

MINUTES

TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL - BUDGET ZOOM REMOTE MEETING March 17, 2021 – 7:00 P.M.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tammy Nuccio, Chair; Steve Jones, Vice Chair; Brenda Falusi, Cassandra Forsythe (arrived at 7:04PM), Lou Luba, John Reagan (arrived at 7:04PM), Kurt Schenher

MEMBERS ABSENT: none

OTHERS PRESENT: Michael Rosen, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records/Treasurer; Bev Bellody, Director, Human Services; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; John Littell, Fire Chief/Director of Public Safety; Bruce Watt, Director, Recreation; Kathy Pagan, Town Clerk; Scott Lappen, Director, Public Works; Jim Paquin, Building Official; Barbara Pettijohn, Director, Library Services; Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Nuccio called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

2. **PUBLIC HEARING ITEM:**

Mr. Rosen explained that this evening is an important step in the budget process for FY 21/22. Four items are part of this evening's public hearing: Town Government Operations, Board of Education Operations, Capital improvement Reserve Fund, Debt Service. The Town Manager proposed budget is as follows: Town Government, \$12,655,147; Capital Improvement Reserve Fund, \$167,946; Board of Education, \$41,000,289; Debt Service, \$4,650,000. This is a total FY 21/22 proposed budget of \$58,473,382.

2.1 2021-2022 Budget Proposed by the Town Manager

Town Government	\$12,655,147
Capital Improvement Reserve Fund	\$ 167,946
Board of Education	\$41,000,289
Debt Service	\$ 4,650,000

Total Proposed Budget **\$58,473,382**

Mr. Rosen reviewed the following presentation:

Town of Tolland, Public Hearing, March 17, 2021.

- Historical and Proposed Budget Revenues; Historical and Proposed Budgeted Expenditure Percentages; Grand List Growth; Mill Rate Increase
- Town Revenues 2021-2022
 - Projected Decreases/Increases for 2021/2022 from Non-Tax Revenue Sources
- Fund Balance
 - An amount of \$350,000 from Fund Balance is recommended to be used as revenue. Also, \$110,000 from the Stabilization Fund
- Unassigned Fund Balance
 - 2022 EST (includes assumption of use budgeted Fund balance) \$7,965,012, 12.12%
 - 2021 EST \$8,265,012, 12.95%
- Trends in General Fund Revenue Sources
- Expenditure Summary
- 2021/2022 Expenditures Budget \$58,473,382
- Town Expenditure Drivers
- Expenditure Revisions
- Board of Education Request
 - The Board of Education adopted a budget of \$41,293,289 or an increase of \$1,275,999 or 3.19%
 - The Town Manager propose budget reduces the Board of Education's request by \$293,000 to \$41,000,289 or an increase of \$982,999 or 2.46%

- Mill Rate Impact of the Financial Plan
 - Mill Rate = 37.31; an increase of 1.26 mills compared to the current mill rate of 36.05
- Tax Impact/Revaluation Impact
 - Overall average percentage increase .85%
- Approved Tax/Revaluation Increase/Decrease over the Past 6 Years for the Average Residential Home
- Capital Budget
- What Is A Capital Item?
- Capital Budget Planning Process
- Types of Funding Methods
- FY 21-22 Town of Vernon Water Pollution Control Plant Upgrade
 - Total amount: \$218,542
- FY 21-22: Significant Capital Projects Funded by the General Fund
 - Total amount: \$167,946
- FY21-22: Significant Capital Projects Funded by Other Sources
- Past 5 Year General Fund Capital Contributions
 - Town Manager Proposed FY22 = \$167,946 or 0.29%
- Tolland Debt Management Plan Schedule; 2021-2022 through 2025-2026
- Budget Schedule: Important Upcoming Dates
 - March 17, 2021, Public Hearing on Manager's Recommended Budget; Zoom meeting; 7:00PM
 - March 23, 2021, Council Discussion; Budget Finalized; Zoom meeting; 6:00PM
 - April 6, 2021, Advertise Budget
 - April 19, 2021, Annual Budget Presentation Meeting; Zoom meeting; 7:00PM
 - May 4, 2021, Annual Budget Referendum
 - By May 11, 2021, Council to establish mill rate upon referendum adoption

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ashley Lundgren, 30 Hidden Valley, thanked Dr. Willett, the Board of Education, the Town Council, and Mike Rosen for working together to create a budget for the town. She fully supports the Board of Education budget and understands that it is the Town Council's job to pull all the budgets together to make a fiscally responsible decision for the town; however, Ms. Lundgren explained that it is her job to advocate for the educational system. As stated by Dr. Willett, the budget addresses 3 challenges: recovery, remediation, and reform. Ms. Lundgren commented that they owe it to their students, known as their future leaders, to stand by the Superintendent's budget request. COVID has impacted student learning and the mental health of the student population. Intervention is needed and Ms. Lundgren requested that they look at where the school system is heading. She added that they need to advocate for all students and that there is no magic wand that will fix the problems; however, a plan is in place to recover. Further, Ms. Lundgren asked that the Council take into account the percentage of what the Board of Education requested last year, the contract obligations, and this year's request. She thanked everyone for their hard work.

Michelle Harrold, 194 Sugar Hill Road, thanked Ms. Lundgren for being an advocate for her full budget. Ms. Harrold commented that for as close as they are to the bottom for per pupil expenditures, they are even closer to the top in median household income. She explained that this is a key indicator of a community's wealth and what it can afford. This is why it is being stepped down with ECS. Ms. Harrold commented that they have been underfunding the community for at least the last 4 budget cycles and creating budgets with minimal increases that are a far cry from investing in the community that can afford it. She added that she understands that not everyone in the community can afford the increases in taxes. She would argue that those are the families and residents who need the services that are being reduced the most. Many residents could afford to pay if their students needed extra help but not everyone has that luxury, and they are the ones who need the budget. Ms. Harrold commented that they need to invest in the community, and she hopes all the questions, time, and energy spent pouring over the BOE budget over the last couple of weeks has proven that 3.5% is not enough of a mill rate increase this year. She hopes they have had a chance to use the tax calculator and see what the tax increase would be for a 3.5% and how gentle a bump it would be to increase it to 4%. She added that she is unsure if it would bring the Board to its full request, but they would be closer. Ms. Harrold commented that the students matter, and they cannot afford to reduce services as they recover from the pandemic. She asked that the investment be made in the community and they fully fund every budget and she noted that she supports the fire department.

Christina Plourd, 101 Metcalf Road, commented that anyone who has followed for the 3 past years knows that she is an advocate for all citizens of Tolland and that she has tried to help advocate for families to stay in Tolland. She explained that she will never forget the mom of 4 a couple of years ago who begged to stay in town for her kids but could not afford the increasing property taxes. The narrative that it is only a cup of coffee or a tank of gas does not work for Ms. Plourd. She thanked the Council and the current Board of Education and the staff for helping everyone find the balance for the community. Not everyone is rich. She commented that she is speaking as both a town mom and a member of the Board of Education (Board) but not on behalf of the entire Board. She is speaking on her own. Ms. Plourd commented that this Board has worked hard with Dr. Willett to understand the budget. They know where the money is going and what they are doing for the students. The Board unanimously approved the budget, and she supports the work that was done and will continue to ensure she supports it as they pull out of the pandemic. She commented that she knows that staff, families, and the community as a whole will work together to overcome the learning loss many have suffered. She believes the Board's portion of the town budget is responsible to the students and she thanked everyone for the questions to try to understand each line item, the process, and the reasoning. Ms. Plourd added that she appreciates that Mr. Rosen worked with Dr. Willett on his proposed budget to find a balance and she has faith in that partnership. Ms. Plourd commented that she realizes that there may be some disappointment that the Board's original budget was reduced but she is confident that they can move forward and work together. She noted that she supports this budget and appreciates everyone's hard work.

Sophia Shaikh commented that she does not have a question for the Council because to her there is no question that the Board of Education's proposed budget of the 3.19% increase is what the Town Council should approve. She commented that the children are the direct beneficiaries of the budget and they are the most precious ones and the ones most impacted by the decision, yet they do not have a voice in this process. Ms. Shaikh commented that she feels compelled to advocate for them. She added that everyone has faced hardship during the pandemic and whose lives have been most affected or upset but the children's. Although they have adapted, the lasting impacts of COVID-19 will haunt the children. As adults, they lament about the economy, how long it will take to normalize, and understand that it could take years. Ms. Shaikh commented that they would be remiss to think otherwise about the effects of COVID-19 and the children. This will be with the children and part of the fabric of their generation. She added that they owe it to them to give them every opportunity to flourish and to recover. The 3.19% increase builds in supports for the children that they desperately need. She added that the 3.19% is imperative for them right now. They provided them with masks, social distancing, and online learning. She asked why they would discontinue the efforts and asked that the 3.19% budget be approved as it was presented by the Board of Education. She asked that it be approved for the children.

Karen Moran, 50 Merlot Way, commented that she supports the 10 plus weeks of the budget work of the Board of Education and Superintendent and the hours of subcommittee work and the town department's work. She added that she supports the hours of questions in public session and the hours spent answering questions offline by the Superintendent. Further, she supports the collaborative work by the Town Manager and Superintendent as well as the needs of the school district which is represented by a 3.19%. Ms. Moran commented that she would still like to hear from the legislative delegation about ECS and added that they owe them some answers and direction. She also wants to know how the schools' needs will be impacted by a reduction to 2.46%. She added that if they are going to go ahead with this, she believes the community is owed an answer.

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, commented that she advocates for supporting the Fire Department and wants to ensure the dollars are spent in the right way. She advocates for rebuilding the firehouses and the investments needed in that department. Ms. Costa thanked Ms. Lundgren for supporting the budget that she worked tirelessly on. Further, Ms. Costa commented that they have one chance to support the children coming out of the pandemic. She asked that they ask Dr. Willett what will be lost as a result of going from 3.19% to 2.46% and encouraged them to listen. She encouraged them to define how they want to treat this one-time event coming out of the pandemic and how the children will be supported. She supports the 3.19%.

Madhu Renduchintala, 93 Hurlbut Road, thanked Dr. Willett and Mr. Rosen for working together to come up with a responsible budget. He commented that he advocates for the work they did over the course of 10 weeks for the 3.19% increase. They poked, prodded, and asked questions. Everything in the budget was vetted and found a need for. He encouraged the Town Council to go back through the Board's minutes and tape and see why they are asking for the money. It was vetted and the need is real.

Kenny Trice, 53 Doe Run, thanked everyone who worked on the budget – the Board of Education, Dr. Willett, and others who were instrumental in getting the budget to where it is. Their efforts are noted and appreciated. Mr. Trice commented that he supports the original 3.19% budget for a lot of reasons. Over the last several years he has heard that they have been trying to figure out how to cut and make everybody happy. He commented that they pay for it now or they pay for it later. Somewhere along the line, if they keep kicking the can down the road, they will pay for it later. Mr. Trice commented that most people like to have education as a critical part of where they live, where they go, and what they do for their children. No one likes to pay higher taxes but somewhere along the line everything goes up. If it does not, it becomes obsolete, and no one wants it. He supports the original 3.19% budget and believes it is something that needs to be considered. Mr. Trice commented that they should trust the team. The team worked on it and knows it inside out. Lastly, he supports the Fire Department and the revamping of the firehouses. It is something that has to be done and he hopes everyone will consider it because when one dials 911, you just want someone to help you. At that moment when one is in trouble, they want help, so he supports the Fire Department's budget.

Rebecca Risley, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented that she wants to add her voice on supporting the 3.19%. The budget was worked on diligently and tirelessly with effort from the Chair and the Board. Seeing all the hard work they put in and what Dr. Willett put together regarding the needs of the children, she thinks it is something the Town Council needs to look at and consider. Ms. Risley commented that she also supports the Fire Department and support the town. She wants to see the town grow and prosper for all members of the town. She added that she realizes that everyone has different circumstances such as the mother of 4 mentioned by Ms. Plourd and it is difficult. Ms. Risley commented that she came from a single parent home and it is hard and there are other avenues to get help as well and the school resources that are being taken away and those are things that could be helpful to that family.

Colleen Yudichak, 12 Blueberry Hill, commented that she would like to echo what her neighbors are saying and 110% supports the 3.19% increase from the Board of Education. She added that she understands what the Town Manager is doing but they cannot let the kids slip through the cracks. It will cost more down the road if they end up in special education. It will cost the town a tremendously more money. Ms. Yudichak commented that she 110% supports the Fire Department. They have been in her neighborhood a few times and have been helpful, kind, and responsive. Ms. Yudichak commented that if they go with the Town Manager's budget, she hopes they do not go further below what the Town Manager is asking. She thanked the Board of Education members who fought for their budget. They did a good job, came together, and put out a good amount.

Mary Rose Duberek, 37 Ryan Road, thanked all the town departments and elected officials. She commented that she has been paying attention to this process for the last year on both the Town Council and Board of Education sides. Everyone is going through the pandemic together. She commented that she supports the original Board of Education budget. They worked hard on the budget and dotted all the i's and crossed all the t's. Ms. Duberek added that she is concerned because if it was so carefully crafted, what would be lost based on the new proposal. She noted that she supports all the other departments. It is an amazing town, everyone lives in Tolland for a reason, and she want to support it. The Fire Department is top notch and holds a special place in her heart because they have been good to her and her family. She thanked everyone and asked if they could work toward the original Board of Education budget it would mean a lot to families with children and the community at large.

