming in Jamestown. Last spring the school committee surveyed parents to gather feedback and insights on our schools. There emerged two clear directives: increase the rigor of academics and keep the middle grades in their community school."

Kaiser said the response for increased rigor is budgeting "for two strategic part-time additions: a literacy coach and a math coach." She pointed out, "We have eliminated the position of dean of students and we continue to reduce our teaching staff in response to lower enrollment. The school committee has closed seven classrooms, in grades one to seven, during the past six years. An eighth classroom will close in the fall and we will move to a 'looping' model in grades 7 and 8."

The school committee chairwoman also advised the council that "to ensure strong administrative leadership at both schools, the school committee this summer endorsed an administrative structure with a part-time superintendent at the top and site-based management at the two schools provided by a K-8 principal and assistant-principal." She reported, the new

structure "has required all members of the administrative team to assume responsibilities beyond their traditional job descriptions and the change has been possible only because of their flexibility and ongoing commitment to providing quality education in Jamestown."

Councilors took special note of the comment about staff flexibility and they said they and townspeople appreciate their dedication to the schools and students, with mindfulness about costs.

Kaiser also reported that school officials "continue to evaluate how best to make optimal use of our human resources and buildings. This could mean using part of one building for an alternative purpose. Currently we are exploring the possibility of leasing space at Lawn (School) to an interested outside special education program."

She concluded with an emphasis that the school committee adopted the school budget unanimously.

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JAMESTOWN SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
April 5, 2007
Executive Session 6:00 p.m.
RIGL 42-46-5: Exception 2,
Collective Bargaining Discussion
7:00 p.m. Workshop
Lawn Library
AGENDA





- I. Pledge of Allegiance
- II. Call to Order and Roll Call
- III. Public Forum
- IV. Consent Agenda
 1. Personnel
 - a. Retirement Action
 - b. Resignation Action
- V. Information, Proposals and Action Items
 1. Pathways Presentation
 2. School Budget - Final Vote
 3. School Calendar 2007-2008-possible vote
 4. SORICO- Strategic Planning Draft
 5. Legislative Update
 6. Food Service Bids-possible vote
- VI. Public Forum
- VII. Adjournment

Upcoming Meetings:
April 26, 2007: Business Meeting at 7 p.m. in Lawn Library
May 3, 2007: Workshop Meeting at 7 p.m. in Lawn Library
Any agenda changes will be posted at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. Individuals requesting interpreter services for the hearing impaired must call 423-7020 forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting date.
Robert B. Power
Superintendent

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