

BUDGET MEETING MINUTES

**TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID MEETING
6th Floor Council Chambers
April 2, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.**

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
TOLLAND, CT

2024 APR -4 AM 10: 23

Kathleen Pagan

MEMBERS PRESENT: Katherine Stargardt, Chair; Jacob Marie, Vice Chair; Jennifer Buckler, Chris Moran, Alexander Noonan, Joseph Sce, Colleen Yudichak

MEMBERS ABSENT: none

OTHERS PRESENT: Brian Foley, Town Manager; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services (Zoom); Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records (Zoom); Bev Bellody, Director, Human Services; Kathy Pagan, Town Clerk (Zoom); Scott Lappen, Director, Public Works

1. Call to Order: Ms. Stargardt called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Ms. Stargardt read the following statement:

As public discourse regarding our town budget continues, I call again for decorum both within and outside of this Council Chamber. As leaders in our community, we should be setting a high standard with the manner in which we govern ourselves. Supporting or even tolerating attempts to mislead the public on the backs of our budget is deplorable and unworthy of our community. I'm sure my colleagues, including Councilor Marie would agree. I believe our Town Council members all want to make the best decisions for our town and while we may not always agree on the specifics, respecting each other's opinions, approaches, and priorities is essential for us to work together and be deserving of the confidence the public has in us. As we enter this public hearing and looking ahead to the budget vote on Thursday evening, I ask that we conduct ourselves with civility and courtesy to both those with whom the Council interacts and with each other.

[Due to technical difficulties, the Council stood in recess until 7:08PM.]

Ms. Stargardt reread her statement.

2. Public Hearing Item:

2.1 2024-2025 Budget Proposed by the Town Manager

Town Government	\$14,144,408
Capital Improvement Reserve Fund	\$ 397,395
Board of Education	\$45,071,148
Debt Service	<u>\$ 5,376,489</u>
 Total Proposed Budget	 \$64,989,440

Mr. Foley reviewed the presentation Town of Tolland Public Hearing, April 2, 2024

- Budget Summary FY 2024-2025
- Town Revenues 2024-2025
- Fund Balance
- Expenditures
- Mill Rate Impact of the Financial Plan
- Tax Impact
- Capital Budget
- Types of Funding Methods
- FY 24-25 Town of Vernon Water Pollution Control Plant Upgrade
- FY 24-25 Significant Capital Projects Funded by the General Fund
- FY 24-25 Significant Capital Projects Funded by Non-Referendum Bonds/School Construction Grants
- FY 24-25 Significant Capital Projects Funded by Other Sources
- Past 5 Year General Fund Capital Contributions

- Total Debt Management Plan Schedule 2024-25 through 2028-29
- Budget Schedule

3. Public Participation

Mr. Moran motioned to open the Public Hearing.

Ms. Buckler seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Fran Weigand, Stafford Springs, noted that she is retired, was the Director of the Senior Center, and is a former resident. She has seen a lot of growth over the years and is representing the administration of the Senior Center as well as the seniors. She would like the Council to consider making the part-time assistant position full time. The person in the position goes above and beyond, works longer than her hours, and does not get overtime. The position merits being full time. The Director has a lot of responsibilities, including watching elderly people, and the Assistant needs to be able to do this as well when the Director is not available. She hopes the Council considers reinstating the position. It is only 10 hours. Additionally, the building is bulging, and people have been turned away from the exercise program. The building would be funded with grant money and not impact taxpayers.

Rebecca Levine, 64 Tolland Farms Road, commented that she is a frustrated and concerned parent of two children in TPS. Like others, they moved to Tolland for the school system over seven years ago. It was one of the best in the state. Since then, Tolland is not even in the top ten. In the beginning, her girls prospered and without the teachers and paraeducators she does not know how well her daughters would have done academically and socially. Ms. Levine commented that one of her daughters is on the spectrum and the other suffers from anxiety. With the help of staff, including the music teacher, they have improved and gained self-confidence. Ms. Levine reviewed the three budget proposals and is disheartened and disappointed. The proposed budget of 4% with the 16.5 reductions in positions and programs is a travesty. Fundamental programs and classes will be lost. Co-teaching is necessary for those with a learning disability and provides one-on-one attention to those who learn differently. The 6.98% budget is equally upsetting because a para, music teacher and others would be lost. She hopes the Council understands what this does to those who benefit from such programs and teachers. Many who do not have children or will have children in the TPS have complained that they will pay more in taxes. Ms. Levine commented that taxpayers benefit when students receive higher levels of education because it increases the chance that they will be employed and their wages will pay for Social Security and Medicare. Ms. Levine commented that unfortunately she would lean toward the 4.84% budget only because fewer teachers would be lost but the program reductions are immense. Every year beneficial programs and positions are cut. Students from underfunded schools do not perform as well. Larger class sizes, fewer advanced classes, and the loss of learning, world language, and child development decline the quality of education. Additionally, people will stop moving to Tolland and students who live in Tolland will go to different high schools or move away. She asked that they think of future generations yet to graduate and those who do go to Tolland and will miss out when neighboring towns offer so much.

Julie Włodarczyk, 15 Harriet Drive, asked that the Council pass the BOE budget as-is. She has three kids who have graduated from TPS and asked them what their most influential experiences and programs were. The first was World Language. Her son was inspired by the teachers and received AP credit which helped him in college. The other program was Child Development which was already cut. Her daughter participated in the program and is pursuing a teaching degree. Her inspiration was the teacher and the program. Ms. Włodarczyk commented that she wonders how many students will not pursue education because they have not had the introduction. If the goal is for Tolland to be attractive to new families with children, the education system has to be competitive. She works for a district in another town which is adding world language classes and starting them earlier. Tolland is talking about less and it scares her for the future of Tolland.

Claudette Morehouse, 89 Merlot Way, asked that the Council consider lowering the 5.2% to a more realistic and reasonable amount. The tax will impact her home and many others because they have not had potable water for seven years due to road salt contamination. They cannot sell their homes and are being held hostage in the town. They cannot downsize etc. and nothing in the budget will help them. Taxpayer money is being spent on repeated water testing and they are apparently getting new curbing and catch culverts when the others are fine. Additionally, as a business owner she works in many homes in town and sees the real struggles. Some are just sad. Seniors on fixed

incomes, single-income families, and low-income families – these are the people the Council is asking to dig deeper. Inflation impacts them, not just the town's budget. Ms. Morehouse finds it disturbing that some dismiss the significant population to fill the agenda of more. She asked when it is enough. Tolland will run out of other people's money. She asked that the Council find a way to help seniors and those households below median income from being further decimated. They are friends, families, and neighbors. The Council is to make decisions that represent all of Tolland. She asked that they are considered.

Liza Nowicki, 176 Timber Trail, commented that she has two children in TPS, and they are the reason they moved to Tolland in 2011. The schools had a great reputation and ratings. Since then, the landscape has changed. The trend has been to do more with less. Last year, her eighth grader received her course offering book for THS. She was ecstatic about the Early Childhood Education Program and would like to be a teacher. She was going to take all three courses but when she got to THS, the program was gone. It has taken until now to convince her that it is not coming back. Ms. Nowicki commented that others will not know the program existed and will miss out on the opportunity. Now, other opportunities such as world language, computer science, and band at TIS are on the chopping block and will be missed. She asked how the schools are doing this. Children are part of the community, and although not voters, the reason many people live in Tolland. The Council is in a unique position, and she hears the concern for increased taxes. At the January 23rd meeting she heard that the town is financially healthy. She explained that there are ways to offset taxes for those who need help, but it should not come at a cost to the children.

Adrienne Charboneau, 5 Crossen Drive, expressed concern regarding the proposed increase in property taxes. She looked at surrounding towns' mill rates for a comparison and Tolland is the highest. Ms. Charboneau cited examples: Willington 32, Coventry 31, Vernon 33, Stafford 36, and Ellington 34. While there cannot always be an apples-to-apples comparison, Tolland is far higher. She also noted the mill rate increases and, other than FY2015/16, what is proposed is the highest tax increase in the last 10 years. The average tax increase over the past 12 years was 0.61 mills. The proposed increase of 1.94 mills is more than three times the average. Additionally, if other districts in CT held their mill rates, Tolland would rank 19th highest out of 492 tax districts. Ms. Charboneau commented that this could scare new residents and businesses away leading to a decrease in revenue. Lastly, the housing market is strong, and values are not expected to decrease any time soon. Homes are being reassessed this year. She asked why they need to wait for the actual numbers to apply them to the budget this year. It was mentioned that the new assessed values would not be applied until next year's budget. She asked why they could not estimate the increase in taxes from the increase in the home market value now and use it to keep the mill rate close to the same. Future expenditures are estimated, and future revenue should be estimated as well. She asked that the Council reconsider the proposed budget and associated mill rate increase to reduce the property tax burden on residents.

Samar Bush, 20 Forest Lane, commented that she supports the 4.84% increase in the Town Manager's recommended budget. They moved to Tolland for various reasons but one was for their child to start in kindergarten and progress through TPS. She has had a child in each school, and it has been disheartening to see the schools be underfunded for over a decade. She would like to see the BOE be able to implement their 5-year budget plan, and this begins with it receiving the 4.84% increase. She also supports expanding the town's tax relief program long term and challenged the Councilors to find ways to decrease the increase in the mill rate by using sources such as the fund balance.

Rebecca Risely, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented on those who spoke of those who care about the schools and keeping them funded while not caring about other residents. Ms. Risely explained that this is not true. The community is varied and many care about everyone and support programs for seniors and those who are struggling. They work together to lift those who cannot afford things, so they do not continue to reduce the school system where students receive assistance. Regarding the comment on this being the largest increase in 10 years, it is because they have not kept up and thus either a large increase is needed, or the school system will decline and not thrive. She encouraged at least supporting the budget integrated in the town budget. It is reasonable, fair, and doable for the community. There are ways to fund it without a large tax increase. Funds are available to relieve taxpayer burden. This is the time to use them.

Christina Plourd, 101 Metcalf Road, commented that if \$1M is taken from the fund balance to provide for operating costs and it is not replaced the following year, there would be a \$2M increase in taxes the next year. If money is continually taken from the fund balance, and not replaced, over the course of eleven years, it will be drained. It is not sustainable for the future students of Tolland. She has one child in TPS, and another will go next year. They are having a great time, and it is a great system. The budget has been positioned as town vs. BOE. She asked that the Council look

at responsible spending, lower the tax increase, keep people in town, make people want to stay, and make businesses want to start in Tolland. She asked that they find the balance. She will support the Council.

Karen Moran, 50 Merlot Way, commented that she is concerned about the sound bite around the mill rate and how high it is. It is hard to compare Tolland to other towns given varied factors. Willington is part of a regional district and does not have a high school to support. It is not fair to compare Tolland to Willington. There are few comparable districts even in Tolland's DRG because they participate in regional districts, or they do not have four schools. She asked that people use care in listening to such comments and budget for Tolland. The schools have been underfunded for too long. Ms. Moran commented that she no longer has kids in the school system but values it as a large asset to the town for her property value. The housing inventory is 95% single family homes meaning families will want to come to Tolland. The majority will want a great school system. She asked that they pass a responsible budget including that of the BOE.

Kenny Trice, 53 Doe Run, commented on a slide Mr. Foley presented of the town expenses. He and believes he said that they are not doing anything new or providing additional services and the increases are due to contracts etc. If this is the case, what was stated is a harsh reality of life – costs go up. Many have differing perspectives but one cannot expect their electric bill to be the same for ten years. Costs go up. When they do not, the service or product, if not enhanced through efficiencies, has become obsolete. He has heard about cuts to the schools since 2011 and they are done every year. They just need to figure it out.

Lisa Burns, 214 Slater Road, commented in support of reviewing the budget one more time - 5.6% is too high. She represents a number of people who are trying to figure out how to fix their homes with crumbling foundations. It is still happening. She had to come up with \$50K+ out of pocket to fix her foundation. To ignore people in Tolland, the epicenter of crumbling foundations, who also have to endure huge expenses is not reasonable. Others have contaminated water issues. They are town citizens who deserve to be considered. They support the schools, but they cannot be the only focus. Those with other types of expenses deserve to be heard and considered in Tolland's budget. Ms. Burns commented that while she does not support 5.6%, she supports something that is more fiscally responsible and includes the entire community. Everyone agrees that students deserve a good education but the rest of the community and how they manage their funds needs to be considered as well. Costs do go up, and it is expected, but they need to be fiscally responsible. One has to work with what they have if the money is not in the checkbook. The 5.6% would be the highest budget increase that she has seen and does not believe it is fair to the town. A statement will be made at the referendum but why can they not consider it now? She asked that they go back, reconsider, and find where pieces can be taken out.

Dana Philbin, 11 Harvest Lane, commented that she is a member of the BOE, a taxpayer, and mom of two TPS students. She moved to Tolland in 2015. When her children were going to be entering preschool, they needed to decide on the best place to raise their children. Tolland checked the boxes with the school system, small town charm, and she knew people who were raised in town and are raising their children in town as well. Since 2015, many items have eroded. As a community member, she commented that it is their job to be fiscally responsible with the budget, properly fund all departments, and discuss the town as a whole. The BOE, fire department, senior center, recreation department, and others are departments of the town. She hears people speak of being fiscally responsible which is not cutting, reducing, or eliminating. It is finding and utilizing the proper resources, using the reserve fund, UISF, and others and applying them to the respective budget areas to not increase the mill rate and taxes to an extent that they become a burden to the single mother of four, senior citizens on a fixed income, or the mother who cannot work due to hardship. The town has several opportunities for aid and asked that they be utilized. There is an opportunity to properly fund Tolland and she implored the Council to work together to find out how they can use the town's 5-year budget plan and the BOE's plan. She asked that it be a town conversation. They have a unique opportunity to make a statement and improve Tolland as a whole for all students, staff, family members, and residents.

Andrew Mangiafico, 7 Lorraine Drive, commented on the 5.56% increase. People are saying it is too high, but it is a number. It does not mean anything until one looks at the reasons for it. There is an extraordinary situation that requires a massive investment. An extraordinary situation cannot be attacked with ordinary solutions or what has worked in the past because the problem is bigger. One has to look at creative solutions and different ways of solving the problem. The schools have had a chronic, massive underinvestment and the bill has come due. They also cannot ignore people who truly cannot afford the increase, but they cannot let this hold them back from what needs to be done to move forward. They also cannot trample people. They need to do what is right for the town as a whole while

taking care of those who need it. Mr. Mangiafico noted the Green and asked if it should not be used because some people cannot access it. They should access it more and be a responsible community and use resources to ensure everyone can access it. The schools are an asset that needs investment and if people cannot afford it, resources need to be used, understanding there are limits, and creative solutions examined; otherwise, they will not get out of the hole. If everything is cut, next year the increase could be 10% or 15%. He noted that it is nice to see bipartisan agreement and parties work together to move forward for what is best for Tolland.

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, commented that she supports the 4.84% budget increase with emphasis on using some of the fund balance to decrease the mill rate. She encouraged the Council to come up with a 5-year budget plan to help the entire town for the future. She returned to Tolland for the exceptional schools and understands the importance of maintaining the town's resources and services. While she no longer has students in the TPS, she appreciates the value of town services, infrastructure, and amenities. It is crucial that they strike a balance between adequately funding the town's needs and ensuring that property taxes are manageable for all. She does not want people to have to leave town due to property taxes or because schools are not offering services and opportunities for the youngest residents. Using the fund balance to offset the budget and decrease the mill rate can help alleviate some of the financial burden on homeowners while supporting essential services and initiatives in town. Ms. Costa advocated for work to be done on the 5-year plan to help alleviate future budget woes. She asked that the Council consider this approach and work together so Tolland is a vibrant and welcoming community for all residents.

Marilee Beebe commented that between 2019 and 2023 the social security cost of living (COLA) rate increases were over 20%. This reflected the impact of the COVID years. The corresponding mill rate increase was approximately 6.6%. It shows an exemplary effort to control mill rate increases. She commended the Council and town management. The flip side is that there are needs across the board including assistance at the Senior Center, Public Works, the Recreation Department, and the BOE. Increases have been so minimal that they are trying to dig themselves out of a hole. If they do not step up this year, the hole will be bigger next year; however, they need to assist those on fixed incomes and make a significant effort to educate citizens about tax credit programs available from the state and town. They are not tax deferrals and applications are available on the website. She asked that the Chair mention the programs. What is available, if people qualify, would pretty much defray the tax increase being discussed. Ms. Beebe supports the budget presented.

Mary Rose Duberek, 37 Ryan Road, commented that she appreciated the Chair's initial statement. Each department has shared what it takes to run their operation and she has to believe them. Once the budget decision is made, with consideration of the comments and what is needed for the town, she asked that they do their best as a bipartisan response to encourage members to vote "yes". Each Councilor is making the decision that the budget is what is needed. It is an individual vote but as those elected to run the town, they need to hear what is needed from the departments and provide support. Nothing is perfect and not everyone can be happy, but they are all members of one community and work together. The Council is negotiating, researching, and communicating with each other. As a citizen she appreciates this but wishes more people would vote and believes they would if the elected officials took a more proactive stance in supporting the budget.

Jason Philbin, Harvest Lane, commented that he is hopeful that they pass the Town Manager's budget. Money from previous tax years can be invested in the town. This includes a thriving town that supports its school system, residents, and town departments as a whole. It can be done with a little tax increase by using funds in the fund balances. The BOE passed a budget, and this is the first step in stopping the underfunding of the schools. It is a disservice to residents to ignore the underfunding issue and not invest tax money in the town. Everyone has expenses and the town has a surplus of money that can be used to lift the burden on residents. The phrase "fiscally responsible" and thinking, along with the underfunding of the schools and the town over the last eleven years, was not fiscally responsible and neither is continuing that trend. He asked that the BOE and Town Manager's budget be supported. It is needed by the town.

Mark Mitchell, 45 Shores Drive, commented that he reviewed the budget. The budget has \$45M for the school system and only \$14M for the town. He is surprised by how small the town budget is and it raises questions if the town has enough resources to serve the community. In terms of the school budget, \$45M is a lot and he did not see the annual cost per child online. He sees an opportunity to have such basic metrics available that would allow citizens to relate to the information. Mr. Mitchell commented that a citizen told him that there is never transparency on the school budget and the expenditures. Mr. Mitchell explained that he saw the \$45M on the school website, and perhaps it is because he is using an Android phone, but he did not see a budget breakdown or presentation of where or how the money would

be spent. The person also said that at year end, the school district says that it does not have enough money to put together a presentation on how the money was spent, which would be a cornerstone of accountability. Mr. Mitchell commented that he is an accountability expert and \$45M merits disclosure regarding expenditures. He explained that the person's concern was that money was devoted to the school library and very little went to it, but no one could account for where the money went. This lack of transparency undermines confidence in government. The Council has an opportunity to create greater transparency for greater confidence in the budget. Mr. Mitchell offered to volunteer his time and talent to provide additional insights. He hears that everyone comes to Tolland for education so something good is in town and worth continuing in a positive way.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the BOE budget is on its website and includes metrics including the per pupil cost. Further, the monthly BOE agenda and meeting packets, on the BOE website, have a financial disclosure review of the expenditures. The BOE and the town work hard to be transparent. It is public money.

Toni Maura, 42 Center Road, commented that she supports the entire town budget. In terms of the data points, the per pupil expenditure for FY22/23 for Tolland was \$18K. In context, in Connecticut, Tolland is the 132nd lowest of 164 districts recorded, placing it in the lowest bracket. She would like to see the numbers move and the Council get creative looking at other ways to support the entire community – senior citizens, single parents, those living below the median income and think of creative ways outside of an increased tax burden. Ms. Maura noted that she supports the proposed budget with assumptions.

George Ulrich, Fish and Game Road, commented that other towns have lower mill rates because they have industry. In Tolland's history, it has turned down items that would have brought in tax dollars such as fast-food restaurants and a motel and created the mess. The only way to have more money for the schools is to have more businesses. Mr. Ulrich commented that the true school budget is 6.35%. 1.51% was moved from the school budget to the town's budget - \$676K. Thus, if the school did not receive anything, it would still have a 1.51% increase over last year.

Heather McCann, 62 Crossen Drive, commented that her home has a crumbling foundation, and she has two children in the school system. They are a dual income household and are not wealthy. They are active in the community and understand the importance of supporting not only the schools but also seniors, those on fixed incomes, and lower income families. The need to appropriately fund the entire community and readily accessible funds are available.

Amanda Hickey, 11 Mitchell Circle, commented that she moved to town for the schools. Her oldest son graduated from THS in 2021 and she has children at TMS and TIS. Her kids love the schools and have benefitted from services that may be disappearing. The future of Tolland depends on the success of the schools. She supports the budget.

Mr. Noonan motioned to close the Public Hearing.

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

4. **Adjournment**

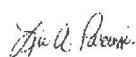
Mr. Moran motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 PM

Mr. Noonan seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,



Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair

Thu 3/28, 4:55 PM

Town Council

Whoops,

On Thu, Mar 28, 2024 at 2:46 PM Frances Weigand wrote:

Dear

Chair Kaite Stargardter and Council Members:

I am Frances Weigand, former director of the Tolland Senior Center.

I want to begin this letter by thanking you, Katie, for your recognition of the need our seniors in Tolland have. I was a participant on zoom for the budget meeting that was held this past Monday evening. Thank you for addressing the issues. I understand balancing the budget is not an easy task. Thank you all for the great job you have been doing.

I have one request. I'd like for all of you to seriously consider increasing the Administrative Assistant position at the senior center, by adding 10 more hours moving it from part time to full time.

Having worked there for 32 years *without an assistant*, I can attest to the amount of work this position holds. The senior population has increased exponentially since I retired in 2020. And so has the workload.

Human Services Director, Bev Bellody, initially put this request into her budget, indicating the need, but that request never made it to the table.

The person now in this position works over time every week to complete the necessary work. She is not compensated monetarily for this over time. It is also required of this position to fill in for the director when the director is on vacation, or ill, or attending networking meetings. This places greater responsibility on this position, again without monetary compensation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. In advance, I appreciate anything you can do. I look forward to seeing you all at the April 2 public hearing for the budget meeting.

Sincerely,

Frances Weigand

860/428/45782

Thu 3/28, 9:20 PM

Town Council

Hello,

I support using the surplus to support the Board of Education budget. Our town has spent generations supporting education. I understand that continuing to live in the home you raised a family in, even after that family has moved, on is a difficult financial situation. However, as with all costs, the costs of a quality education increases. Tolland is rich with family homes, we should continue to fully fund education, in order to continue to draw families to purchase these homes. This is the only way to continue ensure we have a growing, vibrant community.

Thank you,

Adam Bender

103 Goose Ln, Tolland, CT 06084

Fri 3/29, 6:49 PM

Town Council

Good Friday Chairwoman Stargardter, Vice Chairman Marie, members of the Tolland Town Council and Town Manager Foley,

I would like to express my support for the budget as outlined by the Town Manager to be put forward by the Town Council to the public at large for consideration at the May 7th Referendum. As the town is seeing a notable increase in economic activity, further investment in the UConn area that tends to spill over into neighboring communities including our own, and a rise in new housing opportunities (notably multifamily housing), investment in our community will ensure our town remains attractive to prospective residents while supporting programs and services for existing residents.

However, I do believe a greater portion of the Tax Stabilization Fund could and should be used to offset the impact of the mill rate. Especially as we are heading into a revaluation year that could significantly impact resident's home values negatively or positively in the next budget cycle. Minimizing significant shifts in the mill rate without impacting programs or services, while recognizing ongoing financial struggles due to inflation and other economic hardships and allowing for a more measured reaction to any changes in property values next year.

Town increases are modest and meeting core needs for governmental services and staff, with logical adjustments to the town's debt service plan. Meanwhile, the Board of Education's 5-year bi-partisan strategic financial plan for future budgets gradually stabilizes funding levels to be on par with surrounding communities and simultaneously prioritizing cost-avoidance programs in the school system to ensure Tolland students feel that they can succeed in the Tolland Public Schools.

I do hope, whatever decision is reached on April 4th, it can be done with a reasonable level of bi-partisanship. As some of you know in my prior role on Town Council, I've been through four budgets. Two I experienced as a part of a super-minority where our voices did not necessarily matter or could tip the scales of the final vote. One of those years was 2020, where we neither adjusted the mill rate nor could have a referendum due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The other, I voted no because the majority reduced Town Manager Rosen's budget and I felt we ought to support our newly hired manager at the time feel they were supported by the council, though I still voted yes at the referendum. Ultimately, Mr. Rosen left for another community shortly before my second term and wonder if a lack of trust in their abilities impacted their decision to leave Tolland.

The second term saw a mixed bag for our two years in a majority role. We sought to support our interim Town Manager Lisa Hancock who presented a reasonable budget, but ended in a party-line vote of 4-3 that failed referendum, due in part to more active public campaigning against the budget by my colleagues. We succeeded the second time after a 5-2 bi-partisan vote and limited or no open opposition by those who dissented. This 5-2 vote was almost identically repeated in 2023 with new Town Manager Foley, maintaining a majority of the budget he presented and passed as Tolland has gradually seen a rise in participation over the past four years. It is my hope this trend continues, even if turnout is abysmal at less than 20-25% of residents voting.

I hope you give this budget the manager put forward a fair shot to the public. If you support it, make your case in subsequent public sessions and throughout your community and encourage even more residents to learn and make an informed vote. If you oppose the budget, make it clear why and where you feel the budget could be adjusted (reductions/increases in spending, use of funds to offset the mill rate, etc.). But I echo Town Manager Foley from prior discussions and prior budgets to not actively torpedo or tarnish this budget or undercut the process with statements/opinions that may not be entirely accurate or verified with factual information.

I do not envy any one of you. There are many reasons why I stepped back from Town Council after four years of service. The pressures put upon you can be immense and overwhelming, both emotionally and intellectually as some of you will or have experienced first-hand certainly factored into that decision for me personally. I frankly don't miss those moments and the struggles internally that can arise among neighbors and even friends. But I respect that it is a part of the process. It is what makes our democracy and serving on Town Council a truly unique

experience. It can at times be excitingly fast and excruciatingly slow, cordial and contentious, rewarding and thankless.

I wish all of you the best with your final decision, that you put the best interests of the town's future into your deliberations, and that we have a successful Referendum in May. I believe this can be accomplished with a united support for this year's budget proposal. And I hope that going forward you continue to build positive relationships with your peers, staff and those you serve. Reaching out across the aisle and sharing yourself with those you normally would not work with makes for a more productive and trusting team.

Sincerely,
Steve Osier (Jones)
514 Old Stafford Road

Sat 3/30, 1:01 PM

Town Council

To the Tolland Town Council,

First let me start by saying a big thank you to all of you for volunteering your time to serve our community.

In 1986 when we purchased our home in Tolland our real estate taxes were under \$2,000.00 per year. We had trash pick-up two times per week and our home had a septic and well. Today almost 40 years later we still have that well & septic and trash pickup once per week. The dump / transfer station has been closed, now anytime I have bulky waste I need to pay extra to have it collected. In 2023 we wrote a check to the Town of Tolland for almost \$8,000.00 for real estate and car taxes (both older vehicles). We have one less out building than we had in 1986 and have not made any huge changes to our home. That is a 300% increase over the last 38 years. If I live for the next 20 years how much will my taxes cost me and how will I be able to afford to stay in Tolland and my home? How will any senior be able to continue to live in Tolland the town that we call home, and do so on a fixed income?

The average Social Security COLA over the last ten years is 2.8% which includes the last three years of 5.9% in 2022, 8.7% in 2023, and 3.2% for 2024. The increases in SSI do not come close to keeping pace with our current tax burden never mind the new taxes that will be generated over the next ten years. The average COLA over the last 20 years is only 2.6%.

This year Tolland will be reassessing our property values. We all know that will increase our tax burden. Taxes combined with the ever increasing mil rate makes Tolland very unattractive for seniors and those on fixed incomes.

My wife and I raised three wonderful children that went through the Tolland school system. It seems to me that we had the same problems back then with funding for the BoE. No one wants to see our children suffer; in fact I would like to see our school system improve. The stronger our school system the stronger our town is. I just believe that something needs to be done about the mandates that are being placed on public education. These mandates are under and or non-funded. Even those mandated that are fully funded are paid for with our tax dollars. I always felt that it was my responsibility as a parent to provide my children with the things that they needed to become caring, intelligent, functioning members of our society. Today it seems more like it is the community's responsibility to help raise its children. Today you get a "free" breakfast, lunch, and computer, physical and mental health care. The list goes on and on. Where does this stop?

I also believe that as a town we need to take a closer look at the way the BoE is spending the school budget. What are more important, more smart boards or more teachers? I hear about teachers, classes, and positions being cut but no one is telling us about all of the classes, technologies, and positions being added. As a family we had to make strategic budgetary decisions to keep our household afloat while putting three children through college. It's time that our school system needs to take a serious look at needs vs wants.

Best Regards,

Mark Schmidt —369 Gehring Rd

Sun 3/31, 10:55 PM

Town Council

Dear Council Members,

I know that you are busy working on the town budget and I felt the need to speak out on a line item concerning ten additional hours for the Senior Center Administrative Assistant bringing a part-time position to a full-time position.

I have been an active member of the Senior Center for ten years and have witnessed the incredible growth of its membership that has progressively taken place year after year. I have had a front-row seat to this tremendous growth as an active member and volunteer. The Director of the Senior Center has worked tirelessly to present a host of new programs attracting countless new members. She was sorely in need of some help beyond the scope of volunteers and a part-time assistant was hired. Due to the increased activity at the Center and its challenging space limitations, the Assistant is now working a full-time schedule which, in large part, requires constantly moving furniture to accommodate various activities in addition to her Administrative duties.

The Senior Center Administrative Assistant needs to be compensated for her diligence and dedication to the Center. Please increase her hours to maintain the integrity of our Town of Tolland Senior Center. This facility and its Seniors deserve it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Rosemarie Capuano
41 Tolland Green

4/1, 9:15 AM

Town Council

It has come to my attention that the council is considering a 5.6% tax increase. I would like to voice my opposition to this proposal. In this inflationary economy it puts more of a burden on already pressured household budgets such as ours without a discernible return. As a 28 year resident of Tolland I'm sure the council can find areas where the budget can be trimmed to avoid such a drastic increase.

Richard Daniotti
172 Crystal Lake Rd

Tolland, CT

Mon 4/1, 11:42 AM

Town Council

Hello,

It has come to our family's attention that the council is considering a 5.6% tax increase. We would like to voice our opposition to this proposed huge tax increase. It puts more of a burden on our already limited household budget. We have been in Tolland for almost 30 years. I'm positive the town council can find areas to trim the budget and avoid this proposed increase. Thank you, Sheila M. Deprey and family

Mon 4/1, 12:41 PM

Town Council

I am writing in support of the proposed town manager's budget. There are wonderful, hopeful balances that gives this community something to look forward to. Thank you to all for your diligence on this issue, this is a tough process.

Melissa Moser

Mon 4/1, 1:15 PM

Town Council

Dear Council,

I am writing to you today as a parent of a 6th and 9th grader in the Tolland Public Schools in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget.

We moved our family to Tolland for the outstanding education for our children. However, over the past several years we have experienced the schools being impacted with cuts due to continued reductions within the budget. As a result, our children's opportunities from extracurriculars, interventions for various subjects, options for electives, teachers and courses have been cut extensively. It is quite concerning to think of more teachers and programs being cut from an already lean system.

The students currently and in the future deserve the best opportunity for growth and further reductions to TPS will continue to be limiting for our children. Our children deserve to be as competitive as students from other districts. The proposed elimination would be a significant loss for the long-term success of our students.

Respectfully,

Jenifer Gietek

Mon 4/1, 2:32 PM

Town Council

Good afternoon, Tolland Town Council,

I am a Tolland High School graduate, current Tolland resident, I have 3 daughters that have attended Tolland Public Schools, one is a class of 2023 graduate, a junior and an eighth grader, and I have been a TPS volunteer in various roles through the years.

This week, as you review the BOE budget, please support the BOE adopted budget and minimize cuts that will negatively impact our students and the TPS community. As a parent, and invested member of the community, I am seeing firsthand the impact previous cuts have made on our already declining school system, such as diminished quality of education, loss of important classes and programs, reduced safety standards, athletics and more. The future outlook of our school system is concerning.

I understand the difficult position that our town leadership is in and appreciate all that you're doing for the town.

We appreciate the TPS teachers and want them to have all of the support they need. Please make providing a quality education program to Tolland students a priority.

Thank you for your time,
Kimberly Santini

Mon 4/1, 3:10 PM

Town Council

Hello TC,

I'm exhausted, I can only imagine that you all are as well. I'm sending on my last effort email as I know the budget is finalized on Thursday.

Please keep the BOE budget intact WITH assumption. Please consider using some of the unassigned fund to offset taxes.

The attacking of neighbors is too much - maybe social media is truly the end of humanity. Going forward prior to budget season please consider hosting info sessions. I believe it's owed to all residents- informative, non-politically charged, info sessions. Consider hosting these with the super. Throw in a food truck or a bonfire, and I'm sure people will attend! Ignorance is bliss, I

guess- but there are many people in town who want to be informed and just don't know how to get factual, non biased info. No spins, no gimmicks- hard facts that are easy to understand!

Anyway... about 4 years ago, one of you were sitting on this side of the email asking TC for the very same thing. So maybe the TC can work together and think outside the box and tap into a small portion of those reserves, the unassigned balance increased almost by 3 million since that letter was penned.

I'm keeping the faith!

Thanks for all you do,
Toni Moura
Tolland, Ct
Resident
Town and school volunteer
Mom

Mon 4/1, 6:02 PM

Town Council

Dear Tolland Town Council,

I am a parent of four Tolland Public School students: 2 graduates, and 2 current high schoolers. I have seen firsthand how years of cuts have negatively impacted my children throughout their school careers by the offering of less elective courses, extracurricular programs, and enrichment activities. I am truly concerned for further cuts affecting our student community and their ability to be competitive as they apply to college or pursue job aspirations. Chronic budget cuts can result in limiting students' exposure to diverse subjects and experiences, potentially narrowing their educational opportunities and stifling their creativity and interests.

As a Board of Education member, I consistently heard about the needs in our younger grades for additional teachers to lower class sizes, additional paraeducators to assist in overwhelmed classrooms, additional interventionists to assist with our yearly increasing special needs population, additional guidance counselors and mental health staff to assist students with so many mental health and emotional concerns. It is seemingly impossible to ever add resources when year over year the board is faced with debilitating cuts.

The Board of Education submitted a 6% budget increase last year, which was unfortunately reduced to 3%. This year they are again working towards increasing funding in an attempt to

get to a place of continued stability for the district going forward. I was pleased to see that the entire board, both Democrats and Republicans, pushed for a 4.84% or higher increase. Please work with them to finally end the unnecessary underfunding and town discord and instead fully fund our town's greatest asset.

Our children deserve the best education possible.

Thankyou,
Sophia Shaikh

Mon 4/1, 6:26 PM

Town Council

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to ask you to please fully fund the Board of Education budget request. I have three children, one recent graduate, and two others currently in school in Tolland and it's frustrating to see cuts being made to their education year after year.

All of my children play or have played on school teams, all pay-to-play, which has been extremely costly. How will parents be able to afford the extracurriculars their children enjoy plus costs for tutoring if necessary? With increased class sizes, especially considering that some high school class sizes for my boys have been up to 26 students, more children will require more one-on-one attention and extra help. For working parents like myself and my husband it is not only the extra costs but the ability to access after school tutoring easily due to time constraints. These kinds of stressors impact families both financially and personally.

My youngest is an excellent student who will be interested in taking honors level courses, AP level courses and electives in the high school. The faculty reductions that could occur if the school budget is decreased further will impact those opportunities for him as courses are eliminated. I have already witnessed the limited elective class options as my two older children have progressed through middle school and high school. The middle school hardly has any electives to choose from now and the high school has limited selection which is further limited due to the block schedule. My middle son, who is a senior, is currently taking an elective course which has sparked his interest in potentially choosing a college major. This course is likely going to be eliminated if the proposed BOE cuts are implemented. Students should be able to explore their interests and academic strengths through elective courses outside of their basic academic requirements.

For younger students, it's incomprehensible that they could lack the opportunity to participate in band at the intermediate school, computer education at the middle school, language offering in

the middle school. Computer education has already been limited over the years at Birch Grove and TIS, yet it is a skill almost every student will need as they enter the workforce. Beginning Spanish in the middle school has allowed some of my children to progress farther in language in high school, which has been great as most colleges expect 3 years of a language. My kids have had the opportunity to take an additional year or it has allowed them to add another meaningful elective, which can be helpful during the college application process to present themselves as well-rounded students.