Dana Philbin, 11 Harvest Lane, noted that she is a member of the Board of Education. She commented that she advocates for the 3.19% original proposed budget that was put together by longer than 10 weeks of collective hard work to find the resources and needs of the students and staff of the school system. She added that Dr. Willett has used "recovery rebuild reform" repeatedly and it is not going to be a one and done situation. Once they are through the COVID pandemic, there will be years of recovery needed for all students. For some of the younger students, this could have impacted their entire educational careers – at least the 12 years in the Tolland Public School system. She commented that it is important to look at recovery for the long haul and in all aspects such as special education, general education, or all education. The schools were there when students went remote and supported students by sending home books, paper, literature, Chromebooks, and needed supplies. Ms. Philbin commented that her concern with any reduction less than what was proposed as a collective and diverse team of the Board of Education, would not necessarily be responsible by the students. She asked what the reduction impacts would be educationally for students. She commented that as adults speaking for the students, who cannot fight for their education including services in the classroom and beyond as well as events, they need to support students in all capacities. She asked what the impacts would be by reducing the 3.19% to a possible 2.46%. Will it be personnel or education and how are they supporting the students. Ms. Philbin commented that she appreciates everyone who has been involved in the process and people who

have attended meetings and listened. She thanked them for speaking their truth and that they all want what is best for Tolland. She commented that Ms. Plourd often speaks of the young family that resonates with her and Ms. Philbin is appreciative. Ms. Philbin believes everyone has a family that resonates with them in some capacity. Tolland rallies together and does its best to support community members. This is an opportunity to support community members in all capacities. She added that she is not just fighting for the Board of Education budget but is an advocate for the educational system. She cited Andy Powell that they are guardians of education and she feels strongly about their work and that of the Fire Department. The Fire Department's presentation was impactful and people in town are important to the continued growth and progress of Tolland. It is evident in the families that move to town and stay in town. They need to continue to fund resources and people who cannot afford the tax increase. The resources they may cut in the school budget could be the resources for after school programming and additional special education programming. It may be a parent who cannot afford a Chromebook, toner, or printer paper. This is what the schools have been there for. For those who cannot afford a tax increase, they do not want to remove resources that support those families across the board – not only those in the school system but through the entire Tolland community. She supports the original 3.19% and the Tolland Board of Education and its hard work. Ms. Philbin asked that they also work on rebuilding the firehouses. When she dials 911, she wants Chief Littell and his team to be there to support her family and her neighbors.

Linda Scheidel, 81 Morgan Lane, commented that there is so much that the town has had to reduce due to the increase in taxes. No one wants to pay more taxes. She asked why there has not been anything done to help alleviate the large reliance on household taxes. This is the major thing – they need to bring in more stuff and she does not see anything being done to alleviate the homes' tax increases. She added that she supports the 3.19% presented by the Board of Education. She wants everyone on the call and reading the minutes to hear what now needs to be cut from the Board of Education's budget to accommodate the decrease. Ms. Scheidel commented that it is not Dr. Willett's annual raise because he has opted not to take one of them. She asked if it will be the support position he included in the budget so he can stop doing all the jobs he has taken on because he does not have the budget to give himself the support. She commented that it is not something they can do to entice people to come to town. The more they do not support the schools, the more families that will have to leave because they can find more support in another town.

Andy Powell, 21 Clearbrook Drive, noted that he is commenting as a private citizen and not as associated with any board, collective, or group. He commented that knowing the work that goes into producing budgets and the balancing act that needs to be done over time, they are in a special situation that they have not seen in a long time. He believes that part of what has been missed is the work from the town side such as social services, parks and rec, the DPW, and the people who have done the work to allow the other components of the town to work. He provided examples of supporting seniors and other groups. Social services are what really makes things work and they did not see much from those departments. Mr. Powell commented that he supports the Town Manager's work in being able to give them the needed resources. This ties into the continual capital investments that need to be made for the DPW as well as other investments – specifically public safety. People turn to them when it is their worst day and public safety needs equipment, storage, and modern working and living spaces to be able to do their job. Mr. Powell commented that he worked with the CERT team and saw members of public safety in action and led by one of the greatest professionals who has been recognized in Tolland County and the state. Chief Littell has put forward an amazingly professional and responsible team and they want to include citizen engagement. Mr. Powell noted that he is in full support of the bonding for the firehouses and if they can find grants for public safety it will only help the townspeople. Regarding the Board of Education, if 3.19% is the best that can be done then he supports it. Mr. Powell added that if one told Dr. Willett that he had \$10M, he would find the best possible way to provide services to students, but they need to do things in compliance with mandates and necessary work. He added that Tolland's educational system has been chronically underfunded. Since his family moved to town almost 20 years ago, they have seen services, classes, groups, teams, organizations, and experiences dropped. He noted that they got new buildings and needed them, but this was a bonding issue. Investment in education in terms of what they could have done has not happened. If 3.19% is the best they can do, then it is the best they can do. Mr. Powell commented that this all equates to a Tolland that has continuing expenses in terms of more mill rates and property taxes. They are blessed with a great town but commercially, they have challenges. They will find ways to be able to meet those in the long term. The tax base will still be reliant upon personal property taxes. They are doing the best they can. Mr. Powell thanked everyone for their service both on the Town Council and the Board of Education.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**


Mr. Jones motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 PM

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, flowing style.

Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair