

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION JOINT MEETING LIBRARY PROGRAM ROOM

MARCH 6, 2018 - 7:00 P.M.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: William Eccles, Chair; David Skoczulek, Vice-Chair; Brenda Falusi; Tammy Nuccio; John Reagan; Paul Reynolds and Christine Vincent

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

BOE MEMBERS PRESENT: Colleen Yudichak, Chair; Karen Moran, Vice-Chair; Sam Adlerstein; Michelle Harrold; Jane Pasini; Christina Plourd and Jeff Schroeder

BOE MEMBERS ABSENT: Robert Pagoni and Susan Seaver

OTHERS PRESENT: Steven Werbner, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records; Christopher Jordan, Assistant Finance Director; Walter Willett, Superintendent; Ali Simon and Mallory Goldsmith, School Reps

- 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 – Explanation of the budget process by the Town Manager**

Steven Werbner called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Mr. Werbner advised that the BOE has completed their budget process, and have submitted the budget for consideration to him. He has included the recommendation of the BOE in his recommended budget, which he is passing off to the Council tonight. The budget will be posted to the website tomorrow. He reviewed the dates remaining on the budget schedule, and the process going forward.

- 2. Recommendations and suggestions to BOE regarding consolidation of non-education services and cost savings (per State Statutes (Public Act 13-60))**

Mr. Werbner said this obligation has been met by establishing the Shared Services Committee. They have started to meet, and will continue to meet.

- 3. 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**

Deb Goetz of 176 Kate Lane: What is the potential impact on the taxpayers?

Mr. Werbner said they use three different assessment levels. Market value homes assessed at 1) \$167,000; 2) \$268,000; and 3) \$514,000. At the lowest end, the tax increase would be \$101.00, middle range \$162.00, and at the high end it would be \$309.00.

Sam Adlerstein of 164 Pine Hill Road: He asked Mr. Werbner if he used the legislative approved number or something else.

Mr. Werbner said he used a blended figure between the Governor's and Legislative adopted number. It came out to about \$9.3m for ECS, which is about the hold-back number.

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

Tammy Nuccio said the only concern about the BOE budget that she has is not knowing what their plan is to mitigate the ½ million dollars. The .78 budget doesn't take out the ½ million dollar credit in health insurance, which can be a onetime event. It brings the budget up to 2.08%, which really is the addition of the five positions that are being added. When they get to next year and don't have that ½ million dollars, what will the plan be to mitigate that. Mr. Eccles asked why there is a credit of ½ million. Ms. Nuccio said it was because their claim experience was better than what they had been paying. So, the insurance companies adjust the bank levels and adjust the amount that needs to be paid in. So, they get a credit. Mr. Eccles asked if the premiums will increase next year by ½ million dollars because they will have normal claim experiences?

Mr. Werbner said claims are claims. They cannot predict how many people are going to use their insurance. They do as much as they can through the E-chip to save as much money as they can on administrative expenses and taxes, etc. It really can't be predicted. Sometimes it negatively affects the budgets.

Ms. Nuccio said if they don't find a way to mitigate it, then they will come in at a 2% increase next year just to stay flat.

Michelle Harrold said that as of July 1st all of the bargaining units will be on the E-chip and the HSA. So, the deductibles will start working their way down, which will be a savings. The programs they are looking to invest in are to offset all of their increasing costs.

Sam Adlerstein said the Board feels they are being as fiscally responsible as they can be. It takes a lot of reduction to have this small of an increase. If they are not careful, they will be degrading their education. He asked the Council members what their commitment to quality education is.

Mr. Eccles said he is committed to the quality of education, but he is also committed to the taxpayers at the same time. They are not the advocates for the school system. They are the advocates for the taxpayers, as well as the school system. There are many factors to weigh, not just the cost of education. It is also the costs of the roads, and other services we expect in town to make sure that the residents can afford to live here to enjoy that education. He said they need to come up with creative solutions. The Board can't let the State drive them.

Mr. Reynolds said he agrees with Mr. Eccles. They need to look at what is being proposed to the residents, and what will pass through the referendum process. He thinks things need to be balanced. He believes there is a limit in terms of what will get passed. They can't keep increasing because of the lack of ECS funding.

Ms. Falusi said as the Council and the BOE they have the opportunity to educate everybody in town about what the impacts will be if they don't do some of the programs that the BOE is building up. If they can't show people how important it is to sustain the education, then they will just slide downhill. She thinks the Board has done a great job.

David Skoczulek believes the Board's budget is responsible and he supports it. He doesn't know if the baseline is where they will end up though. He would like to review Mr. Werbner's budget before commenting further. He has more to absorb.

John Regan said he has two kids in the school system, and he will for the next five years. So, his commitment to the excellence in the school system is clearly there. He turned the question around though and asked what the BOE's commitment is to the town. They need to look at it both ways. Both are valid questions, and they need to work together to see if they can find some creative solutions.

Christine Vincent said her commitment is to the town as a whole. It is not just education or the town. It is the Town of Tolland as a whole. What does the Town of Tolland look like moving forward for everybody (our seniors, our vets, parents and students)?

Tammy Nuccio said she supports education across the board. She thinks the .78 is a good number, but she thinks they are putting themselves behind if they don't have a plan in place for next year. She goes to all the BOE meetings, and there is a lot of talk about the Lighthouse, etc. Personally, she would like to see more focus on bringing back kids from out-of-district. This is not going to get any better. They need to look at reasonable reduction, increase and use of the fund. At some point, uncomfortable decisions will need to be made. There needs to be concessions on both sides. She doesn't think anyone here is anti-education. They need to have a good education, but they need to be responsible to the taxpayers.

Ms. Harrold said three of the positions that they are looking to add are to help them save money, or to bring money in. This budget has their plan for how they are potentially going to reduce, and find more money. She said this is their year to prepare for the future. They will put all the pieces together, so that they can be in a better position next year. Ms. Nuccio said she agrees with the 2 interventionists, but she struggles with the business teacher / business academy. Ms. Harrold said that Dr. Willett has put something together for them, that they will be sharing with the Council. The business teacher is to start bringing back some of the \$250,000 they send out to magnets. It is the first step to kids wanting to be here, or to stay here. It will enable them to be competitive with the magnets.

Mallory Goldsmith commented that she has noticed many changes. She was wondering if they will get any services back.

Colleen Yudichak commented that they would like to bring back a math interventionist, a business teacher, etc. She said they are trying to bring back a lot of things to make the District stronger. She commented that when they were working on the budget, they were up and down. They voted 6/3 on the .78 budget. They are losing about \$77,000 from the budget, and are able to keep all these positions in place.

Ms. Plourd asked Ms. Goldsmith how she was personally affected by the cuts.

Mallory Goldsmith said they didn't have as many supplies, there was overcrowding in classes, and some classes were cut.

Mr. Adlerstein said they will be doing well to hold their own. He said he reviewed the Council's goals that were passed at the last meeting. He was wondering if they would be willing to add a goal that had to do with quality of service. Mr. Eccles said they will consider that.

Mr. Regan said he appreciates the work that the Board has put into their budget process, but sometimes he feels like the Council is the bad guy in town by making it seem like they are holding back from the Board. He wants the schools to be as good as they possibly can, and have everything that they can have.

Colleen Yudichak asked if the Council will support the Board's increase.

Ms. Nuccio said the .78 is reasonable, but she can't say she's jumping on the .78 because she doesn't know what the rest of Mr. Werbner's budget looks like. They just received it tonight. Ms. Falusi said she is behind whatever the Board came forward with.

Ms. Plourd advised that she attended a summit on regionalization. They spoke about sharing services with the Board of Education. She sees opportunity for them to save money there. With regard to the Business Academy, she sees kids from Canterbury, etc. coming here. She spoke about her opinion on the new positions.

Colleen Yudichak asked Mr. Willett if they could share the information regarding the business position with the Council members.

Mr. Willett said he had been waiting for information from the State, which he just received 24 hours ago. He will be sharing it.

Ms. Nuccio asked the Board to quantify the non-funded mandates. If they can get other towns to do the same, they can go to the Legislature and fight them. She volunteered to go with them as a Rep from the Council.

Jane Pasini said Dr. Willett does a great job keeping our kids safe in our schools. She asked that when the Council looks at the .78 increase, they keep the safety and security of the kids in mind. They have two SRO's, but they are not there all the time. They do a great job, but there is always room for improvement.

Mr. Werbner said the State needs to start planning for the future. They need to hold whoever is running for office to the fire, and those people need to move forward, rather than blaming people in the past. Tolland has done everything right. Ms. Vincent agreed.

Karen Moran said she heard a couple of things tonight: creative solutions and being responsible to the taxpayers. She feels they have done those two things. She spoke about what DECA does. They have a strong foundation of business at the high school, so the pathway to the business academy will help with that. As far as being responsible to the taxpayers, she feels that this budget is very responsible. There are still a lot of holes to fill. In her mind, with .78, they are filling a few holes, but creating a few other smaller holes in the process. The education system in town is specifically correlated with property values. She personally would like to see them have a really strong education system to make sure they are sustaining that for her property values. She thinks everyone else would appreciate that too.

Colleen Yudichak asked why some items on the bond request haven't been fulfilled yet. Some include surveillance, vestibule door, locks, and alarms.

Mr. Werbner said the school bond issue is under the control of the BOE. The town has nothing to do with the pace or priorities. He said he does have concern regarding the Birch Grove roof until he is convinced as to the foundation situation. He has had no discussion with anyone regarding holding back on the bond issue, and what was approved in that bond issue.

5. **Adjournment:** Steven Werbner adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

Steven R. Werbner
Town Manager

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk