

## BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

### TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL HYBRID MEETING 6<sup>th</sup> Floor Council Chambers April 4, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Steve Jones, Chair; John Reagan, Vice Chair; Sami Khan, Lou Luba (Zoom); Katie Murray, Tammy Nuccio (Zoom); Colleen Yudichak (arrived at 7:59PM; Zoom)

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** none

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Brian Foley, Town Manager; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Bev Bellody, Director, Human Services (Zoom)

1. **Call to Order:** Mr. Jones called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. **Public Hearing Item:**

2.1 2023-2024 Budget Proposed by the Town Manager

Town Government	\$13,682,051
Capital Improvement Reserve Fund	\$ 319,451
Board of Education	\$42,989,855
Debt Service	<u>\$ 4,750,000</u>
Total Proposed Budget	\$61,741,357

Mr. Foley reviewed the presentation Town of Tolland Public Hearing, April 4, 2023

- Budget Summary FY 2023-2024
- Town Revenues 2023-2024
- Fund Balance
- Expenditures
- Mill Rate Impact of the Financial Plan
- Tax Impact
- Capital Budget
- Types of Funding Methods
- FY 23-24 Town of Vernon Water Pollution Control Plant Upgrade
- FY 23-24 Significant Capital Projects Funded by the General Fund
- FY 23-24 Significant Capital Projects Funded by Other Sources
- Past 5 Year General Fund Capital Contributions
- Total Debt Management Plan Schedule 2023-24 through 2027-28
- Budget Schedule

3. **Public Participation**

Karen Moran, 50 Merlot Way, commented that at the last Council meeting, Mr. Khan and Mr. Reagan asked where the parents were and Ms. Moran noted that they are here tonight. The additional reductions Dr. Willett proposed are in addition to the reductions he made before presenting his budget to the BOE. Items included delaying the transportation company's increase which is kicking the can down the road so they should plan on having the same conversation next year. She explained that they should be able to trust the Council, the Superintendent, and the process but it is dysfunctional. An education budget is a plan, a statement of values. They need to have more than a 1-year cycle and plan for the community so when storms come, they can be weathered. Companies do organizational strategic planning and so should the town. Ms. Moran's youngest is a senior and she does not want families to have to keep doing this – it is not right. She wants students to have a great education, but when she was fighting for this, she was fighting for what previous families had. It is a vicious cycle, and it is wrong. Underfunding schools for years, not in

line with inflation, hurts them. She is advocating for an increase of the BOE budget and an opportunity to vote on a community budget that retains resources.

Toni Moura, 42 Center Road, commented that hearing the request for scores at the last meeting struck a nerve. Test scores are often touted as a way to measure how good a school is but they do not tell the whole story. She is a parent of a 9<sup>th</sup> grader who is part of special education. Based on teacher recommendation, he is not taking a foreign language and Ms. Moura worries how competitive he will be when filling out college applications. She explained that she worries even more when she sees potential cuts like the THS business teacher, the child development program, and the math coach which will impact her child and others. Despite receiving services over the last 4 years, his English literacy SBAC scores are below average, he fumbles over multisyllabic words, and he is worried about embarrassing himself in class and barely engages. This is the direct impact of underfunding schools and the result of a mom who cannot afford outside tutoring. They can look at the scores of those who are thriving and think they have done a magnificent job, but she asked that they look at students' scores like her son's or those with similar or even lower scores and know that they failed the students. The Council is entrusted to make this decision although it was callously said multiple times that the Council does not have the burden of finding and determining what devastating cuts would look like. The Superintendent is qualified enough to figure out the aftermath, but not competent enough for the Council to accept his proposal. Dr. Willett has been sounding the alarm for years, but it falls on deaf ears. Ms. Moura begged the Council to rise to the challenge and ensure students have the same, or better-quality education, as the Council members' children who have already benefited from Tolland schools. Extreme times, unusual insurance blips, and COVID fallout call for unfamiliar measures like a bigger BOE budget. While most felt hardships and reductions in salaries, the town saw their reserves increase. A 3% BOE budget is fraudulent.

Rebecca Risley, 103 Mountain Spring Road, addressed the calls for transparency on the education budget. The BOE and staff have dug deep and been as creative as possible. They have found every efficiency and looked under every rock for stray dollars in the public eye. They have done their due diligence. Educational budgets need to be fluid. There are always unforeseen circumstances that can cause shifts such as contractual obligations and mandates. Tolland's continued underfunding of the educational system has had detrimental impacts that have been catching up despite efforts of a caring staff which has always been hailed as doing more with less, making it work, and figuring it out. When THS is not quite as clean, remember the custodian that was not necessary. When paying out of pocket for a tutor because your child is struggling with new concepts, remember the math interventionist that was not necessary. When your 6<sup>th</sup> grader has social challenges and the school cannot address them because the student is not on a specialized plan, remember the ROPE para that was not necessary. When your child cannot get a class in their pathway because a business teacher and a children's educational instructor have been eliminated, remember those positions were not necessary. When curriculum is not up-to-date or the expected standards Tolland relies on to bring families to town are not met, remember that the team leads and curriculum liaisons were not necessary. When they continue to struggle to find paras and offer some of the lowest pay of surrounding towns for difficult and challenging work, remember that competitive increases were not necessary. When they lose amazing, seasoned teachers because they are overworked, overburdened, undercompensated, and underappreciated, remember the reductions the Council determined were necessary.

Renie Besaw, 230 Grant Hill Road, commented that she understands some of the frustrations people have around the education budget; however, believes the 3% increase is more than adequate. She was on the BOE and in some cases proposed cuts never actually happened even though the budget passed at the lower rate. She believes sometimes there are scare tactics involved and understands that people will be upset she is saying this, but she saw it happen.

Ashley Pagsuyuin, 46 Bonair Hill Road, explained that her comments are from the perspective of being a mother and working professional with 2 full-time jobs with an expertise of being a licensed and active realtor for over 6 years. Supporting the BOE budget and investing in students is not just relevant for families with children in the school system. Everyone should support a strong school system because it directly impacts their pockets as homeowners. The National Bureau of Economic Research found that a \$1.00 increase in per pupil aggregate increases housing values an average of \$20. Potential residents value education expenditure. Duke University found that housing prices increase by \$0.52/square foot for every percentage point increase in a school district's test scores. Supporting funding schools directly impacts the quality of education for students, their test scores, and from there the value of one's home. As a younger family in town, she explained that these concerns are across the board for other younger families. The population has become more fluid and more flexible in terms of where people can live and there are plenty of options. A town thrives and survives from the rejuvenation that younger families, people, and professionals bring. They need to

have something to offer people aside from the wonderful quiet neighborhoods. The town has very few businesses, places to eat, and places to shop and places are needed that will attract newcomers. The school system is an easy one to keep strong and it benefits the town as a whole. It comes full circle to every resident and speaks to the value of one's home. If families leave for better school systems, home values will decrease over time and the town will be left in a state that will be hard to come back from. She asked that the Council not guide the town down a slippery slope. She asked that the town remain desirable, educated, and valuable and that the Council reinstate the original budget and support the town and its residents.

Heather McCann, 62 Crossen Drive, commented that over the last 4 years children have endured stress and insecurity. They have lost loved ones due to COVID and were abruptly told to stay home from school. Some lost friends and teachers who they may have been with for 5 days/week for many years. They had no idea when the pandemic would end. The aftermath of COVID has left children with learning loss, social/emotional issues, anxiety, and depression. There is an increase in chronic absenteeism and hospitalizations in children who do not want to leave their homes because they feel insecure. Weekly, they hear of mass shootings across the country and are in shock. They have insecurities and are in a constant state of fight or flight. Now is the time they need to feel stable with a hand on their backs and the time to give them more, not the status quo – and certainly not less than they need. The last thing students need is more disruption to their lives - more teachers leaving, fewer supports, and drained and/or underappreciated staff. Students need to know their community and adults will take care of them. Students are struggling academically, emotionally, and socially and this cannot be ignored. It is not just another budget year. Ms. McCann asked the Council to be part of the solution, not the problem and help the kids.

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, commented that Mr. Foley mentioned the cost of trash increasing and this is just a simple example of 1 service provided in Tolland. They need to support all town services and invest in the town. Her friends in another town just sold their house for almost \$80K more than asking and everything in that town is increasing because its education system is strong. She asked that they invest in Tolland schools. It is not just about maintaining the status quo but improving overall. It is about creating opportunities for growth and ensuring better student access to quality education that prepares them for the future. They also need to continue to invest in the senior center and infrastructure and ensure there are trash services. While they need to pass a referendum, the Council needs to support a budget that will invest in all of Tolland – all residents.

Bethany Lescoe, 26 Deer Meadow Road, commented that she listened to the ARPA subcommittee meeting and was happy to hear a productive conversation from both sides of the table that came to an agreement, but she was embarrassed that what was agreed upon in one hour, was completely undone a few hours later. She is a mother of 2 students and is concerned for all students and the future of Tolland. She explained that she wants to express her utmost dissatisfaction for the essentially 0% increase proposed for the BOE. At a previous meeting, Councilor Luba asked for data to show that the children/schools are suffering from continuous cuts and that then there could be consideration to increase the budget. She explained that magic 8-ball data just cannot just appear. They cannot look back at data from 5 years ago and compare it to what this generation faces including the residual effects from the pandemic, mental health needs, and increased special needs. The recent cuts, and those proposed, will set new low standard that will not show in so-called data a couple of years – years that Tolland will not be able to rebuild. She asked if she does not put gas in her car if it will still turn on and if she avoids oil changes if the car will still run. The answer is no. They cannot continue to provide discounted, bargain store, bottom of the barrel attention to what the schools need. They need counselors, team leads, math and business coaches, teachers, and curriculum liaisons. If the Council does not provide what the school is asking for, what it needs, and how it needs to get there, how can anyone expect the school system to sustain itself. She has repeatedly heard that it is not the responsibility of the Council to decide where the BOE will cut funding. While this may be true, it is not fair to think \$5 of gas in her car will be enough to drive to Canada. Funding the BOE now means a future for Tolland. Disregarding the needs put forward by the BOE will only demonstrate the carelessness of the Council in its opinion of the town and the students' futures. It is time to change the narrative of "we can't" to "we can". As demonstrated at the ARPA meeting, they can support the town, students, and teachers. It is a matter of following through and implementing.

Sarah Dagon Goldman, 163 Old Post Road, commented that she is a mother of young children and a K12 educator. She asked that the Council reinstate the full BOE requested and passed budget and show that the town is worth the investment.

Samar Bush, 20 Forest Lane, commented that when she first started paying attention to how the schools are funded 6-7 years ago, she assumed it was a one-time or short inability to fund the schools. Now there is an ongoing pattern of inadequate funding. They are not supporting the schools the way surrounding communities do and her kids are starting to notice. Ms. Bush commented that she is worried about the morale of teachers, staff, and students. They should let the initially proposed budget go to referendum – not one with an arbitrary cap.

Caroline Hargraves, 28 Charles Street, commented that at the last Council meeting the question was asked if a budget less than the one accepted by the BOE is sufficient to meet the goals and objectives for FY24. She explained that it is not and she is concerned about the Town Manager reducing the BOE budget to 3% as a starting point of discussion. This is a result of the BOE not uniting in supporting and advocating for the needs of the school system to the Council this year and in years past. The end result is a budget that does not adequately support all learners, staff, and administration. While she could list each area impacted by the reduction, she does not see it making a difference. The Council has heard and seen the data and the effects of low percent changes time and again. If the Council does not understand the gravity of the situation, then at best, it is not listening and paying attention to what has been presented. At worst, the data does not fit the Council's agenda and has been dismissed. The children have been dismissed. When young families inquire about the town and education, the narrative by individuals with students in the schools is that Tolland is not a community that invests in children and the educational system. Tolland seems focused on maintaining a retirement community, not a well-functioning and thriving town that supports families and future generations. This is the current face and reputation of Tolland and it needs to change. She asked about the vision of the town and who it is as a community. She asked how they can support a school community of 2,300 students who deserve the best. There will be difficult budget years but she cannot accept a Council and BOE not willing to promote and back the budget prepared by the talented educators that are holding the system together despite a lack of support from community officials.

