

Budget

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funds. "These funds have a great deal of restrictions on how they can be spent," Lukon said. "The governor plans to reduce state aid by the amount of money we will be receiving in IDA and Title I funds," she said. Essentially, this will create a situation wherein, although it appears to be an even trade, it is not, Lukon said.

Dr. Robert Fricklas concurred with Lukon, "These funds need to be directly tied into what IDA is all about. There is little discretion in how these funds can be used," Fricklas said.

Lukon summed up the situation by explaining that the substitution of IDA and Title I funds for general funds essentially leaves a hole in the operating budget of approximately \$106,000.

School Committee member Bucky Brennan suggested that it might be possible to use reserved funds to pay for the differential between current North Kingstown High School students and next year's expected number of high school students. "It looks like the differential will be about 10 students," Brennan said. "Ten students at \$10,000 per student for a year would be a one-time capital expense of \$100,000."

This suggestion generated some concern among both school committee members and town council members as they discussed whether or not this would, in fact, be bordering on using unreserved funds for the operating budget, something they all agree is ill-

advised. Town Council Member William Kelly was most vocal in expressing this concern. "I am concerned about the proposal Mr. Brennan has brought up," Kelly said. "It seems as though this is a gray area that may be using unreserved funds for operational costs. As much as I'd like to see a zero-increase budget, I don't want to see mistakes made."

Brennan reiterated his position, "No one has pointed out to me where my logic is flawed here," he said. "I'd like you all to just consider it and think it through."

Ultimately, Kelly deferred and referred the question to Town Administrator Bruce Keiser. "I'd like to refer this to our expert. Is this proposal by Mr. Brennan viable?" Kelly said.

"This suggestion does have merit," Keiser said. "It is certainly one of the tools that the school committee can consider."

The final portion of the stimulus funds involves grants, Lukon said. These grants will be awarded to a few states, they must be applied for and one of the considerations is how the first two portions of the stimulus funds are used, Lukon said. "Since the governor is using the initial funds to pay down state debt, I don't think this will qualify as appropriate use of educational funds," she said.

School committee member B.J. Whitehouse questioned the emphasis on a zero-based budget. "I guess I am wondering how strong the sentiment is for this zero-percent increase because I haven't heard any objection at all to the minor increase we presented,"



Angel face

Hana Toler, 19 months, of Jamestown found someone her size while visiting the newborn baby goats at Windmist (Neale) farm in Jamestown.

Photo by Melissa Toler

Whitehouse said.

Town Council member Kelly quickly responded "I've heard repeatedly from people that they want a zero-percent increase in their taxes. In fact, many people are asking how we are going to cut taxes. The town has presented a very tough budget," he said. "I've already taken some flack today for suggestions that I made last night, but tough cuts are going to have

to be made."

School Committee Chairperson Cathy Kaiser responded. "The school committee knows this, as well. We should keep in mind that there are two sides (on the zero-percent increase) but the school committee is fully in the spirit of partnering with the town council. We are confident that we can meet the budget and not cut services to children at this time," Kaiser said.

Town council member Barbara Szepatowski introduced a discussion of the status of the student assistance counselor position. "I am passionate about this and would like some resolution. Is the town going to fund this position or not?" Szepatowski asked.

A prolonged discussion followed with questions being raised

as to how the position is supervised and whether or not there is any data supporting the program. Town council member Robert Sutton and Town Administrator Keiser both called for a written proposal to be submitted to the town if town funding is going to be requested. "A written proposal needs to be submitted just like any other program that applies to the town for funding," Keiser said. "There must be a demonstrated need."

The public forum section of the meeting was not held due to time constraints. Town Council President Julio DiGiando announced that public comments would be accepted at the Town Council's next meeting on Monday, April 6, at 7 p.m.

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