No one wants their taxes to increase, but considering town funds are in a great place, it seems reasonable that we should utilize them to do what is necessary and responsible to have a robust school system for our students and for our community overall.

Thank you for understanding that our children are our future and our schools are important to our town and to our family.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Giordano

Town Council

Good evening,

I am writing again to ask you to please do what's best for the children of our community. Tolland continuously underfunds the Board of Ed budget and this needs to change! Please let the community vote for the budget with the least cuts and see what happens.

Sincerely,
Amy Green
32 Anthony Road South

Town Council

Dear Council,

I am writing to you today as a parent of a fourth grader in Tolland Public Schools in support of fully funding the Board of Education budget. As a taxpayer, I am hopeful that Town funds will be utilized to achieve the goal of an exceptional, highly-rated and fully-funded school district.

We began a family in Tolland in hopes of providing our daughter an excellent education, unfortunately we have witnessed years of reductions due to low budgeting, which has been very disappointing. Our daughter is an excellent student and voracious learner, however like so many students, is understandably impacted by reductions in positions and programming. Every student deserves the best opportunities for growth and further reductions to TPS will continue to be limiting for our children.

As well as academically, our schools also need to have the resources to properly handle the mental health concerns that are impacting our children at school daily. I am concerned with the rise of anxiety in students post-pandemic and understand that it is overwhelming the staff at the younger schools. Increasing class sizes and further overwhelming teachers will continue to negatively impact students with increased needs.

Our children deserve to be as competitive as students from other districts as they move onto higher learning or trades. The elimination of band at TIS, Computer Science in the middle school, and the reduction of language opportunities are detrimental losses for the long-term success of our students.

Lastly, it is my understanding that as teaching positions are eliminated, newer teachers are the ones lost. My daughter has a newer teacher who has had such a tremendously positive impact on her, it would be a tragedy for our school system to lose her. With so many high school positions poised to be eliminated, we are going to lose valuable resources to our children unnecessarily.

Thank you,
Meredith Werstak

Mon 4/1, 7:20 PM

Town Council;

Writing again to ask the Town Council to support the TM's proposed BOE budget as is.

Seeing the information that was sent out late last week by Dr Willett (on behalf of the BOE). This information is startling to say the least. The thought of either the yellow or red scenarios (see attached) becoming our reality is of grave concern to us as parents of middle/high schoolers.

Please take any and all resources you have to secure this budget as is for the town, so the BoE can avoid taking MORE OPPORTUNITIES away from our children- especially those in higher grades who don't have time on their side. My household is still reeling at the decision to cut the early childhood education program last year, just as our oldest transitioned to the high school. This is a major opportunity taken from our child who is interested in early childhood education.

How are all residents not upset with not offering this?!?! We need teachers to thrive as a community and a country, but we can't do anything to plant seeds while they're young and making career decisions? Now, this year, MORE programs will be lost -will it be music? Computer science? World languages? ALL of these?

Each will just devastate more families and do less to set our kids up for success in life. The trajectory we are on is not sustainable and we cannot keep riding the wave of a good 2015 ranking with our current course offerings, there are marked differences.

In an exchange copied from the minutes at the 1/23/24 TC meeting "Ms Stargardter asked if Ms. Hancock had ever seen the fund balance at this height of a percentage of expenditures. Ms. Hancock responded that it has been close, but not this high.'

We are very much in favor of the town utilizing creative ways with existing excess funds to offset tax increases and thus decrease the mill rate/potential tax increase to residents- thereby supporting ALL residents who live in Tolland. Please use it. With 72% of tolland households being families, the schools absolutely should NOT suffer as a consequence because this decision was made based on a small minority.

We'd also like to understand better the ECS fund - it seems just by its title it should be used by educators, for education. In Tolland I'm not sure that's the case, why? To quote Senator Gordon -who attended last weeks BoE meeting- when asked about the ECS fund's intent to be used for education, he responded 'I agree that the money that we have that we want to focus on education should be going to education".

Please use surplus reserve funding however it is necessary to salvage opportunities and keep Tolland schools competitive and desirable.

Thank you,
Tom and Liza Nowicki
176 Timber Trail
Sent from my iPhone

Mon 4/1, 8:15 PM

Town Council;

Brian Foley;

Walt Willett

Dear Town Council Members,

As a former chair of the Board of Education for four years, I have had a front row seat to four years of budget discussions and decisions affecting our district. I was relieved and hopeful to see that the new board was able to put through a much needed percentage increase and were in agreement that a significant one was necessary. I am also happy to see that a five-year plan is being looked at. There has been so much negative back and forth over the years, pitting elected officials against each other and putting the BOE and the Town at odds unnecessarily.

As a parent of three public school students, I am in a unique position. I have a son graduating, a daughter that just started Pre k 3, and another daughter at the middle school. I am literally your target audience. The cuts that would occur will significantly impact my children and will mean that my youngest will not have the same opportunities as my eldest children. The class sizes, especially in grades K-5 keep climbing and with the reduction of the 6th grade team on the table, it doesn't look like the middle school will offer much relief to students or staff. The intervention rates keep growing and growing and for years I have heard our administrators ask for help, which we haven't been able to give them. Children are falling through the cracks and teachers are overwhelmed. We can't let this continue. The idea of Computer Education being eliminated at TMS seems ridiculous. How can we not see that students need this important class for lifelong computer skills? The possibility of languages being cut or reduced significantly at the middle and high school is very disappointing. Our students deserve well-rounded educational opportunities as students in other districts have.

I hope that the Town Council can continue the work that the Board of Education tried to do by adopting their budget. They are working together in a bipartisan manner to try to put a stop to years of damage being done by underfunding the school system and get it back on course. Please pay attention to the numbers, a 1.7% increase over 11 years is not maintaining a healthy district. It's time to come together and do better for our children. Thanks for taking the time and reading this email.

Best,

Ashley Lundgren

Mon 4/1, 8:28 PM

Town Council;

Philip Mazzilli <philip.mazzilli@gmail.com>

To the Town Council Members,

We support the BOE budget proposal and the current budget funding scenario that the Town Manager has included in his proposed budget.

It's imperative that we increase the funding to our schools and town functions so that we remain competitive with the education and services provided with surrounding towns. In 2015 we moved to Tolland because of the reputation of its school; only to see the BOE funding sputter to less than 2% increases over the past 10 years. It's time to get creative and work together to support a budget that not only supports our future but provides at least a level services budget.

We support the proposed BOE and TM budget with no further reductions. We need to focus on adding value to the Town of Tolland for the future of our current citizens, students, property values and the dynamic future residents we hope attract so that we can ensure Tolland continues to grow, maintain and thrive as a prosperous place to live.

Sincerely,

Philip & Jessica Mazzilli

255 S River Rd

Mon 4/1, 8:28 PM

Town Council;

Brian Foley;

Hello Town Council and BOE,

In anticipation of the Hearing tomorrow night, I would like to restate my (a) complete support for the town's budget increase (necessary to fund basic services in our town), (b) support for the town to take over the USIF debt, and (c) request that more of the Tax Stabilization Fund and the Unassigned Fund-Fund Balance be used to offset taxes.

Thank you,

Kate Howard-Bender

103 Goose Lane

4/1/24

Town Council

Dear Town Council,

I wanted to take this opportunity to write and share my opinion regarding the various budget scenarios that have been brought forth by Dr. Willett and the Tolland Board of Education. Even though I work hard to stay up to date on all BoE budgets matters, I appreciated level of detail given in the recent breakdown of budget scenarios document listed in yellow, green and red that allowed us to really see what is at stake here.

I am writing to express my support for the full amount of the budget that the Board of Ed has presented to you and that no further cuts to that budget be made. I recognize these decisions are not made lightly and that this is a complicated issue. I will note that it blows my mind that the amount of cuts listed in the red column of the document mentioned above is even a possibility being considered...I'm not sure how we could come back from cuts like those. I know we can do better.

I write this as a proud member of Tolland and a concerned parent and I appreciate your time reading this.

Tabitha McKown
65 Wildwood Rd
Tolland

Mon 4/1, 9:24 PM

Town Council

Back on March 6th I sent the email below.

Almost a month later and the need to emphasize it seems greater now.

Please put your support behind the budget the BOE put forward and support the education of Tolland's children.

Dear Mr. Foley and Town Council Members:

Please support the budget put forth by the board of education for the Tolland Public Schools. As disheartening as it is, further reductions will be a detriment to the education of the children of Tolland.

As it is this is a bare minimum budget, offering nothing new for students only cuts. It's beneficial for everyone to invest in this town's schools.

Please be supportive leaders.

Jennifer Abramo
Parent of a THS 10th grader

Mon 4/1, 4:00 PM

Hello TC and BOE Dr W and TM Foley

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to urge the Tolland Town council to consider maintaining a level services budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Given the challenges faced by our community, it is crucial to prioritize stability and continuity in essential municipal services and those for our students staff and administrators at the schools

Furthermore, I propose utilizing some of the funds available in the town's various municipal funds for tax stabilization purposes THIS YEAR, but work to develop a long term plan for creating a sustainable budget for all in town. These funds present an opportunity to alleviate the burden on taxpayers, while ensuring the delivery of necessary services remains uninterrupted.

Additionally, I advocate for the Town to take over the USIF fund payment, as it rightfully belongs under municipal management. This move will streamline administrative processes and ensure efficient allocation of resources for the benefit of our community.

While we often hear about those that cannot afford a tax increase, and nobody wants them, however maintaining a robust town where we have folks wanting to move to town is an advantage for Tolland as well

Last week I listened with intent to the BOE meeting and a 21st century place of work -today we aren't offering a lot of what was mentioned and we aren't offering our students the opportunity to learn many 21st century skills

I trust that the Town Council shares my commitment to the well-being of all of our residents and the prudent management of public finances. Thank you for considering these suggestions, and I look forward to your thoughtful deliberation on this matter tomorrow.

Please support a level services budget -anything less will be a disservice to our town employees, students, & residents

Best regards,

Liz

Thanks!

Liz

Liz Costa

Town Council

I have one request, that you please fully fund the BOE budget.

As a school district our schools have been underfunded for years. As you are well aware we are behind comparable districts in school funding. With an average budget increase of 1.7% in eleven years, how can we say this is sustainable?

Although my family of 6's median income is significantly lower than our towns median income, we must invest in our schools. Of course I don't want my taxes to increase but for our town and schools to thrive we must properly invest in our schools.

One way to achieve this goal while not highering taxes is to use some of our town's general fund balance. For example, the unassigned fund balance has over \$1.2 million above what is required by policy. Why not use that money to help keep our tax increase to a minimum?

Please look at all the avenues you can to approve a budget that fully funds the BOE and allows our town to grow and thrive. Look past your political affiliations and work together.

Wishing you all the best,

Teresa Carey

38 Nedwied Rd.

Mon 4/1, 10:06 PM

Town Council

To whom it may concern ,

We moved to Tolland 12 years ago for the education system . We love the town , the people of Tolland and our kids love their teachers. We have some of the hardest working teachers who go above and work tirelessly to provide a good education for our children in the town of Tolland and I'm grateful for them everyday . Since moving here our taxes have gone up every year and yet the services keep becoming less. We are losing valuable teachers and classes , athletics and academics are being cut. We have excess funding that should be used towards education , toward a dedicated full time police and fire department , for our seniors . This fund needs to be allocated . People can't afford to keep having taxes go up and resources go down we are losing students to other school systems, people moving out due to increase rise in taxes or having street take overs that we sit by and watch since we don't have a dedicated police department . We don't have a dedicated resource officer in each school , class sizes are increasing to unobtainable numbers with less and less teachers and course offerings. Every year it seems more and more people are opting to leave THS. As a town Tolland should hang its hat and invest in the people of the town instead of showcasing the size of our wallet with surplus savings that doesn't mean anything when the town isn't investing the money into what truly matters.

Saving for a rainy day when it's pouring in our town doesn't make sense .

Meghan K. Soroka

Mon 4/1, 10:54 PM

Town Council

Dear Members of the Town Council,

I am writing to express my full support for your unanimous approval of the education budget.

Our schools are struggling and it is not ok. No public school system should struggle, let alone one in a town with funds available like ours.

People who don't support the children of Tolland say the education in our town is "fine". My family and MANY others didn't move here for "fine". My family moved here for a robust school system with rigor, diverse high school course offerings, and a strong foreign language program that, when we bought our home in 2005, started at the elementary school level. Think about how that has changed in Tolland. It is truly sad.

What happened? You know what happened. Please don't let it continue.

Sincerely,
Amanda Doyle
8 Lakeview Drive Extension

4/2/24

Yesterday, 8:56 AM

Town Council

Dear Town Council Members,

I'm writing to you as a concerned grandparent who wants the best education for my grandchildren and all the kids in our town. I've been keeping an eye on the Board of Education meetings, and I was really impressed with the plan they came up with for the next five years.

I believe that passing the Republican Board of Ed budget is the right thing to do. It's important for our kids to have all the resources they need to learn and grow. With the budget proposed by the Republican Board of Ed, we can make sure our schools have what they need to support our children's education.

My daughter moved back to town because of the schools. I want to make sure that they stay in the town that they grew up in. From what I've seen there is a path forward that benefits everyone in town, Please find a way. I urge you to listen to the voices of families like mine and pass the Republican Board of Ed budget. Let's give our kids the chance to succeed in school and in life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Betty Sue

4/2/24

Town Council

Hello,

I am emailing today to express my support for the budget. I would support more funding for the BOE budget if that option was available. I have 2 children currently in the school, 5th and 10th grade. My youngest child has 25 kids in his class and having that many 10 year olds in one class has negatively affected his learning. His amazing teachers spend more time redirecting students than actually teaching lessons. My 10th grader has missed out on many elective class options so far. There are huge waitlists for elective classes that will help students be more well rounded, such as the culinary classes. Other school districts have many more class options than Tolland and our children are falling behind. The thought of the current 5th grade class continuing with 25 kids in classes in 6th grade is awful. My son wants to take honors classes, those classes do not work with 25 kids. I really hope that the town can put forth a fair budget, supporting all aspects of the community we live in. No one wants higher taxes, myself included, however our current school children deserve the same great education of years past and that deserve to graduate with an education that sets them up to be competitive with other surrounding towns. Please fund the full BOE budget!

Thank you,

Meredith and Jamey Dodge

53 Timber Trail

Sent from my iPhone

4/2/24

Good Morning,

My family and I are hoping that the Town Council will fund the Education Budget to the best of its ability using any and all revenue sources available. We hope that the Town Council puts forth a budget that gives the town's education sector its due services after years of underfunding and cuts. We are hoping to be able to support a robust town budget that puts education at the epicenter of a vibrant town plan.

Best,

Sarah and Joe Goldman

4/2/24

Dear Tolland Town Council,

TC Goal 4C - Improve transparency and communication to the public regarding the town budget process.

Pg 12 of the Public Hearing Presentation has an * next to Debt Service and explains "**Although this reflects an increase in this budget, it is a reclassification out of the Operating Budget to Debt Service." That is not transparent. Under the TTM proposal the debt that is "reclassified" is added to Debt Service, but it is not coming "out of the Operating Budget". The BoE budget has not been reduced by that amount before being increased by the proposed 4.84% or \$2,081,293. The BoE budget proposed in the Town Manager's budget will actually have \$2.7M (2.08M + 650,000) in new spending. That needs to be communicated clearly.

If the goal is to give the BoE an effective 6.35 % increase in new spending, then please be transparent and state that. Honestly lay out the BoE requested 6.35% increase of \$2,730,722 for a 24/25 budget of \$45,720,577. Get rid of the smoke and mirrors approach. Do not add to our already high Debt Service obligation (compared to neighboring towns). Don't complicate an already higher-than-normal overall spending increase and much higher-than-normal tax increase proposal. In order to get anything even close to this proposal passed at referendum, you must be transparent, direct, non-partisan, and factual.

Shifting the BoE's share of debt payments to Debt Service may make sense eventually, but not as part of this year's budget process. You need to take your time to draft a new agreement and properly amend Town of Tolland Code 176-24 Policy 25 Town of Tolland and Tolland Board of Education Utility Internal Service Policy/Agreement which was adopted by both the TC and BoE in 11-2013 and amended on 7-13-2021. Wouldn't you need to hold a Public Hearing to further amend said Agreement and related Town of Tolland Policy 25 before absolving the BoE from any further payments? It's interesting to see that Stafford BoE has line item 830 (\$490,000) in their budget for debt service which they explain includes the solar lease payment contribution returned to the Town of Stafford. Their electricity payments have decreased by approximately \$350,000. This seems to be similar to the original intent of the BoE/Town of Tolland UISF Agreement. If it hasn't worked out in Tolland as intended, then it needs a thorough study and discussion before just adding the payments to another account.

If you remove the \$650,000 addition from Debt Service and find legitimate use of another \$100,000 - \$200,000 of fund balance, you should be able to come to a budget that still provides a sufficient increase for the town budget, 4.84% for the schools (\$2.1M on top of 23/24 funding level), and a tax increase of under 4%. It would show that you have listened to residents who would like an increase in the BoE budget and to those who may struggle with another 5.2% on top of the very high taxes we already pay in Tolland. I would support that budget.

Thank you for considering all points of view,

Deb Goetz

176 Kate Lane

4/2/24

Eric Nelson

Town Council

I want to add my voice to the conversation concerning the proposed property tax increase and the horrible idea of ruining our historic town green with sidewalks.

First, those of us on a fixed income have a very difficult time with the taxes we already pay here. I'm sure that some of the increase is necessary. I'm also sure that some of it is not. How much for that sidewalk?

And as for the sidewalk on the green: There is a very easy fix to the imaginary problem of the wheelchairs not having access for gatherings on the green. MOVE THE GATHERINGS TO A LARGER, SAFER PLACE WITH MORE PARKING THAT ALREADY IS ACCESSIBLE FOR WHEELCHAIRS. Or does that make too much sense?

No tax increase. No sidewalk.

April 2, 2024

Dear Members of the Tolland Town Council and Town Manager:

Thank you for the opportunity to share public comment during this budget season.

Tax season reminds me of making soup from a stone. The folktale Stone Soup likely has its roots in oral tradition, and has morphed and spanned continents in its retelling and writing. A common theme in these retellings has to do with the ingenuity of a hungry traveler, who convinces neighbors through good humor and careful timing that a little bit of this, and a little bit of that, would surely improve the soup, started with a simple stone. Tolland is an excellent community, with solid services. In tax season, all of the neighbors vote for a mil rate that we feel will keep our services high quality, and maybe even make them better. A little bit of this, and a little bit of that, from all of our neighbors, make a fine soup. Or at least, that's the idea. Part of our taxes each year are squirreled away into a variety of funds, stuffing the pantry, as it were. This is grounded in good theory, as having healthy savings is fiscally responsible, on a variety of levels. Now that our stores are overflowing, it's time to look at what's on the table as well as what's in the pantry as we figure out what to cook, in order to maintain our services, with the goal of making them even better.

Tolland can move forward using the tax dollars that are in savings to level out the tax burden in the current proposed budget, and maintain the services proposed. Doing so would not put Tolland's AAA rating at risk, nor would it increase risk to the town's ongoing financial security. Rather, using a strategically calculated portion of the fund balance(maintaining the minimum balance per best practice) to offset the proposed mil rate would ensure that the budget proposal

that is ultimately moved to the residents honors the contributions of past neighbors, and protects current neighbors from undue burden, while maintaining critical, foundational town services. Tolland has many excellent town services, and takes pride in its fiscal prudence. And yet, we must jointly realize that at some point, we will not be adding enough to the pot, to make something wonderful. If the Tolland Public Schools, in particular, are faced with a budget lower than the proposed 4.84% increase (with the UISF payment removed), the kinds of cuts that will be made will be far less than palatable to current and prospective residents alike — reducing critical positions such as World Language, English, Science, and a Librarian, to name just a few. We will be effectively taking the stone out altogether, leaving nothing but hot water. Timing is everything, and this time of abundance makes it easier to ensure that Tolland's core services will remain robust. Please use all means possible to present a reasonable budget that maintains full funding for services while softening the tax impact for current residents, by utilizing a responsible amount of the fund balance. Let our past selves help us now. Most importantly, please present a budget to residents which includes the proposed 4.84% increase (with the UISF payment removed) for the Board of Education budget, so that we can continue to be an attractive town for young families to settle and stay, and keep our property values high. Thank you for considering these comments, and for your service to the town of Tolland.

Sincerely,
Kate Vallo

4/2/24

Hello,

The Town Council has the responsibility to appropriately fund our schools and BoE budget. This has not happened in several years and our children and staff have lost programs, effective learning environments and services.

For the first time in several years, we have a Board of Education attempting to work together in the best interest of our school system. The budget adopted by the Board is still lacking appropriate funding but it is a start in building back the capacity of Tolland Public Schools. As the Town Council, please do your part with adopting the budget and consider using the Reserve Fund if necessary to offset tax costs. We moved to Tolland prepared to pay the taxes required to have our children grow in excellent schools. To our disappointment, Tolland seems committed to building a retirement community at our expense.

Caroline Hargraves
28 Charles St, Tolland, CT 06084

4/2/24

Dear Town Council Members,

Hi, my name is Mila Thompson, and I'm a junior at Tolland High School. I'm writing to talk about something super important: our education. I really want to make sure we get the best education possible for our future. I've been hearing a lot about how our schools haven't been getting enough money for the past 11 years. That's a long time! And it's not good because it means we might miss out on stuff we need to learn. I'm worried because I've heard that if we keep not getting enough money, things like computer classes and language classes might have to go away. That would be a bummer because those are things that could help us in the future. Also, I've noticed that some of my friends are struggling in school, especially in the younger grades. It's sad because they might not be getting the help they need. And I've seen more kids feeling really stressed and anxious lately. We need support for our mental health too. So, I'm asking you, please, can we make sure our schools get enough money? I know it's probably complicated, but all us kids really want is a good education so we can have a bright future. Thanks for listening.

Sincerely,

Mila Thompson