

## MINUTES

### TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION JOINT BUDGET MEETING ZOOM REMOTE MEETING February 22, 2021 – 7:00 P.M.

**TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tammy Nuccio, Chair; Steve Jones, Vice Chair; Brenda Falusi, Cassandra Forsythe (arrived at 8:19 PM), Lou Luba, John Reagan, Kurt Schenher

**BOE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ashely Lundgren, Chair; Christina Plourd, Vice Chair; Renie Besaw, Christine Griffin, Mahdi Renduchintala, Jacob Marie, Dana Philbin, Sophia Shaikh

**TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:** none

**BOE MEMBERS ABSENT:** Tony Holt

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michael Rosen, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records/Treasurer; Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services

1. Call to Order: Pursuant to Section § C9-4 of the Town Charter the Town Manager is required to call and attend a joint meeting of the Town Council and Board of Education for the purpose of discussing the appropriation request of the Board of Education

Mr. Rosen provided an overview of this evening's meeting.

This evening's discussion is about the February 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the Board of Education budget which has a \$1,275,999 increase (3.19%) over last year's budget (2020/2021).

Mr. Rosen provided an overview of the budget process including timing.

All meetings will be held virtually via Zoom.

- March 3<sup>rd</sup>, Town Manager submits recommended overall town budget (FY 21/22) to the Town Council
- March 4<sup>th</sup>, Advertise Public Hearing
- March 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, Budget Discussions with Departments about Operating Budgets
- March 17<sup>th</sup>, Public Hearing
- March 23<sup>rd</sup>, Council Finalizes Budget
- April 19<sup>th</sup>, Annual Budget Presentation
- May 4<sup>th</sup>, Annual Budget Referendum (Mr. Rosen noted that they anticipate having a referendum this year.)

2. Board of Education Budget Presentation

Dr. Willett reviewed the following presentation:

Tolland Public Schools, Joint TC/BOE Meeting, 2-22-2021

- Purpose under PA 13-60
- Tolland Charter: Obligations of the Manager
- Tolland Board of Education Goals
- Portrait of a Graduate
- District Goals
- Pandemic Exacerbation
  - Mental Health Needs Before the Pandemic
  - Mental Health Needs During the Pandemic
- FY22: Recovery, Remediation, Reform
- Benefits/Highlights of this budget
  - Recovery
    - Recover previous budget offsets purchased from the end of year FY20 for FY21, that are now restored to the FY22 budget
  - Remediation
    - Speech & Language Services
    - English Language Learning Services
    - ABA Services (Autism support)

- Social and Emotional/Mental Health
  - Reform
    - Cost avoidance programs and investments
    - Attrition reduction/elimination
    - Lighthouse "Pathways" programs (e.g., Engineering, Business)
  - Tolland Public School Education – an excellent return on investment
  - Non-Educational Program Collaborations
    - ECHIP Collaborative (Eastern Connecticut Health Insurance Program)
    - UISF (Utility Internal Service Fund & Agreement)
    - Town and BOE Field and Grounds Agreements
3. Recommendations and suggestions to BOE regarding consolidation of non-education services and cost savings (per State Statutes (Public Act 13-60))

Mr. Rosen explained that non-education services would mean not asking questions about the number of books, teachers etc. Non-education services would include insurance, capital, or regionalization. Dr. Willett added that the nature of the Public Act is such that there is a moment in time when the BOE completes its adoption process. Under Section 10-222, it is the Board's obligation to determine and present what is needed for education. The Town Council makes the allocation decision. Non-education expenses include supplies, grounds, facilities, and back-office consolidation.

Ms. Shaikh asked about the difference between items 3 and 5 on the agenda. Ms. Nuccio explained that item 5 would be any other general questions. Mr. Rosen added that this is at least the second year where the split has been enumerated on the agenda into two business items. Ms. Nuccio recommended that this section cover questions on items such as UISF, technology, insurance, transportation, lighthouse, classroom sizes, the chief personnel officer, and administrative additions. The next section would be those items outside of these topics. Dr. Willett commented that he PA 13-60 is meant to be a reminder of the statutory division of this type of conversation. Ms. Nuccio expressed concern that the Council will have questions and if they cannot take this opportunity with the Board being present to ask those questions, when may they do so. She explained that they need answers to the questions prior to deliberation. Dr. Willett responded that it depends on the nature of the questions. The role of the Town Council is to ask about non-educational expenses. The rest is part of the Board's budget process and there are further opportunities for discussion.

Mr. Luba asked about PA 13-60 and if Dr. Willett's office or the Board has discussed consolidation opportunities and if anything such consolidation or regionalization has been recommended or identified that could fall under this public act where they could find cost savings without a loss of personnel. Dr. Willett responded that items considered in the past have included back-office consolidation. Tolland has a history of addressing this via items such as the healthcare collaborative, the creation of the UISF, and the Building, Grounds, and Fields Agreement. Thus, efficiencies are part of the current picture. Dr. Willett explained that the back-office consolidation conversation has taken place in the past and there was a feeling that there would not be added value. Everyone is fully utilized and one could not reduce staff without straining those who remain and with consolidation the current functional systems may not work well. Mr. Rosen noted that they are applying through CRCOG for the grant from the Regional Performance Incentive Program (Office of Policy and Management) that looks at back-office consolidation. Mr. Luba asked about other positions such as school counselors and if they could be regionalized and shared among other schools. Dr. Willett responded that he will provide a written answer to this question and provided an example where a counselor needs to address the needs of 20 students which is a large number to handle. He added that in regard to social workers in the school system, there is overlap and the work the staff member does with the student's family benefits the town. The town's Human Services Department and the schools work closely together on a number of items.

Ms. Plourd commented that there was a Shared Services Committee and a white paper was done in town. A lot of work has been done in this area and she believes software should be looked at. While it does not pertain to this budget, it is something to look at in the future.

Ms. Nuccio asked if there is a way to determine how much of the budget increase is directly attributable to the COVID pandemic. Mr. Marie commented that the answer depends on the definition of COVID expenses. At the first budget meeting, he believes 0.2% of the increase was due to the need for additional cleaning. He added that another .4% was recovery from last year's budget. In terms of positions, he noted the speech pathologist position as well as 2 additional

FTE positions. Dr. Willett explained that positions that were directly COVID-related where they could leverage ESSER II, were those that cannot be supplanted. For example, the positions of social worker and counselor this year were from grant funds and thus ESSER II funds may be used. The positions of the ABA, ELL, and SLP are necessitated by what the district needs to provide in terms of special services. Dr. Willett explained that the ABA program has grown over the years and now it is a logical extension to the high school. In a normal year, the ABA, ELL, and SLP would be part of the picture. Due to the pandemic, they are now more broadly needed. Ms. Nuccio explained that her impetus for the question is to learn if additional funds become available, if anything could be shifted to a different source of funding for a year or two to alleviate the pressure and then a re-evaluation could be done. Dr. Willett responded that until codified, they cannot count on this.

Mr. Luba asked about the most cost effective ways to provide appropriate counseling and measures to meet the needs of students. While it is great to have it in-house, he asked if a cost benefit analysis has been performed regarding outsourcing vs. the wages and benefits of staff. Dr. Willett responded with historical information about the philosophy going back a decade ago. He noted that currently, many districts are creating programs to more adequately serve student populations because the special education costs outside of the district are astronomical and no one has done anything to control those costs. Dr. Willett noted that it is an act of self-preservation and professional, ethical, and moral correctness to have programs in district that serve students' needs. In terms of cost avoidance, Dr. Willett commented that they cannot have a 3 year or 5 year average below 1% without having found cost avoidance measures. A standard maintenance budget is 2.5% - 3% and there has been a 5-year average of less than 1%. The average outplacement cost is \$69K (excluding transportation) and one teacher is \$42,055.

Ms. Nuccio asked Dr. Willett about the increase in spending for ABA, Tolland Transition Academy, and LEAP and if they have seen a corresponding decrease in special education costs that offset the significant increase in the spend for those programs. If so, she asked if they have a net for the new programs or the ROI from a fiscal dollar perspective. Additionally, she noted that Dr. Willett spoke of the average cost of outplacement but not of the per child cost of these programs in district. She believes last year the staffing for LEAP was over \$1M and more is being added. Dr. Willett responded that this information has been provided in the past and they are starting to venture down the road of an educational expense. He asked if the Council is not going to move the Board's budget forward because it is perceived that an adequate savings is not coming from the ABA program. He asked if the Town Council is prepared to do this. Dr. Willett explained that the Board spends a lot of time working with him on such items and he does not believe it is the Council's position to determine if a particular program is doing what is needed. He added that the fact that the students are not being outplaced is the cost avoidance factor; otherwise, the budget would be much greater. Ms. Nuccio commented that the task of the Council is to approve the overall budget. In order to do so, the Council needs to understand. In this case, it means understanding the numbers that are in the budget that have been there for the last few years and the programs being put in place to remediate or mitigate those costs so the Council can review it and say that it believes this is a reasonable ask. She noted that there are a lot of additions in the budget that are somewhat related to special education costs; there are no additional teachers. Dr. Willett responded that SLPs are more or less teacher adds and ELLs may be considered a general class of this as well. The statutory obligation of the Board is to determine student needs. When the Board presents a budget, the assumption is that those groups that can caucus have discussed these items and they have been vetted. Under PA 13-60, conversations about special education services are in the domain of the Board. The PA 13-60 is not about deciding whether students with autism could be more cost effectively served somewhere else, which they cannot. It raises questions in this forum that do not belong. Ms. Nuccio responded that in Section C9-4 of the Charter, the meeting is for the purpose of discussing the appropriation request of the Board of Education. The questions will be asked because the Council needs to understand the budget. Dr. Willett responded that the Charter does not override the Public Act and explained why it was set up this way and its purpose. Mr. Renduchintala commented that the Board has gone over the questions that are being asked in recorded sessions and the budget line by line. Ms. Lundgren requested that the questions be contained to non-education questions and added that she is sure Dr. Willett would be willing to address program questions in a conversation. The meeting should be about what can be done to increase efficiency.

Mr. Luba commented he has reviewed the Public Act and as a legislative body the Council should be able to get explanations on expenditures. They are not pointing at a specific expense but questioning overall for a better understanding.

Ms. Falusi thanked the Board, Dr. Willett, and everyone who worked on the budget. Many of the questions posed have been answered at the budget presentation in February and at other meetings. At this point on the agenda, the Council

should be making recommendations and suggestions, not asking questions. She added that the budget has been supported and backed by every member of the Board. The Board approved the Superintendent's budget after a couple of adjustments. The Board did some consolidations and cost avoidance and is ethically and morally taking care of the students and providing the needed education. Thus, Ms. Falusi commented that she does not have a problem with what is suggested for the non-educational services. She thanked them for their work and added that she would like to free up their time so they can continue to do the good work they have been given and entrusted to do by the town.

Ms. Philbin commented that some of the questions raised were brought up in FCC, at meetings, in public comment, and submitted online. She asked if this information is still available online so the Council may access it. Dr. Willett explained that the Board has had a chance to question, review the information during public sessions, and ended in the Board's adoption of the budget. The energy now shifts to questions from the public and the Q&A form is developed. Mr. Luba's question about the back-office is about an administrative expense; however, Dr. Willett noted that he gets concerned when they start discussing evaluation of special education programming which takes a long time to understand and is an educational expense. Ms. Philbin commented that hours and days have been spent on the budget and asked if the online submissions were available. Dr. Willett responded that now that the Board's questions have been answered, the site will be propagated with information and the questions with answers will be posted. He noted that some may be combined when the same question is being asked.

