

# Memorandum

**To:** Board of Selectmen  
**CC:** Timothy Warren  
**From:** Town Clerk/Tax Collector  
**Date:** 3/5/2009  
**Re:** 2009 Budget - Town Clerk/Tax Collector

I am before you tonight to address the budget request for 2009 as requested and presented by the Town Clerk/Tax Collector.

I returned from my vacation to find that the Selectmen had decided it wasn't fair that my department would be the only department not receiving COLA increases of 4%. The Selectmen went into my budget line items and altered them to accommodate a 4% COLA for myself and my employees. I would like to believe the intentions of doing so were good; however, I find this very action to be very undermining and shows a mistrust in my ability as a department manager with twelve years of experience to run my department on the budget I presented.

In review, I will start from a memo dated October 27, 2008 to All Department Heads & Committee Members; "The BOS has requested that all budget requests for the 2009 fiscal year be level funded. This does not mean that you can't budget for raises for your employees, but need to keep the bottom line level funded..."

On December 1, 2008 I presented my department's budget at which I questioned a proposed 4% COLA by the BOS. I kept the budget in line with the level funding and did not include a 4% COLA as it was not made clear if this increase was to have been included in the

"level" funding (which in effect is a 4% decrease to the operating budget). The Selectmen had not unanimously decided the intent of the COLA and stated that they would have to further discuss the issue. In the minutes from 12/1/08, after I had met with the BOS they had briefly discussed whether the department budgets should include the COLA increase. "It was decided, for the time being, that the department heads should level fund their operational budget and they would decide on the COLA later."

On December 18, 2008 I presented my budget in the amount of \$153,872 (\$26.00 under last year's budget) to the Budget Committee. Because the Department Request was under the Selectmen's recommendation \$157,872 it presented a little confusion. When Selectwoman Abbott was asked by the Budget Committee Chair, Stan Bean, for clarification of the 4% COLA in regard to the bottom line, she stated, "...that they decided to ask the department heads to **level fund their budgets and find the 4% salary increases within their level funded budget**...Ms. Cornett stated that she could not find 4% salary increases within her level funded budget ..." (Selectwoman Hatch stated later to the Budget Committee that the BOS amount was an error and should match the department's requested amount).

On December 29, 2008 the BOS had decided to find the salary increases in the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's budget by reducing line items. This is actually a 4% reduction in my operating budget, which has the potential of affecting services to the taxpayers to stay within that bottom line. Further, the taxpayers, at Town Meeting may make a motion to vote out a 4% COLA or any salary increases, which would mean my operating budget being reduced by 8%. This will further jeopardize my full-time Deputy's employee's benefits and retirement should she not be able to work her weekly 35 hours.

I have put a lot of thought into my budget with public service and my two employees as a priority and kept to what the department managers were tasked with by the Board of Selectmen. It was a

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difficult decision for me to not budget salary increases. I have exhausted myself with readdressing my budget several times and remain confident with the budget as I presented it to the Budget Committee as being the one that will get us through 2009 and meet the needs of the public and employees.

My Deputies and I are very grateful that we are employed and that we enjoy the jobs that we have. I would further ask that the Board reconsider their actions and make better efforts to communicate with me as a department manager should they have questions which decisions impact our taxpayers as well as employees.

Respectfully and Sincerely Submitted,

Debra A. Cornett  
Town Clerk/Tax Collector