Joe Goldman, 163 Old Post Road, commented that he thinks everyone wants Tolland to stand out as a town that values and promotes good education. It starts with the budget as a statement of the way elected officials and the town feel about education. As a teacher, he noted that this is something educators pay attention to and a show of support from the BOE and the Council goes a long way in raising morale and would be appreciated by teachers. His understanding is that most education budgets spend the most on teachers and perhaps they are having the wrong conversation. The question should be how to increase teacher pay in the district. He provided data about a nearby district where a starting teacher makes approximately \$4,000 more at step one. This equates to approximately a 10% difference in pay and often districts that offer more pay get first choice when it comes to a candidate pool. They would want Tolland to have first choice. It has more to do with the quality of education in the district than just about anything. Instead of talking about what they may, or may not, want to cut, they need to start discussing how to increase teacher pay so the school system can be competitive with neighboring districts. It would say a lot about Tolland and what it stands for. It would be an investment in the future of Tolland and in its students. It is a difficult choice but at the end of the day, he hopes it is clear that Tolland supports students and teachers.

Kenny Trice, 53 Doe Run, commented that his children are grown but they came to Tolland for the education. Everyone in the room is here because of education, not magic. Someone took the time to teach them. As parents, they believe they can teach everything. They will be superheroes to their kids no matter what but there are some things they cannot teach. Those require teachers – people who hold resources. He noted that he asks himself why Tolland is a 2.9% town and if it is a magic number they cannot go past. For those who cannot afford it, they need to look at this but the metrics do not bear out that they cannot go above 2.9%. He asked what the Council would do if inflation went to 4%. If the town would still go 2.9%. They have to invest in resources so the school system can teach children like it taught his. Although his kids are grown, he still supports education because someone did it for him when he came to Tolland. It is his turn to do it for others. Mr. Trice noted that he is blessed that he can afford it and understands that not everyone can, but for the most part they cannot continue to have 2.9% and expect stellar results. One has to pay for the good resources if one wants better education.

Deirdre Goldsmith, 21 Marlboro Glade, requested that residents be given the opportunity to vote on the fully funded educational budget put forth by the Superintendent and the BOE. Today, she hears overwhelming support for this and hopes it matters.

Amanda Doyle, 8 Lakeview Drive Extension, commented that she is a parent and teacher in a neighboring town. She thanked those on the BOE for approving the Superintendent's budget. She added that above all else, adults should do

what is best for children. Every aspect of town government is important and the costs for necessities are high, but she hopes that each of the Councilors feels that the town's children are the most important aspect of the community. Providing them with quality educational opportunities and social and emotional services is a necessity. They want the youth to be successful academically and emotionally. She asked if the Council wants more young families in town. Poorly funded schools have already and will continue to cause families to move elsewhere or not move to Tolland. She asked that the Council fund what is most important and reinstate the education budget approved by the BOE.

Mary Rose Duberek, 37 Ryan Road, commented she supports fully funding the original budget proposed by the Superintendent. People love the town and want to promote it and be excited about it. The education is not terrible, but it is only great because people are working hard trying to work within the parameters. As a booster, they are trying to raise money for items that in some towns are likely fully funded with taxpayer dollars. She provided an example of an All-American athlete that is fully funded by their family. It is hard to hear a mother say her child is struggling and that education is failing the child because they want people to love the community as much as they do. There are people with contaminated wells. She commented that this is not her problem but she could not imagine saying that someone does not deserve clean water and is fortunate not to have a crumbling foundation but could not imagine not supporting tax relief for those who do. Members make a community beautiful, and they support each other. She has a student at THS and is proud of him but he is struggling too. The lingering effects of COVID are not gone. Ms. Duberek noted that she and her husband are college educated and lucky they can sit down and work with their child but maybe not everyone has that ability. This is why they support education. It is a village so people do not have to struggle. She fully supports the budget of the Superintendent and the BOE that was agreed upon by a majority.

Jen Gallichant, 150 Timber Trail, commented that as a BOE member she has said a lot during meetings in support of the budget. This is a great process for the community. She thanked the community members who showed up tonight in support of the education budget and the Superintendent who continues to work tirelessly to find ways to alleviate the cuts that Board members, like her, ask him to find throughout the process.

Kate Howard-Bender, 103 Goose Lane, commented that it is gross that they are fighting over an increase that could be as little as \$200/year. She is tired of having this argument, saying the same things, and watching the can be kicked. She loves living in Tolland, the education her kids have received, and the friends she has made. Ms. Howard-Bender commented that ECS has been decreasing on a stepdown formula since 2013. The BOE has been managing the impact since then and punishing the schools because the town has a high income does not make sense. Three Councilors are in Council Chambers and this is distressing. Although the others are on Zoom, the community is looking to the Councilors to show up. She appreciates that they are logged in, but it is not enough. This is the theme – it is not enough. She is here as a parent and educator to kindly demand that the Council reinstate the bare minimum ask for the BOE. It is not too much to ask that students in the schools, or will be, have the same quality of education that students who graduated 10, 20, or even 30 years ago received. To the Councilors, she is asking that the budget be made whole for the BOE and then that they advocate for it to be passed and tell residents why they need to vote "yes" in the referendum. They need Councilors to fight for high school seniors, preschoolers, firefighters, and senior citizens. Tolland is worth it. They need to act like the community it is.

Julie Brennan, 127 Ellington Road, commented that she is a parent of 3 kids in the school system and supports the increase in the school budget. She has sent e-mails to the Council and thanked Councilor Yudichak who was the only Councilor who replied. Ms. Brennan noted that she is an unaffiliated voter who has voted mostly republican for the past few years and her husband is a registered republican and they both agree that they need to support funding for the schools. Everyone needs to come together and support the children, schools, and school budget.

Cynthia Flynn, 145 Anthony Road, commented that she would like the Council to put the 6% increase Dr. Willett and the BOE approved out for referendum. If the Council feels residents do not want to spend that much money, then it will show in the votes. She asked that they be given the chance to show what they want.

Dana Philbin, 11 Harvest Lane, noted that she is a parent of 2 students at TIS and a BOE member. She appreciates everyone's involvement in the budget process. She has expressed concerns and questions and has spoken with the BOE through different forums and they have raked the budget with a fine-toothed comb. She has advocated for the originally proposed and still supports it. It is the job of the BOE, Council, and other boards and commissions to listen to the community. People are asking for assistance and support of seniors, the Recreation Department, education and others across the board to make Tolland whole. An adequate budget is one that supports across the board. They need

to ensure they are preparing for the future and the town as an entire community. If they do not continue to fund Tolland as a whole, they will not have the conversations where people say they love Tolland year over year. Ms. Philbin supports the full budget, Dr. Willett, Dr. Willett's budget, families, and all community members who speak. It is crystal clear what the community is asking of the Board and the Council.

Kate Vallo, 80 Tolland Green, commented that she agrees with those who are advocating for the students and everything in the community. One of the Council's responsibilities is to ensure continuity of services. Difficult decisions have to be made and it is a difficult time. The BOE and Superintendent provided information that made it clear that a proposed increase of 3% does not ensure continuity of services and does not fund high quality schools. She is particularly invested in this being in education. It will require cutting some positions and services including math intervention, curriculum liaisons, and team leads. The Council has an opportunity to provide residents with an opportunity to vote on a budget that would fully fund the schools and ensure high quality education for the next budget year. She respectfully requested that this be done. She added that while she understands that it is not up to the Council to decide on cuts that may need to happen, it does not absolve members from the responsibility of acknowledging that cuts will have to be made and to take action to stop it.

Jodie Coleman-Marzialo, 79 Tolland Green, commented that she has been a special education educator in Tolland for over 14 years and has worked in every school in the district. COVID has had an impact on students. They are struggling emotionally, mentally, physically, psychologically, and socially. There is less motivation to complete assignments, study for tests, and do homework. Behaviors have increased significantly as well. Paraeducators help the teachers. Ms. Coleman-Marzialo moved to Tolland in 1999 because of the educational system and worked at UConn. She promotes higher education and wants students' SAT scores to be good and the only way they will be is with the help of paraeducators and teachers being paid and compensated with a budget that can fund the town. She is in favor of an increase in the BOE budget. If one wants the education to be good, one needs to help the school system.

Julie Cusson, 10 Lamont Lane, commented that she has raised 4 children and loves Tolland. Her kids would come home and say that she had to vote – they were being told by teachers that art and music were going to be taken away and this concerned her. A lot of people move to Tolland for the education and she asked if they later stay. She has gone through the nightmare of having a crumbling foundation and an issue with her well on her properties in town. People often say a high budget is made that will be knocked down, but she does not know the truth to this. She knows that not everyone has great successful jobs. Ms. Cusson added that she wants to live in Tolland forever and not have her taxes so high that she cannot stay. A lot of people move to Tolland but then move after their children have attended the wonderful school system. While this is not everyone, it happens. She supports children and hopes that the Council, with its heart, thinks of everyone. She added that COVID hurt everyone including businesses. They cannot ask the schools to do everything. It is the parents' job to spend time with their children at home to address the emotional needs.

Julie Kolb, 34 Susan Drive, commented that she moved to Tolland because of the school system and its proximity to Hartford where they worked. They have been happy and have made good friends. Her 2 children are 18 and 21 but as a resident she wants to see the school system supported. There is a connection between one's home value and a good school system. She is a full-time working mother and had an opportunity to take some time off to help with the booster club and be the president of the PTO at TIS. Through these activities, they can fundraise but only so much. They cannot reach the classroom where people and teachers are needed. Where she works, reductions are being made and it comes down to capacity and bandwidth. When one reduces capacity, bandwidth is reduced along with the services that can be provided. Ms. Kolb noted that she is advocating for the schools, the library, and the fire department. Her 93-year-old mother-in-law lives in town and has had a few calls. The community service was available and fantastic. She asked that investment in the town continues. While times are tough, this is the only place where individuals have an opportunity to say "no", that they do not want something unlike when it comes to the cost of fuel, gas, and food but this is a service that everyone needs and it adds value to the community.

Andrew Mangiafico, 7 Lorraine Drive, commented that his kids are young and his oldest is entering Birch Grove. While they have not experienced much of what other families have in terms of learning difficulties or things of this nature, he is hearing people talk about their kids having trouble reading and pronouncing words and asked how the town and schools are succeeding if the resources to help them are not available. They are failing the kids and it is crazy to think that a town like Tolland does not have the resources for students who struggle. He asked if they do not invest now to maintain schools, what the increases will look like once Tolland starts to take a nosedive in terms of reputation and

prestige in the school systems. They moved to Tolland 10 years ago and 1 of the big things was the school system. When it is time to recover, how much will it cost. He noted that there was agreement on the budget from both sides and asked that the Council give people the chance to vote on that agreement and budget. It is the right thing to do. He understands that when there is an increase, it is a struggle, but they are talking about children. If the best is wanted for the children, people need to invest in them.

George Ulrich, 36 Fish and Game Road, commented that they are not cutting spending. They are reducing the amount of the increase. They need to stop turning down growth. The town is notorious for this. Everyone wants it to be a cute and pretty town with more money for the schools. If people want the money, something needs to be put in such as a warehouse to bring it in. In another state there are businesses on the interstate and this could have been done here. He commented that a lot of seniors cannot afford a pretty town. It was pretty when he went to school in the room that is now Council Chambers. He asked where people think the money will come from. He is on a fixed income and his expenses for food, oil, and electricity have all increased. If anyone has \$200 they would like to donate to him, chances are he would not give it to the school but would pay one of his bills instead.