Ms. Griffin commented that as the Chair of the FCC, she has reviewed the budget extensively. They have had a lot of discussions with Dr. Willett and she supports this budget. It balances the interests of students, staff, and the community. She has dug into the weeds to gain an understanding and understands why the Council wants to do so as well.

Ms. Nuccio asked about technology. The district now has about 4,800 devices and she asked if there is a phase-in plan for device replacement. Dr. Willett explained that it is in the same range of replacing equipment as in prior models of technology in education. About 2 years out they will start a replacement cycle in each of the schools that will amount to approximately \$40K-\$50K to replace antiquated equipment and put new ones into the cycle. Overall, for the district it would be about \$100K - \$200K. Additionally, there will be a shift from printed to electronic media. He added that there will be some credits from trading in old equipment as well.

Ms. Nuccio asked about managing and consolidating printing services. Dr. Willett responded that they are consolidating who they use for repairs and printing services.

Ms. Nuccio asked if the insurance costs and repairs for the devices are built into the budget. Dr. Willett responded that it is part of what parents/guardians pay. They can buy into insurance for the repair of damaged machines. That said, the district has equipment not being used by students and repairs will be needed.

Ms. Nuccio asked about transportation – specifically why it is going down and the extension of the contract. Dr. Willett responded that they are in a new 3-year contract. With the extension of the transportation contract, the district has been able to achieve consistency of personnel and improve on-time performance and driver familiarity. The language in the budget is in regard to the 3-year extension. The reduction is due to being able to do transportation more efficiently; but, this can fluctuate. If they have a number of outplacements, the cost can be \$20-30K each.

Ms. Nuccio asked if the elimination of the Honeywell fees is in UISF or in the district's energy budget. Dr. Willett responded that the budget includes what the district was obliged to pay. If the loan amount was transferred to the town under a bond, it would reduce the Board budget by \$670K. Ms. Nuccio clarified that under the Honeywell contract, the district was paying the M&V (Measurement and Verification) fees. Dr. Willett explained that based on the notes at the bottom of page 31, it appears that the fees were eliminated as of February 12<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Griffin asked about the Honeywell contract and where the \$200K settlement would go. Mr. Rosen explained that the Council gave authorization for him to negotiate and sign an agreement with Honeywell. The funds will be placed in the UISF. Mr. Rosen noted that this is not yet a "done deal".

4. Questions from the public (2-minute limit) specific to the Board of Education budget with questions being directed by the Town Council Chair to the appropriate body for response

Kate Vallo, 80 Tolland Green, commented that she has had the pleasure of following the Board of Education budget closely during the budget season and has seen the work that has been put into it. She fully supports it and hopes the Town Council will as well.

Kate Howard-Bender, 3 Goose Lane, thanked the Board for putting the budget through in a unanimous fashion. It gives her hope for the kids and the community that they are worth the investment. She asked the Council if it will have the political will to support the community. *Ms. Nuccio responded that this is the beginning. They are asking questions and will have to look at the entire town and then decide on funding and what can be supported. From her perspective, the question cannot be answered at the first budget meeting. Mr. Luba responded that he is in agreement. They need to do their due diligence and review the information to make a determination. It is not a matter of political will but looking at what is before the Council and if it is appropriate for the budget, what the town can afford, and what the town is willing to accept. They will hopefully have a town referendum and it is a matter of putting something together that the Council and Board feel is appropriate. Ms. Falusi responded that she believes the Board did its due diligence. The Board submitted a modest investment in the community and she believes it is morally and ethically valuable. It is the correct programming for the schools and the correct answer to have a unanimous approval. The Board should be commended on a wonderful budget season for creating and crafting the budget for the community. She does not see anything that would move her from supporting the Board's budget. Mr. Jones responded that he concurs with Ms. Falusi. Going back to the capital budget public hearing, there is political will and political capital that can be expended to encourage turnout. There is an opportunity for Councilors to be engaged and work with the Board to encourage the greatest turnout.*

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, thanked the Board for putting together the budget. She saw a collaborative effort and tone. She added that the budget supports the teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff who have given so much to the town in a year that has been difficult. Ms. Costa asked the Council to support this and commented that the outcome of the pandemic will likely not be seen educationally or in a mental health capacity for years. She asked the Council to support the budget and not include potential dollars from the federal government. Those dollars will be needed to in the future for students who have fallen behind or have mental health issues as a result. She hopes the Council will support the budget.

Linda Scheidel, 81 Morgan Lane, commented that she respectfully does not view ranking 133 out of 166 on per pupil expenditures as long term great value. She added that over the years they have lost many programs in the schools due to unsupported budgets or the push for a 0% increase. Some programs include art in high school, health at TIS, and foreign language at the elementary level. Ms. Scheidel added that the students in high school now had more support in their earlier years of education than the current elementary students do. If the Council does not support the Board's budget and/or continues to push for a 0% increase, they will not continue to see the success at the high school level as they do now. They also will not be able to attract the amazing teachers. She explained that if the Council does not want to put this on residential tax revenue, then it needs to do a better job bringing in commercial tax revenue.

Annelise Cyr, 34 Columbine Road, commented that the children in schools spend most of their time throughout the week between the walls of the school. They are not there only to learn science, math and reading. They are a whole person and need social, mental, emotional, and physical support. She explained that they need wholesome and holistic support. She added that Dr. Willett explained there has been an increase in students' mental and emotional struggles. She commented that she has had many situations where she needed a counselor at the school for her son. Ms. Cyr wondered why between COVID, race relations, bullying, and other things children are seeing why they are looking for a counselor to share accounts. Why are they not seeing that it is a basic necessity? She commented that the children need the support. Don't they want the children to have all the support they need? Integrating and including all children regardless of special needs is the only ethical and fair solution. Why are they looking to consolidate in this area? *Ms. Nuccio responded that they are not suggesting any cuts to anything yet; they are trying to understand the budget. It is the role of the Council to understand the budget in full because ultimately the budget decision is made at the Town Council level from a whole dollar perspective. What the Board does with it is their purview. In order for the Council to pass through a \$1.3M increase, it is incumbent upon them to ask questions, understand what is in the budget, and whether the whole town can support it. The purpose of the meeting is for the Council to ask questions and the Board to present the budget. Questions are not an indication of what the Council is doing. It is an indication of the Council trying to understand. Ms. Falusi commented that her trust is in the Board, Dr. Willett, the administrators, and everyone who worked together to create the budget. She does not support outsourcing anything to do with mental health. The support is needed especially now. She does not believe it is her responsibility to understand everything line by line and*

*micromanage what the Board has done during the budget process. Listening to the Board formulate the budget has been an eye-opening experience and educational. She added that she has followed budgets for over 12 years and it is a many year process to become familiar with everything under the BOE purview. If she has questions on programs, she knows where to find the answers. Mr. Luba commented that the Council is morally and ethically bound as well to ask such questions so they can understand and when they propose the overall budget, it is a sound overall budget for the entire town of which the Board is a part. It does not mean pulling the budget apart line by line. The Board has done an outstanding job presenting the budget. He explained that when he brought up the issue of possibly splitting the social worker or counselor, it was just a question and example to see where they stood with the push. It is something that has been going on and growing in the state legislature for a period of time – looking to cut costs and regionalize assets. It was to see where they are and if there are other avenues. His objective was not to eliminate it; it was to ask the question to learn where this stood. They ask similar questions of all of the town's departments. Mr. Reagan commented that it is not a matter of having political will to pass a budget or going line by line through a budget. It is a matter of trying to gain the best understanding so they can make an informed and intelligent decision on what is best for the town. As they work through the process, questions will be posed, and may be repetitive, but the Board has put in a lot of work on the budget. He added that no one has said anything about a 0% budget. As questions come up, they appreciate the answers. Dr. Willett noted that if anyone wants to meet he is happy to do so. He added that no one has a problem with the questions. Public Act 13-60 speaks to a process that is non-education expenses. The Board is elected to provide oversight on education and provide the best budget that considers complicated issues such as special education. Ms. Philbin thanked the public for their participation, her peers who worked tirelessly on the budget, and the Council for asking questions. As a member of the public she would not want elected officials to represent members of the town inappropriately. She is appreciative of the questions and the digging but regarding the latter, they may need more clarity. She commented on Ms. Scheidel's comment regarding the low expenditure and added that she would expect to move up the ranks. The Board has a lot of work to do to recover from lost opportunities in years past and previous budgets. They were lucky to have TEPTO fund \$30,000 of the Chromebooks to help them through the pandemic to get one-to-one technology and the people in the community for supporting the Board. She hopes the Council will continue to do its due diligence and work as the team as the Board did.*

5. Petitions and/or questions to the Board of Education from Town Council members specific to the BOE Budget

Mr. Luba commented the during last year's budget discussions, they discussed cutting back on staff. Specifically, they discussed cutting the art and 5th grade teacher. He asked if there were any reductions in teachers in last year's budget. Dr. Willett responded that there were but they also transferred people for coverage. This year, with respect to losses, they have been careful not to compromise programs. They have tried to take reductions from retiring positions or those that would not have a tremendous negative impact. Last year, they made a reduction in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and a team was consolidated. They made an interventionist out of that job and reduced it. Dr. Willett believes the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and art teachers were reduced and he believes this was via retirement. Mr. Luba commented that based on the initial presentation, Dr. Willett stated that they were down to an average class size of 21-22 students. Looking at the overall student population, they have lost approximately 90-100 students overall and Mr. Luba asked if this was accurate. Dr. Willett responded that there has been a reduction of teaching staff commensurate with enrollment. When talking about FTE, there are different kinds of staff who are brought in for one-to-one, SRBI, and RTI. Regarding teacher ratios, Tolland has made the adjustment and the ratio is about 1:20. He noted that enrollment is targeted to increase in the lower grades. They have reached equilibrium with respect to enrollment and the district should not be making downward adjustments in the name of enrollment at this point. Dr. Willett added that special services requirements have increased exponentially in the last decade. If people such as paras are not put in place, the district is not fulfilling the educational program and people will challenge this resulting in a greater cost in the long run. Mr. Luba commented that last year when discussing the teachers' contract and what became a 9% increase over a period of 3 years, there was also a discussion of \$330K that was listed as an increase in wages based on the wage. He believes it was stated that by Dr. Willett and the Board that they would look to find ways to offset this expense. Mr. Luba asked if they were able to find any offsets. Dr. Willett explained that data suggests that the bargaining unit agreement was very favorable towards Tolland and is included in last year's budget document. In the Board's minutes from the end of last year, there are phase documents which describe how the Board was going to try to offset the impacts and transfer funds to create the Coronavirus Relief Fund. They have continued to work on the offsets including him not taking a raise this year and having the athletic director act as the vice principal to come within the range. Every day the consideration is how can they make the most out of a dollar? In the little things, and the big things, they are constantly trying to find a way to stretch a dollar. He added that in budget cycles, if there are a few years less than 1%, there needs to be a higher point than that to ensure they are not compromising the education process the town wants. Mr. Luba explained that

constituents have asked about this and he will review the documents. Ms. Lundgren added that on pages 24-25 there is more information on enrollment and staffing.

Ms. Nuccio asked about the enrollment data. Dr. Willett explained that there is a note that indicates this is the enrollment as reported to the SDE as of October 1<sup>st</sup> of every year. The actual enrollment is from a data run on January 12<sup>th</sup>. On October 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment was 2,281 and on January 12<sup>th</sup> it was 2,308. Ms. Nuccio commented that the projection shows a loss of 91 students. Dr. Willett explained that while they are projecting down over the short term, over the long term the district numbers are not decreasing and will increase in the lower grades in 2025/26. He does not believe the district will leave the 2,200 zone over the next 10 years.

Mr. Reagan asked about some outliers on the object budget information. He asked about the increase in line 325, PD and other professional services. Dr. Willett explained that this includes approximately \$75K for autism programming, \$72K for Literacy How, and \$25K for EastConn co-teaching program (training special education staff) and reviewed the programs. He added that Literacy How was included in last year's phase documents and had to be brought back. Mr. Reagan asked if these items were in the district previously. Dr. Willett explained that these are items were not previously in district but they see them as a need coming over the horizon. Mr. Reagan asked about the increase in line 641, textbooks. Dr. Willett explained that the increase is driven by language arts, math, and science. While companies are moving toward a digital product, this is still in transition. Dr. Willett noted that some consumables are included in this line as well. Mr. Reagan asked about the increase in line 646, Curriculum workbooks materials. Dr. Willett responded that it is mainly language arts and math. Mr. Reagan asked about the increase in line 730, equipment. He asked if the lift is included in this line item. Dr. Willett responded that the articulating lift is not part of this. This line includes Promethean boards, Apple products, and connecting supports.

Mr. Schenher asked about remediation of problems arising from COVID and remote learning. He asked if the associated expenses for intervention and support will return to a baseline. Dr. Willett responded that speech and language needs are significantly up and may drop and be rebalanced in 2-3 years and be offset with retirements but it is difficult to know how long the impacts will last. He added that there can be times of lower budgets but every once in a while, within them, there has to be a higher one and this is an example. This year there is not a single position in the budget that would not cost more in the future if it was lost.

Ms. Plourd commented that many of the questions are answered in the Board document. She asked if this is a publicly posted document accessible to the Council. Dr. Willett explained that they are currently transitioning this to the public Q&A available under Budget at <http://www.tolland.k12.ct.us/>. Ms. Plourd asked if this could be sent to the Council. Dr. Willett explained that often people do not ask questions in the venue thinking that it will be shared and there may be grammatical and other errors. Thus, he edits and may combine similar submissions. Ms. Plourd commented that she would like the Council to have the information for deliberations and assumes everything is subject to FOIA. Mr. Luba commented that he would like to see all of the documents in their raw form. Dr. Willett explained that they can and everything is available via FOIA. That said some questions ask the same thing and the answers can be consolidated. Mr. Luba explained that it has been said that questions were posed by the Board but the Council only has the information that has been made available and does not know what has been asked. Thus, he feels it would be helpful for the Council to have the information in advance. Dr. Willett explained that it has been more efficient to provide a summary. The purpose of the meeting is non-educational expenses and some of the questions go deeply into educational expenses.

Ms. Griffin commented that she printed out the first 37 budget questions posed by the Board. A lot of questions posted this evening are on the list and there are duplicates. She asked Ms. Lundgren if at the next meeting they could address allowing the Council to have access to the document. Ms. Lundgren commented that the Board reviewed the line items and discussed them. The Board has done its due diligence to get the answers and they should try to condense the information and make it available to get them to the Town Council. Dr. Willett explained that it is designed to be part of a process that ends in the Board's adopted budget document and is not a final document. The Q&A document will be published to the website in the next week and will likely answer a lot of the questions posed in a more precise manner. Ms. Lundgren noted that there are videos and minutes of meetings. The information is already available. Perhaps a document of where to find the answers would be helpful. Dr. Willett recommended waiting until the information is posted in a week or so.

Ms. Shaikh commented that all of the information the Board has reviewed and worked with is available both on YouTube and in the minutes. The Council's questions are nearly all the same as those posed by the Board and dissected to the n<sup>th</sup> degree. She added that general statutes Section 10-4-B points out the ramifications a school district can face if state needs and recommendations are not fully funded.

Ms. Falusi commented that they have very good subject matter experts on the Board and she suggested that the Council Republicans reach out to the Board Republicans and ask them questions. Ms. Nuccio responded that that is not allowed. Ms. Falusi recommended asking the Republican cohorts where the information can be found i.e. at which meeting was this discussed. The information is available, there is a pandemic, they are building a new a school, and in the next week she is sure Dr. Willett will be inundated with getting the educators and staff vaccinated. Anything they can do to alleviate what is on Dr. Willett's plate would be appreciated.

Mr. Luba commented that they are looking to ensure there is free and appropriate education. They understand the statutory requirements but they need to understand the budget and that there is not anything in it that could be deemed as not fully appropriate, or additional, expenses. He explained that the main reason why the document needs to be made available quickly is because on March 3<sup>rd</sup> the Town Manager will present his final budget. The Council will have less than a week to understand all of the budgets. If there is a document that answers the questions asked by the Council, while the Board has been thorough, the Council needs to be able to understand as well. Had they already received the document, this evening the questions could have been very precise. Thus, he would like to get the information in its raw form so he can ask pointed questions. Dr. Willett responded that under the process, the Council makes suggestions and the Board responds in writing. In regard to the timing of less than a week, this is why members are elected to the Board. The Council is not supposed to do the job of the Board. The Board asks the questions and provides the adopted budget to the Council. The timeline does not allow for the Council to understand everything the Board went through in 2 months or longer. The Board does the due diligence. The Town Council can get answers and it would be more valuable to have more concise and direct answers. The way they are asked, some information will not provide clarity. It is about trust. If the Council trusts the Board has done its due diligence, then it should trust that the Board is presenting a document that will get to what the Council seeks. Mr. Luba responded that it is not a matter of trust. The Council can ask questions but they do not know if they have been asked by a Board member. He trusts them completely but needs to see what has been asked so he can understand and be sure he is not missing anything. The Council has asked questions of all of the departments.

Ms. Nuccio explained that the Council would like to see whatever questions have been asked so it can review them and not ask repetitive questions however it is done. In the next stage, the Town Manager will present the budget and the Council will meet again with all of the departments. If the Council can get the questions and answers, it will limit the questions during that meeting.

Mr. Renduchintala commented that the Board spent dozens of hours on this and it was passed unanimously.

Ms. Nuccio commented that at the last Board meeting Dr. Willett projected to possibly have \$1M left at the end of the year. She noted that she understands this is tentative and may change but asked if there is an update on actuals for this year and if there are any pre-purchasing opportunities as there were last year. Dr. Willett responded that the Board will continually discuss this as it did last year. The goal, to the greatest extent possible, is to do all they can to consolidate and have available resources at year-end because it would be beneficial. Dr. Willett provided the example of the discussion of going to five days a week. To stay within the guidelines, they need to increase the human resources in order to do the cleaning which will impact the bottom line. Dr. Willett explained that while he hopes to have funds available, things may come up. Thus, it is a tentative and cautious "yes". He will create phase documents similar to those drafted last year as they approach year end. He added that if there are resources, a good place for them would be the Coronavirus Relief Fund for unanticipated expenses.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Jones motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:06PM

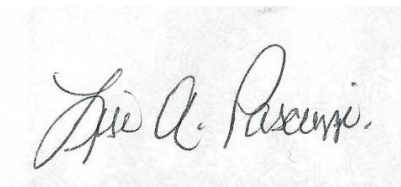
Ms. Falusi seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.



Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lisa A. Pascuzzi", is centered within a rectangular box. The signature is written in a cursive style.

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Lisa Pascuzzi  
Town Council Clerk

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Town Council Chair