Kevin Ingraham, 30 Partridge Lane, asked the Council to fully support the education budget as recommended by Superintendent Willett. He moved to Tolland 14 years ago with 4 children because the town had such a good school system. What makes a school system good is retention and recruitment of educators and this should be paramount to supporting, maintaining, and growing a strong and healthy education program. Tolland has a lot of great teachers and administrators but in his time in town, he has seen too many leave. They need more and not less. By supporting a fully funded budget, they will attract more educators. If they continue to make cuts, he is unsure how they can expect good people to come to the district. He is unsure why anyone would want to work for an unstable and unsupportive employer especially when he heard tonight from a teacher that other districts are paying more. The 6% is fairly low especially when looking at inflation. He feels for all of seniors and people who are on fixed incomes but Social Security is going up a record 8.7% this year. Six percent is less than the 8.7% the federal government has set forth. Mr. Ingraham asked that the Council fully support and send to referendum the budget as recommended by the Superintendent.

Lan-Hsuan Huang, 15 Mountain Side, commented that she has 2 children – 1 at Birch Grove and another at TIS. She overwhelmingly supports a fully funded BOE budget and providing a quality education in Tolland. There will be long-term damage to education with insufficient funding. Good teachers will be lost and many enhancement or supplementary programs will be eliminated. She noted her strongest support and will vote “yes” on the full BOE budget.

Jamie Davis, 23 Johnson Road, commented that if anyone is struggling there are resources and tax relief. Help is available online. She explained that she has a kindergartener who is struggling to learn how to read. He was repeatedly referred to services and every time was denied. It was not until she escalated it that she was able to get him reading intervention. He is at a crucial age. Making cuts now when they cannot find space for him in intervention – she does not know what they are doing here. It is horrible. Ms. Davis noted that she supports the full budget and more than the full budget because it is not enough.

Michelle Harrold, 194 Sugar Hill Road, commented that she has 3 children in the school district and each are at different schools. She has had intimate experiences at the elementary schools and can assure people that 5% is not enough and to go to 3% is a slap in the face of staff. It is harmful to students. They are struggling whether they are outwardly showing it or not and teachers are struggling because students are struggling. They are not offered enough support. Ms. Harrold asked when they, as a town, will decide to invest in the education system and not continue to be conservative cutting resources because of constant crises. The crises do not always end up being as bad as initially thought. Regarding insurance as the reason to cut the school budget, how do they know if it is a blip? If so, why not stabilize it? If they do not want to increase taxes, find an alternative such as using reserve funds. If it is not a blip and is the future, they will need to figure it out next year. She asked if they could just invest in the school system once.

Philip Mazilli, 255 South River Road, commented that he agrees with the larger budget put forward by the Superintendent and the BOE. One can say that 3% is an increase but at a time of 6% inflation, and last year 8% inflation, it is not an increase. It may be more dollars, but it is not more resources or staff. It is a cut.

Amanda Olson, 144 New Road, commented that she agrees with others regarding increasing the budget. Her oldest daughter was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade when her teacher caught that she needed assistance. Her daughter had gone through kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade and Ms. Olson expressed her concerns then, but her daughter was pushed along. In 2<sup>nd</sup> grade she received tier 2 intervention where she was pulled 1x/day and put back in class when she reached the level. She needed more. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher left the district that year because she was offered better pay. This is a huge issue for Ms. Olson's household because she has 4 children and her second oldest is also on an IEP. She has 2 more children who are not yet in the school system and she is seeing the budget continuously being cut. They moved to Tolland 10 years ago and had an opportunity to move to another town that had a huge budget increase. To see Tolland's be minimalized is sad and concerning. She supports the increase and hopes it will be put to a vote. It is the point of having a democracy – so people can be heard and choose as a whole.

Jennifer Macionus, 159 Woodhenge Drive, commented that initially she was going to advocate for staff. She cannot say enough about the stellar services the town provides including educational services. While she only has 1 child, they have benefited and are fortunate. They moved to Tolland before having a child because of the reputation of the schools, the community, and the caliber of services. She was going to mention a school librarian that Ms. Macionus understands may now retain her job but for those who retain their jobs this year, they will be nervous for next year and possibly seek employment elsewhere. Who would not do so for stability for themselves? Students are hearing this. A stabilization plan is an excellent idea. When she saw the staff to be cut, she could not sleep. These positions included a custodian, math teachers and tutors, and a business teacher. Citizens recognize the herculean job before the Council and appreciate it. They want to keep senior citizens happy and thriving and it saddens her that in a town like Tolland that this continues to be an issue. Ms. Macionus' daughter's 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was on the chopping block as the less senior person a number of years ago but the budget worked out and saved her job, but she had already signed a contract elsewhere. Ms. Macionus gave a shout out to the highway department and suggested the bulky waste could be a place they could save. People can pay for their own disposal if it means the school system getting \$200K. She asked if people paid for their own disposal of items if the money could go to the schools or a capital expenditure. Many people would pay – they are affluent enough. What she has seen on the side of the road could be donated and used albeit some may be broken and those on a limited budget need an inexpensive way to get rid of bulky items. Ms. Macionus noted that she was stunned when she saw the list of reductions and was appalled that they would even consider cutting librarians but knows that the Council cares.

Linda Scheidel, 81 Morgan Lane, commented that she supports the 6% that Dr. Willett worked hard on going to referendum and being in the Council's proposed budget. Tolland does not have a great school system. It has a good school system, but not a great one. It is kind of working with bare minimums. The kindergarten class has 1 teacher with 18 students who are 4-years-old and 5-years-old. The school does not have paras to support the teachers so they can help kids learn how to be good students and focus on their work. One teacher is assisting a student while the other 17 are being 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds riling up the rest of the class. The schools do not have support to help kids become good citizens. Help is needed and funding is needed to provide it. She asked that the Council let Dr. Willett show the town what he needs and let the town vote and decide whether or not they want him to have it.

Freya Williams, 30 Barbara Road, commented that she believes that what is being discussed effects all of the youth in Tolland, the parents, and the community. They say democracy dies in darkness. The Town Manager cut Dr. Willett's budget in half and people did not have an opportunity to vote on it. As seen tonight, people want an opportunity to vote on that budget and support the cost incurred. They know it is an expensive time to live in Tolland, the state, and the nation and inflation is high. They can do things to help the lower income community, but the children deserve more and better. They expect better from elected representatives and the hired Town Manager. More can be done and more is needed than what is being offered now. She is disappointed in the apathy and defeat she heard from her elected representatives. She is a voter and public participant and is asking that the school budget be given more money. The children are the future and deserve better. They cannot vote so she will vote for them and believes the majority of people in the room will too.

Claudette Morehouse, 89 Merlot Way, commented that she has lived in town for 40 years and while they did not move to the town for the schools, when they had kids they got involved. Her kids had a great education. The schools were wonderful, and they still are now that her grandchildren go to them. One has special needs and all their needs are being met. She added that there is a small population in town of people who work paycheck to paycheck as well as senior citizens. Social Security provided an 8% increase, but Medicare and supplemental insurance costs increased as well. Ms. Morehouse commented that she supports a realistic budget for the schools – one everyone can afford. She

wants to live and retire in town but there are money grabs every year. Many people are moving out. She is working in houses that are being sold not because people want to sell but because they have to. She noted that she is held hostage to the town and cannot sell her home because she does not have potable drinking water due to road salt yet has to pay taxes on a house she cannot sell. It is her problem, but it could be someone else's someday. When the budget goes out to referendum, will it help her in regard to the water? She has heard about the crises and what the schools need and agrees. Kids need a good education but the people in town have to pay the taxes to provide the education and if they cannot afford it what happens. The Council needs to look at all of Tolland, not just the largest section of the budget. Town services are great and saved her sister last October. They went to the aid of her mother 3 times last January. Ms. Morehouse commented that she will support a realistic budget but cannot do anything because she does not have potable water and nothing in the budget will help her with that.

Councilor Murray noted that she has collected all of the communications that have been sent to the Council e-mail regarding the budget. In summary, the e-mails are as follows: 26 in favor of keeping the BOE budget that was submitted; 2 general budget comments; 3 in support of the Town Manager's budget; 9 asking that the Town Manager's budget be decreased. The content of the e-mails will be submitted to the Town Manager's Office to be kept in the minutes of this public hearing. Additionally, 2 e-mail submissions were received from town groups: Mental Health Task Force, Veterans Recognition Commission. These e-mails will be included as well.

[Councilor Khan stepped out of the room and returned to speak as a resident and business owner.]

Mr. Khan commented that he supports the BOE and his priority is to educate his kid. He tells his kid to finish school and college and not be like him – a small business owner. He encourages education. He moved to the town 9 years ago for the education. It is a good school system but over the past 10 years the BOE budget has increased, and the town has increased its revenue. He is looking at the ARPA money and some have said to use the ARPA money and the problem will be solved and everyone has had a different opinion. In terms of the budget, some people can afford it and others cannot. He asked where they would make the sacrifice. They have to work together and come up with a solution. [Mr. Khan returned to his Councilor seat.]

Brian Flynn, 145 Anthony Road, commented that he wants an opportunity to vote on the budget proposed by Dr. Willett and approved by the BOE. He does not have that opportunity right now and asked that the Council give the voters this opportunity.

[Mr. Jones opened the floor.]

Councilor Yudichak apologized for being late and explained that she had a family obligation that was planned before this evening's meeting. She noted that she has read everyone's e-mails and is trying to respond. If anyone has not yet heard from her, they will receive a response. She is excited to see so many people voicing their concerns. As a Councilor she is taking everything into consideration and is listening.

#### 4. **Adjournment**

Ms. Murray motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:59 PM

Mr. Reagan seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,



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Lisa Pascuzzi  
Town Council Clerk

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Town Council Chair

Hello Steve and John,

Please see below for a message from the Substance Use/Mental Health Taskforce regarding this year's budget. Could you forward on to TC members also? The Taskforce voted unanimously for me to send an email as the Chair to both of you on behalf of the Taskforce to ensure that our concerns regarding the potential cuts to the BOE budget were heard in a timely manner. In the past, we have been directed to send the recommendations/communications directly to TC and the TC representative will send/forward to those who they deem appropriate parties to have the information, so I am following that workflow here! Could you also read this into the minutes of tonight's meeting- or the next meeting you feel it is appropriate to do so? Thank you very much!

Dear Members of the Tolland Town Council,

As you are aware, the Mental Health and Substance Use Task Force was formed approximately two years ago with the primary charge of evaluating mental health/substance use related needs of the community and making recommendations to the town council based on our findings.

This body has spent the last two years seeking input from stakeholders and the community at large. In addition, a needs assessment was performed and administered by an independent contractor, who then analyzed the data gathered and presented to stakeholders and members of the task force. The data and recommendations from this analysis support the the need to protect library programs and professionals on both a school and town level. The findings also reinforce our position from last budget cycle that all professional staff and positions that support pathways, skills for adolescents and teen leadership programs as well as all counselors/social workers/psychologists that provide social emotional support in Tolland Public Schools should be protected from being cut from the operating budget.

The 3% increase to the school budget as proposed by the Town Manager may or may not cover the increases allocated for contractual obligations. As a result, the BOE was put in the position of having to make difficult decisions and to cut many aspects of the programs and supports listed above. This is a direct contradiction of what the Task Force has recommended in the past (see recommendation last year regarding keeping programming for Skills for Adolescents and Teen Leadership) in addition to contrasting the data and outcomes of the Needs Assessment performed.

The Taskforce encourages members of the town council and the town manager to work with the superintendent to provide a budget that ensures the continuance of these vital services.

Thank you,

Becky Moore

Chair

Tolland Mental Health/Substance Use Task Force



March 18, 2023

Dear Tolland Town Council,

My name is Justin Karatkivcz, a member of our Tolland Veterans' Recognition Commission. I have proudly served on the Commission now for two wonderful years. I am still actively serving in the Connecticut Army National Guard and have recently hit 15 years of service and the rank of Sergeant First Class. Of the 15 years, I am sitting at 8 years of active service, most of which was with the Army Funeral Honors here in Connecticut.

Throughout my time in the service, myself and many others alike, have always heard promises upon promises of opportunities and resources. Although those promises are in-deed obtainable, it is not without jumping through various hoops. It's just the unfortunate way the world works for Veterans. For example, my Healthcare for myself and my family are vastly different. My wife and children can see anyone and get any medical services they need without complications, however I myself have to get proper referrals to see certain doctors or specialists. More hoops for me, even though I am the sponsor of the Healthcare. Definitely strange but this is an example of the difficulties and obstacles for Veterans and current service members.

Personally, I imagine the first step to easing assistance and opportunities should start here at home. And I expect of all things, for it to be easy and obtainable with minimal struggle. Big government can be complex and confusing but here in Tolland we have the opportunity to truly make a noticeable difference here at home.

Since my time with the Commission, we hit the ground running in hopes of producing more for our Veterans here in town. So far, we have assisted multiple Veterans with gathering benefits. Attended multiple town events to bring awareness of the TVRC. Conducted monthly outreach events in the form of Coffee houses, and Social Hours. We created a logo that represents us in an effort to stand out from the crowd. We have created uniformity with use of polos and hoodies. We have developed Commission By-Laws, Commission forms, applications, and business cards. We have generated some fund raising through sales of cups, tumblers, stickers, and door prizes. We are working on and overseeing projects to improve and enhance our Veteran monument and park.



Finally, we have created our first ever budget request since the Commission's conception over 14 years ago.

Ultimately, I am writing you today in regards to our proposed budget request to have some funding allocated and locked in for Veterans. No promises of assisting us with General funds but to have a designated fund for Veterans specifically where our outreach can truly send a message of solidarity and commitment. It feels wrong when we are always fund raising, mainly because most of our funds come from Veterans themselves. The military has always been a group of people who will sacrifice for the cause, but it shouldn't be solely that way. Our community and especially the Town itself should step up to the plate.

I am DEEPLY grateful for the support we have fostered over time, however more needs to be done and we need more in order to properly ensure our brothers and sisters in-arms are aware of our Town's support.

With allocated funding, I predict our ability to conduct Veterans activities on a larger scale will be more foreseeable. I see our ability to reach more Veterans here in town and support them with resources and solutions. I even imagine Veteran cookouts with speakers, a chili cook-off, and even possibly upgrading the Veteran wall of honor. Most of our commitments can be seen in our budget request and even through our power-point.

We have always received overwhelming support from you all although words can only do so much. I know everyone is asking the world from you all but honestly, Veterans are a demographic that does not like to ask for help, and here we are. Our own fundraising can only go so far, so... here I say, we need the help.

I thank you all for your time and consideration and look forward to doing many years of productive outreach with your support.

*Justin A. Karatkivecz*  
Justin A. Karatkivecz  
Treasurer, TVRC  
(860)593-9435



## Tolland Veterans Recognition Commission

Line  
Item

### LOCAL OUT-REACH

	Projected Costs	
<b>Local Out-Reach Request</b>	<b>\$ 2,000.00</b>	<b>Line Item Notes</b>
1 Marketing Materials	\$ 2,000.00	Signs, Banners, Office Supplies

### VETERAN EVENTS

	Projected Costs	
<b>Veteran Events Request</b>	<b>\$ 9,000.00</b>	<b>Line Item Notes</b>
2 Promotional Items	\$ 3,000.00	Shirts, Hoodies, Caps, etc
3 Events & Planning	\$ 3,000.00	Guest Speakers, Entertainment
4 Food Supplies	\$ 3,000.00	Coffee House, Social Events, Cookouts

### EMERGENCY VETERANS ASSISTANCE FUND

	Projected Costs	
<b>Veteran Assistance Request</b>	<b>\$ 1,000.00</b>	<b>Line Item Notes</b>
5 Veteran Assistance	\$ 1,000.00	These funds would be made available to veterans in emergency situations like fuel assistance or food assistance at the discretion of the TVRC to act as a stop gap while the veterans seek assistance from other resources.

### VETERAN DROP-IN CENTER

	Projected Costs	
<b>Drop-In Center Request</b>	<b>\$ 5,100.00</b>	<b>Line Item Notes</b>
6 Internet, Phone, etc	\$ 1,200.00	-
7 Resource Officer	\$ 3,900.00	52/wks, 5 hrs/wk, @ \$15/hr

**Total Budget Request: \$17,100.00**

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Dear Tolland Town Council,

Thanks for your work on behalf of our town. As you decide what town budget should be sent to all of us for referendum, I believe that we residents of Tolland need your help with regard to the largest portion of the budget, which is the Board of Education \$44.2M budget request. I know someone on the BOE pretty well, and I know she is frustrated. Based on my observations, I am frustrated as well. Here is why:

Many BOE members have absolutely no concept of unlimited wants with limited resources: Last night's meeting was a glaring example that the BOE is unwilling and/or unable to prioritize. One member said that she is not ready to take certain costs off the table; costs that the superintendent already cut. Many discussions were about the impact of cuts and not the priority of spending. It was just more and more and no to any cuts to things we purportedly can't do without. The superintendent actually displayed a chart of budget cuts he made PRIOR to his 6% increase proposal he sent to the BOE. The BOE chair swallowed this hook, line and sinker and actually facilitated a discussion that took the BOE backward and not forward. That was painful to watch.

Many BOE members approach the budget funded with our money with all emotion and no reason: I heard a number of times something paraphrased as, "We want what is best for our schools." This sounds great but is completely unachievable. It would be best for our schools for all staff to have PhDs. We aren't going to do that. The great economist, author, and American thinker Thomas Sowell wisely said, "There are three questions that will destroy most of the arguments on the left: 1. Compared to what? 2. At what cost,? and 3. What hard evidence do you have?" Approaching the \$44.2M proposed budget with these questions would have ended many BOE meetings in less than 3 minutes. Please think about these questions as you hear from the BOE and from the vocal, progressive, ill-tempered minority who chime in at BOE meetings and your meetings.

Many BOE members have no understanding of the big picture: Many of us are suffering from crippling inflation, resulting incredibly high interest rates, depressed equity and fixed incomes markets that are hurting life and retirement savings, and an economy heading to recession. Almost ironically, the root cause of all of those factors is too much government spending and the related creation of money at the federal level (reference to Milton Friedman's only two causes of inflation). As you allocate our town's ARPA funds, you have great visibility into how incredibly stupid and irresponsible the federal government has been in spending our federal tax dollars and those of our children and grandchildren. Many BOE members don't see their support of a 6% budget as adding to all of our pain.

Some BOE members have a conflict of interest or no interest at all: The chair of the BOE cited her children as the reasons to support the 6% budget increase. In corporate America, this would be a significant conflict of interest. Unfortunately, in politics these days, politicians are often blind to conflicts of interest. I saw this one very clearly. Two BOE members don't pay the very property taxes that fund the BOE and town budgets. At least one of these members has done his due diligence and is taking the tax impact on all of us very seriously.

In summary, I have found the BOE as a whole a rubber stamp for whatever the superintendent wants or maybe worse. As such, I think it is up to you to bring rational thought to the BOE budget that will ultimately go to all of us for a decision.

Please let me know if I can help in any way, and thanks for listening. BTW, I'm still willing to draft charter edits to prevent placeholder, unelected town councilors.

Regards,

Tim Griffin

80 Doe Run

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Good morning all,

As a family of four who has lived in this town since 2017 I can honestly say I don't recommend Tolland to coworkers, friends and family as a place to live. The main reason why is taxes. Low and middle income families cannot afford the high yearly tax increases. The last home evaluation hurt the low and middle income families in town with a double whammy. Appraisals went up on smaller homes and taxes went up as well. What's going to happen when home evaluations drop dramatically in three years? That's going to be around the same times state funding goes away.

As a family down to one income right now we have to watch where every nickel and dime go. Last year we had to take down damaged ash trees. We kept all the wood and have been splitting it ourselves so we can save money on oil. Last night was the first time we let the first go out in our wood stove. We work on keeping things in our family budget. When things are tight we plan ahead and reduce our spending. I wish the school and town would budget and prepare for harder times. My family will be voting and it will be no for any tax increase.

Have a good day,

Cristina Gosicki

80 Walbridge hill rd

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Good Day Council Members,

I am a resident of Tolland, a teacher in Tolland and a parent of two children in Tolland Public Schools. I want to take a moment to share my perspective with you.

To start I want to thank the Board of Education members and Dr. Willett for all of the hard work they put into creating and presenting the budget for our schools. The Board of Education members have done their due diligence to scrutinize the budget to ensure that our tax dollars are being spent appropriately. They have done their job and the budget that was presented to you initially showing a 5.9% increase was fair and balanced out the needs of our students and staff with what the town could handle for a tax increase. Dr. Willett has clearly stated multiple times in Board of Education meetings that the increase is mostly due to fixed costs that are increasing. Allowing anything less will damage programs and cut staff to our schools.

This brings me to my next point. The impact of the Covid protocols, quarantines and illnesses have been profound. Students are not the same and we need to ensure that we are meeting their needs and fostering their growth. I do not see a budget showing only a 3% increase doing that. One way that is apparent that students are not the same is what happened yesterday. I was at your meeting yesterday. I heard the yelling and that word being used in the meeting. Those voices sounded like kids. I don't think 5 years ago, kids would behave in such a way but unfortunately it is all too common now. I have heard that word said just last week in my hallway at school in our town.

On the other hand I also see so much good being done in Tolland. The hard work of the Town Council and Board of Education members who volunteer their time to serve our town. You also have other organizations who offset many of the costs such as Project Graduation, Tolland Boosters, and Tolland PTO. Many things the schools are able to provide are because of these volunteer organizations and staff volunteering their time beyond their work day. This brings me to my last point. If we can do so much with these volunteers to offset costs in education, why can't the town look to creating some organizations to bring tax relief to our citizens who need it?

Please consider Dr. Willett's initial proposed budget as we move forward in this budget season.

And finally, as a parent and teacher in this town, I strongly support Dr. Willett and the Board of Education, but I also support fully funding the needs of our town offices and fire department. We have been pinching pennies for far too long. I am all for spending wisely and cautiously but there are times when investment and spending is warranted. I think that time is now.

Thank you for listening and all that you do.

Shay Belair

185 Kozley Rd

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Tammy - I'm not one to typically write to representatives, as honestly, politics just baffle me and one of the main reasons I stopped being an LEO. But here goes nothing.

I live in our town, Tolland, and where we are proposing to raise the mil rate again by 2.3%, we are already at 37. With the increase in electric cost, heating costs, gas prices, and the overall general cost of living, an additional increase in tax only continues to hurt the middle class. Yes there are programs on combined incomes of less than 50K, but for a family with 2 children on a combined income of 100K, the cost of living has everyone pinching pennies. 100K is the new 50K for a family.

In taxes alone we paid \$11,000 in property tax, and \$900 on vehicle tax (we have 1 car!) That is \$1,000 a month in taxes alone.

Middle income families are getting raked over the coals, we make too much to get support, but not enough for any tax breaks. Add to that \$1,000 a month increase cost of electric, oil, child-care, preschool, food, what is left?

In the FB group you asked residents to speak up. To be blunt, many of the middle class residents don't want to speak up, it's a waste of time as nothing seems to change and we continue to take the brunt of not making enough, but not making too little to get support.

At the end of the day, taxes will raise as the town has its own cost to cover given inflation as well. At least it's been said.

Benjamin Roach

170 Metcalf Road

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Hello Town Council Members,

I'm writing to you today to express my concern for the proposed increase in our town budget. We've had sizable increases over the past years during very tough times. Our citizens cannot continue to pay for these increases. While I support the education of our children, I would also like to see equal attention considered to other members of our community including the elderly, working class, single income families and young adults. It is important to recognize everyone and to provide services that we all can benefit from throughout the year.

I would request that the town council review the budget again and reduce the total amount to under 3%. When considering your reductions, please don't cut things that would impact our community at large including safety, recreation or other essential services like garbage pick up, bulky waste, etc.

I appreciate your time and consideration as your team moves forward with this process.

Cordially,

Lisa A Burns, MBA

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4/4/2023

Jon Crickmore 31 Cook Rd Tolland, CT 06084

Town Council / Town manager

I'm writing to express my concern with the process of how the town of Tolland spends hard earned tax payer dollars. I ask each of you a simple question. Can you tell the residents of Tolland with certainty that their hard earned money is well spent not wasted? If the answer is NO you must not vote for any tax increases until the time comes that we have a process of verifying department increases. This is not an attack on any one department it's a town wide issue that needs to be addressed. With very limited information and very limited time looking for waste I can give you the following example. During the summer of 2013 Tolland taxpayers paid to repave Cook Rd. In the summer of 2022 (Just 9 yrs later) Tolland tax payers spent over \$100,000 to once again repave Cook Rd. While I do appreciate smooth as glass roads, I don't appreciate the total disregard for our tax dollars. Pavement is designed to last much longer than 9 yrs especially when it's on a side rd.

Do anyone of you know the process we use to determine what roads need to be fixed? If the answer is NO that means you are not informed enough to vote on increasing our taxes. It's my understanding (after speaking with a town employee) that the DPW uses GPS technology to determine what roads need replacement. The determination is made in whole or in part based on the number of times DPW trucks are on a certain rd. In the case of Cook Rd DPW travels Cook Rd almost daily to inspect the condition of Johnson Rd and Kendall Mountain Rd. (2 dirt roads needing repair after most weather events) If this in fact the way we decide how to spend tax payer money the TC and TM must NOT approve another increase until the time comes that we can verify how our money is spent. I can tell you with certainty that there was zero need to pave Cook Rd and in fact the road is in worse condition now than before they paved it. Cook Rd now has at least 3 layers of pavement that has reached a height above the curbs for most of the street. I'm sure we can all agree there are many roads in Tolland that need attention, the \$100,000 should have been used there instead. This is not an attack on our DPW as they generally do a great job, however this is to bring to your attention the need for more oversight. Continuing the status quo of approving increases without documented verification is a huge disservice to our residents. I don't believe any one department is intentionally asking for money they don't need but there clearly needs to be more oversight and better data collection before approving additional spending. Continuing the same path of allowing employees to dictate our tax increases is a gross mismanagement of the trust we have put in our elected officials.

I won't pretend to have the answers to these problems, but answers are needed before approving anymore tax increases. Maybe a volunteer citizen oversight board is needed. Regardless of the solution each and everyone of you should be outraged by this one example that wasted over \$100,000 of our money.

Respectfully,

Jon Crickmore

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I support the BOE budget. Please find a way to support Tolland's BOE proposed budget. I will be voting YES at referendum I'm support of the BOE budget.

Thank you.

~Cathy Santangelo

31 Usher Ridge

Tolland, CT 06084

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Dear Town Council,

I'd like to think that it's no surprise that I'm truly struggling to accept most of these cuts that the BOE will have to make this year but since it was requested that our thoughts on this matter be heard, even after all the due diligence the BOE has done throughout the budget process...Here is the short version the impact these cuts will have. Some of these positions are already eliminated during the initial Superintendent's budget. This included an Interventionist at the Middle School level. These Interventionist help defer special education costs. There are so many "on the cusp" kids that get lost in the shuffle as they get by but not truly getting the attention needed.

I've been very vocal about many of the slated items that we are going to lose. The childcare class. This is a class beloved by many, esp many females who are interested in pursuing careers in education and childcare workers. Essentially, it is a life skill. It shouldn't just be an Internship. The instructional piece is so critical for that program.

We are losing a Math Coach & a Business Teacher for our Pathways program. This individual teaches 3 economics classes along with a variety of other classes. However, instead of investing into the Business Pathways we will need to turn around and let go of an individual teaching the basics of this.

We recently had the LBGTQ+ community come to a board meeting and discussed various factors in terms of creating a policy for our school system. These students are looking for support from our school system. Yet, we've had to consider losing a counselor. Teachers are getting burnt out. They are leaving for districts with better pay. We are going to take away the additional stipend for the Curriculum & Liaison positions. Who will stay and take on the variety of tasks that are allotted for each? It will surely still cost somewhere. I'm sure the Unions will be accounting for this change during negotiations.

We are asking for help with the insurance piece of the puzzle. This "blip" is going to have a ripple effect on our district. Losing staff to off-set these costs will impact regular education classrooms and curriculum offerings.

It was recently stated in a town council meeting by one member that they would consider providing the necessary funds to the schools if they could see concrete metrics that they are failing. Let me say it again. They would consider providing the needed funds to schools when and if they are failing. Do we eliminate routine maintenance on our town buildings and vehicles, waiting until they break down or need emergency repairs? That's not being responsible in my eyes. We should not be failing our students. What I can say is 32% of elementary students have IEP & 504s. By law, we need to provide them the support that is required. It's not just a sheet of paper. The creation of the plan includes many stakeholders. It's a multi-step process. The Teachers, VP, and School Psychologist all meet with the parents to create, review, and follow up on plans. This accounts for many of the needed Para positions that we can't fill but are a requirement. Meetings like this also require a sub to oversee the classroom when the teacher is pulled away.

I could go on all day but will leave you with this. During our budget meeting with administrators, one said, "When there are budget cuts, those become missed opportunities for students." As we all know, my priority has always been, and always will be, the education of our students. Hopefully we can all convey to our voters why the necessary funding is so critical to our educational system now and in the future.

Best,

Ashley Lundgren

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Town Council members, Town Manager

Thank you for all you do including this daunting budget. I'm writing to express my disapproval of this budget. I am so tired of those that play the same old scare tactic every year, "oh my! the children, "their education is suffering" we can't afford paper. Oh please, the children are just fine. My kids had a great education with a lot less, and now I have grandchildren in the school system (2 with a special need) and all their needs are being met with exceptional teachers.

Town Manager lowered the almost 6% BOE budget down to 3 and stated he could have comfortably gone lower. Why didn't he? It was also mentioned that budgets in the past have been padded and 200k can easily be scraped off the top. Every year there is a 6 figure surplus, that never gets back to us, the taxpayers, but allocated to other town fund accounts. This tells me this budget is very loose and can and should be tightened up to a fiscally responsible and realistic budget. This budget has to be put forth to all of Tolland not just those making 6 figures. There are many that are living on fixed income and pay check to paycheck trying to make ends meet and this unrealistic budget this will move the ends that most families won't meet.

Some families don't even have clean drinking water which there is nothing in this budget that mentions this. Decimating struggling families will trickle down to supporting town venues, like buying ice cream at Sami's is no longer a treat on a hot day but a luxury that most have to pass on. or having dinner at a local pizza house.

As for my home I am paying taxes on a home I cannot sell because of no potable water, so being held hostage in a town with no clean drinking water for 6 years is inhumane. I'm suppose to support a padded education budget but when it comes time for a referendum on bringing in clean drinking water will they in turn support that? I think not.

This budget will decimate many in town on fixed incomes, and struggling families. The town council, Town manager and the BOE have to look at numbers in dollars and cents ( I get it), we look at the bottom line, I beg you to save where you can and spend what you need. I am confident that with the increase in the grand list of about 24M and reduce the padding and anticipated surplus we can easily come to a 2% budget increase. 5 out of the last 7 years there was an increase and it is never going to enough moving forward , unless we start being fiscally responsible. I am not in favor of the current 3.4% proposed budget.

Thank you

Claudette Morehouse

89 Merlot way

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I fully support funding the BOE 5.9% budget increase. I will vote yes to support our schools at every referendum! Please, PLEASE reconsider the budget and support our children!

Thank you,

Meredith Dodge

53 Timber Trail

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Good afternoon,

My husband and I have been members of Tolland for 25 years now. Our daughter started her educational career as a wide eyed and toothless kindergartner in 2007 at Birch Grove Primary, and graduated Tolland High School, in 2020 during the height of the pandemic. We feel fortunate that our Lily had an amazing experience, primarily because of the amazing educators that went above and beyond to nourish her curiosity, and support her learning.

Year after year we have painfully watched-despite our objections- the budget's inability to even meet the minimum required to fully fund our school system, causing less than positive changes in curriculum, programs, and activities to be cut. I have reviewed the budget increase proposed by the BOE and feel confident that there was significant scrutiny and discussion to bring forward a fiducially responsible budget.

Schools and our teachers should not need to wait for the generous donations of individuals, and the need for frequent fundraising to simply "get by." I feel it is also important to highlight that necessary funds are required to be able to support the current and ever growing mental health crisis in this country, and specifically our community. The inability to provide preventative and prophylactic support will eventually cost this community in a significant and irreversible manner.

We no longer have a child in the school system, but as responsible stewards of this town we will continue to support that the youth of Tolland continue to have the same educational opportunities as our daughter. For a community to not only survive, but to thrive the educational system must be one in which there is undeniable support and endorsement.

We are beyond the tipping point, and not allowing the Board of Education's proposed budget may meet a short term objective, but will certainly negatively impact our youth, and this community for years to come. Please find a way to support Tolland BOE's proposed budget.

Our family fully supports the BOE budget, and will be voting 'yes' at referendum in support of the BOE budget.

Thank you.

Regards,

Kelly Contreras

22 Carter Drive

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Dear Town Council,

My name is Lan-Hsuan Huang of 15 Mountain Side in Tolland, CT. I am writing to reinstate the BOE of educational budget proposal to the 5.96% increase that the Board of Education has requested. I will vote on May 2 to support that budget. Please do not reduce the Board of Education budget request before taking this to referendum. We deserve to vote on this and the impacts it will have on our town and community.

Best regards,

Lan-Hsuan Huang

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Good morning,

I support the BOE's proposed budget. Please support it as well. I will be voting YES at referendum in support of the BOE budget.

Thank you,

Amy Ezis Green

32 Anthony Road South

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Hello,

My name is Jessica Mazzilli of 255 South River Rd in Tolland, CT. After reading the last Town Council minutes, I was very concerned that members of the council voiced that empty seats at the last meeting indicated that their constituency is apathetic or

in support of the current cuts to the BOE budget. I am writing today to make sure it is clear that I am in favor of the BOE budget and request that the BOE budget be reinstated to 5.96%. I will vote yes in support of the budget At referendum. Consider my seat full at your meeting as I read the minutes from home when I can manage to set aside time to do so.

Sincerely,

Jessica Mazzilli

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Hello,

My name is Freya Williams of 30 Barbara Road in Tolland, CT. I am writing to ask you to reinstate the BOE of education budget proposal to the 5.96% increase that the Board of Education has requested. I will vote YES on May 2 to support that budget.

Please do not reduce the Board of Education budget request before taking this to referendum. We deserve to vote on this and the impacts it will have on our town and community.

Thank you,

Freya Williams

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From: Kenneth Trice

Hello and my thanks to all of you serving as the elected representatives of the Town Council. It's not an easy role.

As I indicated during Monday night's budget meeting, as a member in the audience watching you folks on stage, your performance left me with the feeling that we can't do this, or we can't do that! And no, we can't go there because the trend has always been this, or that. But, let's not forget the referendum because we can't do this. And it was mentioned that the perceived trends were the same as decades past. So, what you are saying is that we can't do what is challenging. That's the narrative!

All this simply proves two things. People in general hate paying taxes! Period! They hate paying taxes and tolls. This has been an issue since the ancient Egyptians. And regardless of their income level folks, including myself, dislike paying taxes. Even if paying certain taxes are beneficial to us. On a side note, I am not including those who really cannot afford increases (low fixed incomes, poverty level). And trust me, I understand poverty and not having.

Second, cost go up! When they don't that product or service is probably becoming obsolete. Think CD players. It's economics and it's life. Regardless of your income level eggs went up. The K-car that saved Chrysler in the 1980's cost \$6000 new. Find a new car today for double that! This notion that expenses and/or budgets are to stay at zero year after year to satisfy a particular segment is not reasonable.

The narrative that came through from some:

- We can't.
- We just can't!
- Oh the trend for the past generation has been this.
- And the referendum won't pass because of this, or that.

It came across to this voter as defeatism. Instead of telling us what we can't do, can you tell us what can we do?

For the record I support the original BOE budget of a 5.96% increase. That budget is sadly a compromised offering that includes cuts to assets and people that will surely hurt us down the line. As mentioned, there are probably compelling arguments from both sides of where the final percentage should fall.

I do worry about the underlying message to the folks on the front lines at the BOE about your proposed actions. I worry about their morale. The ramifications of being short sighted to save money have and will continue to be felt.

Can't is easy, comfortable, safe. Can't paralyzes you from going forward. Can is hard, risky, even unpopular. But, can leads to growth, change and ultimately better. I believe in can. I believe in hard. Would you tell a basketball team with a few wins facing an undefeated team of 30-0, they can't win?

So cross the line, push past the trend. Newsflash. You folks are not only the government, but you're also the folks who compose the narrative. Change the narrative to We Can.

Thank you for your indulgence of my comments, even if you disagree. I just believe We Can.

Regards.

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Dear Tolland Town Council,

Since there seem to be multiple emails options, I am sending this again.

I support the Board of Education proposed budget for this next year and will vote in favor of it at referendum. I supported the original budget created by the Board of Education.

Sincerely,

Samar Bush

20 Forest Ln

Tolland, CT 06084

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Dear Councilors,

I know you've been working on putting forth a budget to go to referendum and there appears to be two different views on it. I believe the budget the town manager has proposed is fair and reasonable. While I still think the increase could and should be less (I would like to see something 3% or lower), 3.4% given all of the factors doesn't seem completely unreasonable.

What does seem unreasonable is the discussion of allowing the BOE budget to go back to the 5.97% versus the town manager's proposal of 3%. An almost 6% increase is completely unaffordable! For all those who say that a 3% increase would be "devastating", I'd like to remind you this is an annual commentary, the schools are NEVER devastated, and quality education continues to be delivered every year. I remember a recent year where much of the narrative of the devastation was around the cutting of a 5th grade teaching position, the budget passed with that "cut", and the position was never removed. The cutting of positions is always the lead story for the superintendent, as that tends to get the most attention. In the end, after the budget is passed, the BOE can spend the money in whatever way they choose, and often things that were presented to be cut are not. For those who point to the "small" percentage increases in some years past, may I remind you that as the number gets bigger, the percent increase equates to a larger dollar increase. Thus a 3% increase this year is a far larger dollar increase than 3% ten years ago. So, at the current spending for the BOE, a 6% increase is a huge number.

I ask that you consider ALL residents who live in town. We all want a quality education for our students. However, people are struggling with large cost increases in every area, and this is just more. I understand the town and the schools face some of the same pressure, so I see the need for some level of increase. I urge you to be fair and keep the increase to only what is needed, which I think the town manager's proposal does (or if he feels the town can do with less cut some of that too).

Thank you for your service to the community.

Renie Besaw

230 Grant Hill Rd

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Good evening town council members,

I am sure you have heard from many of the Tolland residents you represent regarding the proposed BOE budget cuts. I have to admit I have become jaded by the steady chipping away at what Tolland Public schools provide with each budget season.

This year's proposed cuts to school operations are extremely concerning. I understand that you feel the lack of voter participation gives you a mandate to make the proposed cuts, but ultimately you are truly undermining the education and development of Tolland kids, future residents and citizens.

These kids don't get a chance to vote and are not at fault for the fact that many of their parents are apathetic and may not be familiar with the budget process this town goes through and needs to be voted on every year yet is not well publicized.

I urge you to keep the best interest of Tolland students in mind and restore the BOE budget proposal to the superintendent's original recommendation in order to preserve the vital services our kids need.

Thank you for your time,

Bettina Herrler

32 Bakos Rd

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Town Council Members,

I write to you as a parent and an educator. The discussions that are taking place regarding line items to cut from our board of education's budget are frightening. We moved to Tolland years ago because it had a reputation of a great school system but I don't know how any town without librarians can claim to even be a decent school system (not to mention some of the other cuts being proposed). I have been and will always be in support of the board of education's budget proposal. Our children deserve to have a good education in a properly staffed and funded school system!

Amie O'Brien

(8 Whispering Woods Road)

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For the last several years we have been bombarded with cost of living increases that are breaking so many people financially that there are new social service programs constantly coming down the pipeline to help people afford the essentials. Taxes have steadily been increasing in Tolland. Record inflation. Oil is thru the roof. Groceries are much more expensive. I am flabbergasted that a proposal to raise taxes here in Tolland is even being considered again right now. We are going into debt to heat our homes and yet the town wants more more more out of us. Why don't people in town who want more school perks start a fund outside of our taxes that they can contribute to instead of forcing people who are struggling to pay for it? I hope you'll vote down this increase and give us a break.

Diana Bump

15 Sherry Circle

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I support the BOE budget, please find a way to support Tolland BOE's proposed budget.

I will be voting 'yes' at referendum in support of the BOE budget.

Thank you,

Liza Nowicki

176 Timber Trail

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Good evening,

I am writing to share my support of the proposed budget from our town manager. My family does not support an increase beyond what is already proposed.

While I am still not clear on the "blip" in the insurance this year, I do not support increasing the boe budget and raising taxes just to cover that expense. We pay over \$10k in taxes for our home alone and any increase is going to hurt.

My children went through the school

system and we moved here 10 years ago for their education. I fully support having a school system that is operating at a level that is within the needs of our students but that needs to be without breaking the backs of the town residents.

Thank you all for your time and I appreciate your volunteerism

Sincerely,

Jenn Sargent

65 Paula Joy Lane

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Dear Mr. Foley and Town Council Members,

We have reviewed the proposed budget, and we are writing to inform you of our disapproval. Not only does the budget not include any funds to address the contaminated water issue, but the contaminated water issue is not even listed in the "Priorities & Issues" section under Budget Overview. The Town of Tolland is facing exposure on this issue. This issue is not going away and may only get worse as the years go on. We live in an unsellable home that we are paying taxes on and even more taxes if this proposed budget is passed. It is discouraging and insulting that it is not even on the Town Council's list of priorities! If clean water is not a priority, then what is? Even President Biden and Vice President Harris have stated that everyone in the United States is entitled to clean water. Apparently, everyone else in the United States EXCEPT for Tolland residents.

Furthermore, we have lived in Tolland for almost 34 years. Both of our boys graduated from Tolland High and both attended and graduated from exceptional high level colleges. Each year that we have lived in Tolland, the Board of Education has always asked for more and more money because, in its view, Tolland students were "suffering". This has NEVER been the case. If you look over the years, including last year, Tolland High students have attended many high level colleges.

We understand costs have risen and that needs to be taken into consideration. However, current issues must be addressed and resolved before more money is spent. We, therefore, ask that you consider the above before presenting this budget to the Town at a referendum.

Mark and Denise Gilcreast

82 Merlot Way

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Greetings Council members,

My apologies for not making the council meetings. This year I am working 2nd shift and unable to attend in person or via zoom to express my concerns.

I would like to take a moment and voice my concerns with this years budget recommendations.

Resident background;

1. My parents came to Tolland in 1964 and raised 4 children, that all went through the Tolland school system.
2. I married and made my home in Tolland
3. I became a widow in 2007, and struggled at times to keep my head above water and remain in the home my husband and I built in Tolland.

I have been, and continue to be a 1 income household. I have gone without in tough times, and continue to go without in an effort to keep my home and remain in Tolland. I struggle with the continued increases in groceries, gasoline, taxes, insurance etc. I have also watched my 401 for retirement decline in a poor market for the last two years. I am less than 3 years from retirement, and I never thought I would be questioning if I will be retiring in Tolland. It was always my goal - to stay in Tolland and not fly south.

I am asking the council to keep these in mind when making budget decisions this year;

Single income households, the elderly on a fixed income, those families already struggling.

The budget should reflect needs not wants.

With the BOE consuming the vast majority of our budget - I would like to see them to go back and sharpen their pencils with what they will "need" and remove items that could wait a year or so, when this economy picks up and families can afford it.

If we do not start making changes now in Tolland, it will be sadly be reduced to a town of only the young and wealthy.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Susan Luce

42 Charter Road

Tolland

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Good afternoon,

I am seriously concerned by the Town Manager's proposed budget. As a parent who moved to Tolland specifically for the school system, I am feeling like I was tricked. Every year, we as parents are put in the position of fighting to hang on to the bare minimum financial support for our schools. Every year, further cuts are taken, which drives away high quality educators. Last year alone, we saw an exodus of teachers who left gaping holes in our school communities. We are losing our ability as a town to attract talented educators, and the quality of our school system is drastically declining! To consider cutting school counselors and LEAP programs at a time when so many of our students are in crisis is nothing short of catastrophic. These impacts on our schools and children will be felt for years to come; there will be no turning back.

I urge you in the strongest of terms to reconsider the proposed budget cuts, and bring Dr. Willet's proposed budget back to the Town Council. I will happily support this budget increase, as I am sure many other parents will as well. Give us parents a chance to vote for our children's future. Don't make the decision for us.

Sincerely,

Amanda Olson

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Good afternoon,

We are writing in to let you know our thoughts on the Board of Education budget. One of us is a registered Republican voter and the other is a registered Independent voter who has voted mostly Republican in the past couple of years. This budget is a bipartisan issue. Both sides of the party lines drastically need to come together and do better for our kids, who are, in fact, the future leaders of our town.

The Town Manager said at the meeting on Monday night, the 3% increase is considered a starting point for discussion. We'd like to see this 3% increase to a bit higher number, as our schools and our children deserve it. It seems as though we as parents are put into a position of fighting to hang onto the bare minimum of financial support for our schools year after year. More and more cuts are taken every year, which drives away high quality educators. Last year alone, we saw so many teachers leave our town, which left gaping holes in our school communities. We are losing our ability as a town to attract talented educators, and the quality of our school system is drastically declining. Cutting school counselors and LEAP programs at a time when so many of our kids are in need of it is not acceptable. We can certainly attest to this as this year our 6th grader needed help from a wonderful guidance counselor at the middle school due to the changes covid brought along with the transition to middle school. Cutting counselors and programs will be felt by our kids for years to come.

We urge all of you to come together and work together to reconsider the proposed budget cuts. We will support the budget increase, and we know many other parents and residents in town will do so as well. Give us parents a chance to vote for our children's future. Please do not make the decision for us. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jesse & Julie Brennan

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Hello Town Council Members,

I sent an email to Mr. Foley last week after seeing his proposed budget, and received no response. I am now emailing all Town Council members in the hopes that my concerns will not fall on deaf ears for a second time.

My email to Mr. Foley expressed my emphatic displeasure at the proposed cuts to Dr. Willet's budget. My faith in my elected officials to act in the best interest of my family and neighbors has been utterly shattered. I do NOT feel that town council members are concerned about my children's future, and doing what is best for our community.

As a parent who moved to Tolland specifically for the school system, I am feeling like the victim of a bait and switch! Every year, we as parents are put in the position of fighting to hang on to the bare minimum financial support for our schools. Every year, further cuts are taken, which drives away high quality educators. Last year alone, we saw an exodus of teachers who left gaping holes in our school communities. We are losing our ability as a town to attract talented educators, and the quality of our school system is drastically declining! To consider cutting school counselors and LEAP programs at a time when so many of our students are in crisis is nothing short of catastrophic. These impacts on our schools and children will be felt for years to come; there will be no turning back.

I urge you in the strongest of terms to reconsider the proposed budget cuts, and bring Dr. Willett's proposed budget back to the Town Council. I will happily support this budget increase, as I am sure many other parents will as well. Give us parents a chance to vote for our children's future. Don't make the decision for us.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Flynn

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Dear Town Council Members,

Much ado was made Monday night of an average 1.88% inflation rate over the last 10 years compared to a BoE average increase of 1.58% over those same 10 years. We need more data points before accepting that that comparison actually should be considered by the Town Council as a reason to increase the BoE 23/24 budget for referendum.

Net Current Expenditure per Pupil in Tolland was \$12,273 in 12/13 and \$18,268 in 21/22. That is an average increase of 4.88%/yr over 10 years while our ECS funding was decreasing. That increase far exceeds the average rate of inflation. (Source: CTDoe)

There was a decrease in enrollment of 413 students over those 10 years (13/14 = 2733, 2/3/23 = 2320). A decrease in students would also result in a decrease in the number of teachers as Dr. Willett stated on page 15 of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget - "Ratio 1 teacher reduced for every 21 student enrollment lost". 413 fewer students would lead to 19 fewer teachers over the 10 years which would also help alleviate the need for larger budget increases. (Source: previous Town budget documents)

Classroom size is actually quite comparable to what it was 10 years ago. Comparing CERC Town Profile 2013 to pg 3 of the Supt's Enrollment Report dated 2/3/23, Grade K was 19.1 for 2013 and is projected to be 14.9. Grade 2 was 22.3 and projected to be 21.9. Grade 5 was 20.2 and is projected to be 21.1. Grade 7 was 25.3 and is projected to be 20.6. High school averages went from 21 to 21.6 (although 2 THS teachers are on the potential reduction list so that may slightly change).

In 5 of those 10 years, the BoE budget increase was actually 2% or more, including the last 2 years. The 2/22/23 (after the BoE proposed budget was submitted) BoE Curriculum Committee minutes are interesting as Dr. Willett apparently said that with a steady average 2% budget increase he expects to be able to add 5-6 new Pathways over the next 5-7 years. He had 2.25% last year, 2% the year before, and the TM proposed increase is 3% for next year. Sounds like he's on track to keep on adding new programs in his "Lighthouse" vision as presented in 2017. ( LEAP, TBA and Engineering Pathways, Tolland Transition Academy, and Open Choice have already been added over the past 5 years in line with his plan) (Source: BoE minutes and Supt's Budget proposal)

The mill rate for real estate and personal property increased from 30.19 in 13/14 to 36.58 in 22/23 for an average increase of 2.12% per year, higher than the inflation rate cited. (Actual tax impact varied due to a reval) (Source: Town budget docs)

The median household income in Tolland, a data point that Dr. Willett includes in his budget proposal each year, went from \$103,358 in 2012 to \$121,120 in 2021 for an average increase of 1.72% per year, meaning median income increased less than the inflation rate cited. (And I doubt many households are keeping up with inflation this year!) Source: (Town budget docs and Supt's Budget Proposal)

Year after year after year we hear that if the BoE budget isn't increased to their ask, property values will suffer. There is no factual proof that has ever happened, even in 0% increase years and definitely not after 10 years of a 1.58% average increase. Has anyone looked at the prices houses in Tolland have been getting over the past year? And houses were selling more quickly than ever. :) (Source: budget hearings as far back as I can remember and current house sales per JI and Zillow)

I am not advocating for a decrease in the increase or an increase in the increase as I am still listening and learning. We definitely do not need a 5.96% BoE increase as a resident advocated for on Monday night. Dr. Willett has since found extensive savings

which do not impact educational quality and he is working on more. (Voting today, I would most likely support the TM's proposed budget increases and not more.) I am simply asking that the Town Council Members remove emotion and base decisions on fact. Please do not base any decision on the number of emotional letters you receive or on those who speak at your meetings as you all know they are not representative of all residents. Do not base your decision on vague and unsubstantiated claims of losses current students have over graduated students as there have been choices made every year that Tolland Schools have existed. Some things go, some are changed, and some are added. Tolland schools have always, do now, and will always provide an excellent educational opportunity for Tolland students.

Please, do keep in mind the # of residents who are dropping cable, switching electricity suppliers, changing grocery habits, etc. in an attempt to save a few \$\$ and do not underestimate the impact a \$20-\$30 /month increase in taxes may have on some households. Those are real dollars.

Thank you and good luck in making the best plan for all of Tolland,

Deb Goetz, writing as a resident

176 Kate Lane

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Good evening,

I have been trying for days to come up the right words to express my disappointment with the budget allotted for the BOE. It is so upsetting to continually have cuts to our school budget. I currently have a freshman and a 4th grader. I have seen such a drastic decrease in the offerings in the schools throughout the last 6 years or so. Our amazing and resilient teachers continue to provide a great education to our students despite constantly being asked to do more with less. My 4th grader currently has 25 kids in his classroom. While his teacher is beyond amazing, the children are on top of each other in a classroom designed for maybe 18 kids. They are stuffed in the room with no room to spread out. My high schooler isn't able to take interesting/exciting electives because they have to cut a section due to budgets etc. We are burning our teachers and staff out, we continually pile more and more on them with no support offered to them. We need to do better, our children are the future. If we continue to take more and more away from them, they are going to be less competitive with their peers. We have lived in this town for 11 years and have seen countless families move out of town or send their kids to private schools because they see the decline in our schools. We moved to Tolland for many reasons, one of which being the school system. It's disheartening to see the decline in the financial support budgeted to the schools each year. We all feel the crunch in our wallets, we all have seen all of our personal bills go up. It's not surprising that our schools are seeing that same inflation in their bills. It shouldn't be surprising that the budget needs to be increased. I know of lots of parents that are apprehensive to email or speak at meetings because it seems futile and seems to fall on deaf ears. I truly hope that the town council will reconsider the budget and fund our schools. Our students, teachers and staff deserve more. Post pandemic our students need more support not less. Please support a higher budget for our schools.

Thank you,

Meredith Dodge

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I support the BOE budget and will be voting yes on the referendum.

Chloe Coles

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Dear Town Council and Town Professional Leaders,

Thank you for your service to the Town of Tolland and the positive difference you make to the lives of residents. Your selfless service goes a long way toward making Tolland a great place to live. You face challenging work, give more than you get, are often under appreciated. It shouldn't escape us that you spent the ushering in of Spring at the 6th floor Hicks Building, the same place you spend much of your time, away from home and many other things you could be doing. This email is focused around communication and good process with a backdrop of gratefulness!

I am a Tolland resident of almost thirty years. My children grew up in town and have now been out of the school system for a number of years. My request is simple: Work to make sure the children of Tolland today have the same or better quality of schools as in the past (even the recent past). I hope you agree that this is a worthy goal. It is the goal of many of us who remain here, even after our children are gone. We benefited and now owe this to Tolland's future.

Please help residents like me who share this goal understand the budget through this lens. How close are we? It might not even happen in one year. Are we moving toward or away from this goal? Your opinion on this is important only after the public process of weighing the evidence, including the key metrics and hearing from our administration. Let's all work from the same info and your weighing the evidence in this manner is a very critical part of your representation. Anyone can quantify a mill rate for segments of population. Of course that is important, and yet it's just a number if your rationale that leads to setting that mill rate isn't made clear.

Anyone can look at the numbers: Revenues equal expenditures equals a balanced budget proposal to residents. But what about it? I work in a nearby town where the budget process has some key differences. The Town Council directly reflects on the BOE budget. There is not a step where a Town Manager can, outside of the public eye, make reductions that then become the starting point for Council deliberation. I think we can agree that doing the same in Tolland would make for a more transparent process for leaders and residents. A Council with a good decision making process will address what the Board of Education proposes for school funding and why as a fundamental part of their decision-making process. With that understanding, they may make reductions. In doing so, they will make their rationale public and clear. Again, this is the practice of neighboring towns and I would not expect you to disagree.

If we are moving further away from the goal expressed above, if our quality of schools is in decline (full disclosure: I believe they are), then what is your rationale for your part in letting it happen?

It's not just because of increased inflation. Most towns are in the process of increasing their expenditure budgets in line with the increase in underlying cost (but don't take my word for it, look at the data. If you need it, I can help).

It's not just because of reduced ECS funding. The ECS formula is favorable to residential towns like Tolland. Grand List is the predominant factor. Even after an ~20% phased-in reduction, Tolland will still be blessed with far more ECS funding than most other towns of comparable wealth (but don't take my word for it, look at the data. If you need it, I can help).

It's not because of declining enrollment. The BOE has demonstrated in their data the adjustments made for enrollment. (don't take my word for it, get the data)

Lastly, it's not because of the comparatively high investment we already make in our schools. Tolland is near the bottom in per pupil spending and it's not because we are doing something magical to control costs. This is contrary to what I've read on Facebook, where some residents perceive that we are investing MORE into our schools compared to other towns. And that leads us back to your decision making. Misunderstanding like this comes about when the public decision making process is more opaque than it could be. Funding decisions are hard. Yet, we are all disserved if the Council skips over some of the most critical truths in order to make difficult decisions more accepted. Finding the right balance is always a challenge and, in addition to the

school community, there are many of us who have been dedicated to this town for a very long time, who raised our children here, and who want Tolland to continue to be the great town it has been.

Respectfully,

Sam Adlerstein

164 Pine Hill Road

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Dear Town Council Members and Town Manager,

Thank you for your time in reviewing the town budget. I appreciate the immense amount of effort it takes to review and understand the budget. I appreciate the discussions about the best way to move Tolland forward in the next budget year and put forth the most palatable budget to referendum. However, I strongly believe the Town Manager has missed the mark with his proposed budget. Halving the increase of the BOE approved budget in order to force consensus amongst a group that is incapable of it, including their very own goals that guide their work, is unprofessional and reprehensible. The 3% increase to the BOE is disinvesting in the education system in Tolland and, once again, negatively impacting every student in our district.

When will Tolland invest in education? We have been in budget crisis mode for the last decade. In that time, the most heavily impacted has been the school district. I keep thinking it can't get worse, but here we are underfunding curriculum, eliminating librarians, and undermining the efforts to support the mental health of our students. Forcing the BOE to spend down their ERF, while holding on to the town's reserve fund...what are we doing? What is important to our community? It's clearly not the children. Today, I regret investing in this community and building a home here.

Some of you might not be aware of just how expensive it is to attend Tolland schools, before forcing tutors by underfunding the education system. I'm lucky enough to have a freshman band player going to VA Beach AND a 7th grader going to DC in the fall. I paid over \$1200 this month in school related costs (fundraisers, field trips, sports participation fees, supplies, etc). I've paid over \$3200 since the start of school. Do I need to take away extra-curricular opportunities in order to pay for my own math and reading intervention? Because that is where my family's budget is headed.

I wasn't going to write in because I'm so discouraged and really don't feel like my voice matters, but if we are doing tallies to make a decision, I want mine to be included for supporting education. And don't get me wrong, I don't want to take away from the Town to pay for education. I want to have both because Tolland CAN afford it.

Have a nice day,

Michelle Harrold

194 Sugar Hill Rd

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Hello TC,

Writing in again as an Avid town volunteer and PTO volunteer. One family income living below the Tolland median.

I fully understand that it's naïve of me to think there's a possibility that everyone can take off their political hats and see past red and blue.

I also understand in other towns the town manager can't arbitrarily cut the BOE budget. The proposal goes directly to the council to keep the process public and transparent! Allowing this in Tolland is a direct insult to the already comprehensive public process that just proceeded. Let's be real, the superintendent is paid for his expertise. And everyone on the BOE has asked Hard questions.

My direct ask of the Town Council is that you Please make this a transparent, public process. If you change it, make your rationale clear for all of us to understand, including the impact on students, including why you feel cutting the proposed BOE budget in half is OK.

For full transparency residents and businesses deserve to know the tax implications on a fully intact BOE budget. Tell us what a 5.96% budget looks like! Then allow voters to make an informed decision based on real tangible numbers.

The average tolland 5 yr BOE budget increase is 1.19%. The average 10 year is 1.58% Forbes indicates the average 10 year inflation rate is 1.88% which means the BOE budget hasn't even kept up with inflation. This sends a message to students and parents that we don't matter.

As a parent and community member, will these cuts increase MY personal expenses to ensure my kids will receive the services they need and deserve?

Will it surpass the proposed tax increase for my home? Remember I've already stated I'm a one income family provider living below our town's median income. I can tell the board right now, a tutor will cost me more than the Town manager's proposed 152 dollars a year tax impact and even if that were doubled, the tax impact would still be cheaper than a tutor out of pocket.

Please follow a transparent process, keep the BOE proposed budget intact and let the people decide at referendum. If you decide to change it, my direct ask for the sake of all tax payers is that you do so clearly for all of us to understand. Would you do this?

Respectfully,

Toni moura

42 Center Rd

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I'm writing in light of the events that transpired the other day at the Electric Blue. We as a community have been already dealing with this business and the reputation that comes along with it for many years. Things have obviously been pushed over the edge regarding the establishment and here is hoping that we no longer need to deal with this as it is now no longer able to operate and also with the building being up for sale.

But because of this our town is now going to be suffering because of this latest news story. It is about to be spring which is a heavy time for people to move in and out of our community. Our community that I moved to three years ago when UCONN offered my husband a position at the business school. We moved here for a number of reasons but what pushed us over the edge was because of the schools and the ratings, programs and services that the district offers.

But now when prospective buyers look into Tolland now they will only see this latest news story and also that our school budget is on the brink of being slashed. This will drastically impact the ability for us to garner higher home prices and also long standing, high quality community members to join us in Tolland.

I have three children in the school system and I am so pleased with all that they have at their fingertips. Our schools are the highest determinant of home prices and length of steady home ownership.

The district is far from unreasonable in their asking for a budget increase. Every town around us is asking for an increase as well of similar or higher amounts.

We have high taxes here in CT and I am happy to pay them. But I am displeased with the idea that the taxes that have already been collected are not going to be dispersed in a more effective manner. I am not in favor of us hoarding away money into a rainy day fund like this. We have plenty of money in there. If we wanted to continue for it to grow- invest part of it wisely. If you are not going to spend my taxes then refund it back to your residents. It's ridiculous to have essential services and positions lost in our district when we have the money to pay for it all recurringly. We should be offering a town wide summer camp like Manchester. We

should be offering summer time preschool for three and four year olds. We should be absolutely offering the school district the budget that they are asking for. We should be using this as a way to drown out the negative news story of the electric blue. We should be highlighting how our community focuses on education and the children that we are lucky to raise here. Exceptional new families and businesses will flock to our town because of fully funding our schools. There is no wasteful funding for schools when our teachers are having to ask parents and community members to supply things for classrooms and beg for substitutes and paras, etc.

This is a prime opportunity for Tolland to make a concerted effort to show that we are a great place to live. And we would be remiss to not see this opportunity for what it's worth.

Fund the schools and build up our community. Our children are worth it.

Best,

Chloe Coles

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Good morning,

I have so much to say regarding the budget that I'll be blunt and say I'm not even sure where to start. My public participation and emails seem to be moot. I support the Superintendent's original 5.96%. It's necessary for an exhaustive number of reasons that I don't have the energy or time to reiterate.

We all know that there are many disconnects in this town, with one side clinging to their believe that the residents don't want the chance to vote on a larger increase due to a vocal group of residents and the other side constantly fighting for that opportunity only to be shot down time after time, and now even with a majority vote from the BOE.

What we need is our representatives to come together in support of a budget and advocate to residents as to why it is necessary. This is why we have supports and programs in place to support residents, particularly the elderly on fixed incomes, in maintaining their quality of life and staying in their homes, without penalizing the families that want to see growth and a robust educational experience for Tolland's children.

Regards,

Rebecca Risley

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Dear Esteemed Member of Town Council and Manager Foley,

My name is Laura Cassenti. I live at 55 Hilltop Rd.

I know this is long, but the summary is, failing to invest in education is going to negatively impact this community, not only in breaking the school system but in dragging down real estate prices. (I list a personal anecdote here, but can come up with a table, if you'd like.)

Here's the longer letter.

First, I wanted to thank you for working hard for our town and for giving us the opportunity for our voices to be heard. I appreciate your efforts.

Anyway, I am greatly concerned about the paltry raise that you are giving to the education system in town. Important questions to ask are, "how much was inflation over the past year, let alone the past few years? How much is inflation predicted to be?" Multiple sources show and predict inflation to be 6% or more. (The first result in a Google search yields 8.8%.) Here is one resource that I use:

<https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates/>

How much is the town giving to the school system? A paltry 3%. If you are just comparing percentage increases to last year, while it could look like you are giving them more money, you are not. You are cutting an already thin budget. Have any of you spent time in the schools? Have any of you talked off the record with teachers when admins aren't present? (I know at least one of you has not, since Councilperson Murray asked during the Board of Education meeting about cutting supplies. As a side note, as a former Room Parent, I can tell you how some parents react when asked to provide supplies for the classroom. It is not always pleasant.) Based on experience at Birch Grove, I can tell you that some staff's jobs were threatened when they were open and honest with me about a situation that put my daughter's health and life at risk. You need to have private conversations for the real picture. I have worked in the schools as a sub pre-pandemic. During one of my first years here, we ran out of paper. At the end of the year, I was told to scrape up whatever I could find to print notices to go home. You are breaking the school system. Have you seen the proposed cuts that Dr. Willett has proposed? That should make it clear to you what you are asking. Librarians play an important role in the school. As someone who was frequently asked to sub in the Libraries and teach the classes that they teach, the job isn't just about checking books into and out of the system. They also teach how to do research, not only using books, but online. The situation is disconcerting.

The town's educational system is why my children and I moved here. I grew up in Tolland, graduated at the top of my class in 1993, left for 20 years to pursue degrees at MIT and CMU and a career in academia. When I became the sole caregiver to my children, I returned for family support and, I reasoned that, if the schools were good enough for me to get into MIT, they should be good enough for my children. My oldest is now a student at MIT, due in part to the extra efforts by his teachers who took time out of their own schedules to help him. There are excellent teachers here, but they are not going to stay if they don't feel supported. (Mrs. Grotton is a prime example.) Obviously, education is important to us, and we would have chosen a different community, if I felt differently. This was in 2013, however. I feel differently now.

After we moved here, I realized that our schools could not meet my children's needs. Two of my children (my sons) are classified as gifted children. The third has disabilities across the board, some of them severe. Teachers and staff have done what they can to challenge my boys, taking a special interest in them, but they can only do so much; other children need their help more than mine. For my daughter, the schools cut corners, sometimes neglecting to follow her IEP and federal law. I have had to advocate for her, occasionally taking complaints to Dr. Willett, among other admins, who has been very helpful in rectifying the situations. Corners were already being cut in 2013, and it's only gotten worse.

Unfortunately, the bar was set very high for education for my children. We moved from Lexington, MA, whose educational system has a strong national reputation, not only for general education, but for special education. In 2017, when I last looked, it was a Gold Medal ranked school system by US News. The difference between their school system and ours is stark. Lexington invests in the schools, and it shows. It is also reflected in real estate prices. For instance, our home, which was 1600 sq. ft and sat on 0.25 acres, sold in 2013 for \$675,000. Today, ten years later, its estimated value is \$1,100,000 (Redfin and Zillow estimates). It wasn't the house or the property that people were interested in buying; it was the school system. Our house sold within minutes of going up on the market. (Feel free to look it up. The address is 25 Wachusett Dr, Lexington, MA.)

Lexington is in the Boston area. So, it's not fair to compare prices there with housing prices here. A more in depth comparison can be done locally. However, while searching for temporary housing to live in while our foundation is rebuilt this summer, do you know what information I saw listed first about the local areas? Information about local schools and their ratings. That's what people are looking for first. People pay for education. If education is harmed, what will happen to real estate values? Our property taxes? Our revenue? Will people want to move here?

I understand there is a revenue problem. This has been compounding itself over the years. However, I am willing to tighten our belts here at home.

Please reconsider the amount budgeted to the schools. The way things currently stand, I have no long-term plans to stay here watching how the town continually defunds education. I also know that my oldest doesn't plan on returning. He doesn't see a future here. (As a side note, he was disappointed as he watched classes he wanted to take get cut from the curriculum.)

Sincerely,

Laura Cassenti

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I appreciated Steve Jone's thoughtful response to my email.

I just wanted to correct an error in my initial email, I pulled the wrong \$\$ out for the BoE increase in the TM's proposed budget. It is, of course, \$1,252,132 leaving \$41,697 after the budgeted increase for health insurance. Sorry for the error - I was multi-tasking while listening to the CGA Public Hearing on Raised Bill #6890 - Transit-Oriented Communities.

Deb Goetz

The Overview for tonight's presentation is very informative, however it does not address the elephant in the room - the recommendation for a 3% increase for the BoE budget when 5.96% was requested.

Since that request was made, savings have been found in fuel, special education reimbursements, and transportation so the 5.96% is clearly not needed. There are additional areas to be adjusted that will also not affect educational quality. However, with a BoE budgeted increase of \$1,210,435 for just health insurance, the Town Manager's proposed total BoE increase of \$1,233,836 needs further explanation as that appears to only allow for a \$23,401 increase for all of the other line items in the BoE budget.

Is the budgeted increase in the BoE's share of Health Insurance in excess of what is actually needed? If that can be adjusted, then the full list of staff reductions presented at the last BoE meeting would not be necessary, nor would the great angst being expressed by some parents and community members. In any other recent year, a TM proposed BoE budget increase of 3% would have been received positively by those now expressing grave concern.

Although the Board of Education budget will not be discussed in detail until 3/20, a brief explanation tonight of how the 3% increase proposal was derived could help reduce the tension in town and allow the focus to be on the overall budget for all of Tolland.

Thank you in advance for the work you'll all be putting in over the next few weeks.

Sincerely,

Deb Goetz, writing as a resident

176 Kate Lane

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I am disappointed to learn about the proposed budget reductions the BOE and superintendent are being asked to put forth and the impact that this will have.

I am especially disappointed to learn that such cuts would mean losing our school librarians. I think that the education they provide our students is critical especially in our age of misinformation. Students need to learn how to obtain factual information and how to discern it from opinions or falsehoods. Students need to learn how to use and engage with technology in a safe way. This is instruction librarian educators provide that we must not lose.

The education of our students is declining. And this matters to our town and society.

Every time a budget is put forth we are asked to sacrifice more and more quality educators. Even proposing these cuts with such regularity must weaken the faith any employee would have in dealing with the district. More experienced educators are being lost and we will lose many more to come through these actions.

I feel that proposing a budget with such drastic loses is devastating and unnecessary, as the vote should decide what cuts are warranted. The BOE should be allowed to budget to (at the very least) maintain our current level of services.

Janice Sennick  
98 Timber Trail

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We are emailing to state how disappointing it is to see the town managers reduction of the BOE's approved budget by almost 1/2- to 3%. I saw a listing of the resources that will be cut if 3% sticks, and find these losses appalling. In fact it really feels like a sabotage to our school system! Please reinstate the 5.69% to support our youth and those responsible to grow them, and promote Tolland as a great place to live.

This past summer, we convinced a coworker (in hartford) with 2 small children who are not yet school age, to move from west of the river to Tolland. We are now embarrassed we recommended living here so highly, now knowing she will soon figure out our schools may lack fundamental resources- like a librarian for example- when her children attend. Unless things change dramatically here to support our towns schools, we cannot continue to recommend this town, and we are certain we are not the only people living here who feel similarly.

Thank you,  
Liza and Tom Nowicki  
176 Timber Trail

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I'm saddened at the extreme lack of support from the council regarding the superintendent's proposed budget. Without even including inflation issues, we community members do realize there are increases. Invaluable resources are being cut and unsustainable choices are being made.

Families in town are fearful of the future, and I don't believe this is the right path for a bright, sunny future for our children, or our town. Please consider watching/attending a board of Ed meeting, it could open your eyes to the needs of the educational system and the understanding of these expenses. A lot of these (line) items are required by law!!!

3% is extremely low especially considering these times, and for our geographic area when comparing to surrounding districts.

Thank you for your time,  
Melissa Weeks

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Dear Town Council,

My name is Rachel Axler, 46 Josiah Ln Tolland Ct. I support the fully funded educational budget that Dr Willet proposed. Let us as taxpayers vote on the full budget. We cannot keep cutting services in our schools. The stress levels of our teachers and our children are at an all time high. Staff retention is difficult because we are still reeling from covid and the increase in teacher retirements. This is not the time to cut educational services.

Thank you.

Rachel Axler

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Good evening town council,

I have previously voiced my support for the full budget increase suggested by Dr. Willet. I hope that the many eloquent speakers this evening have moved you to allow residents to make the decision on whether to support that increase at the poll.

Thank you,

Bettina Herrler

32 Bakos Rd