

**SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA
TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION
JOINT MEETING
HICKS MEMORIAL MUNICIPAL CENTER
6TH FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBERS
FEBRUARY 28, 2017 - 7:00 P.M.**

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TOLLAND, CT

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Shirley M. Bailey

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rick Field, Chair; William Eccles, Vice-Chair; Robert Green; Paul Krasusky; Kristen Morgan; Joe Sce and David Skoczulek

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS PRESENT: Sam Adlerstein, Chairman; Patrick Doyle, Vice-Chair; Michelle Harrold; Karen Moran; Robert Pagoni; Jeff Schroeder, Susan Seaver and Colleen Yudichak

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS ABSENT: Kathy Gorsky

OTHERS PRESENT: Steven Werbner, Town Manager; Walter Willett, Superintendent; Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records; Beverly Bellody, Human Services; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; Sam Belsito, State Representative

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

Steven Werbner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Werbner began the meeting by giving an update as to what he knows at this time regarding the Governor's budget. There is a lot of confusion as to what is contained within the Governor's budget, and there is confusion as to what is going to happen with the recommendations made by the Governor's budget through the legislative process. There has not been a lot of deliberation about the budget at this point. So, a lot is unknown.

Every town is different. Some towns saw small reductions, while some towns saw reductions of several million. Tolland is on the high side at \$7 – 8m of loss. Some towns have decided to gamble. They don't believe the numbers in the Governor's recommendation are going to come to fruition in the end. If you are gambling on hundreds of thousands of dollars that might be a gamble he would be willing to take. Due to the dollar amount of Tolland's reductions, he is not going to recommend a gamble on \$7 - 8m.

Tolland is in a difficult situation, which is made more difficult by our town Charter. It has a mandatory referendum process, which is difficult to work with based on the time limits associated with it. He explained that the referendum needs to occur the first Tuesday in May, and every two weeks after until a budget is passed with no timeout allowed. The Appropriations Committee reports at the end of April, which will be of no use to us for the first referendum process. Tolland's Council needs to adopt the budget by the first of April. Often, what the Appropriations Committee recommends is not definitive towards what the final approved budget is by the State Legislature. Further complicating the situation is that the tax bills go out July 1st. They need at least two weeks in order to print tax bills and prepare them for mailing on a July 1st deadline. So, ideally the budget needs to be adopted by the beginning of June. If

that deadline is not met, there is statutory language that allows tax bills to be sent out at the current mill rate, and then sending out supplemental tax bills based upon the new mill rate. Should this situation arise, it would need to be examined.

The Legislation may pass some 'not withstanding language,' which may allow towns to delay their budget setting process until sometime in June to allow for definitive numbers to come from the State. Mr. Werbner has asked that if they pass the 'not withstanding language' that they also consider language to allow for extra time to send out tax bills.

From his reading of what is happening at the State level, it is not getting better. The State has a \$1.7 billion deficit, which is only going to get higher. The teacher pension shift was \$400m. If the State wants to correct that, and say the towns won't need to cover those, the State needs to come up with \$400m somewhere else. To say that Tolland will not lose \$7m is very unlikely. It may not be \$7m, but he thinks everyone needs to come to the reality that we are stuck with this.

He had done some projections. If the BOE got their 2.14%, he would not recommend a 2.14% reduction in the town side. He would say the town should get 2%. Also, if they were to lose ESC revenue, he would still be talking about a 5.5 – 13% tax increase. Do you think that is going to pass in Tolland? He wishes the BOE could get what they want. He thought the BOE's budget was very reasonable when it came in, it could've been a budget that would have passed. He also thought that what he originally proposed for the town (less than a 1% increase) would have been reasonable. Being practical and realistic, he doesn't see it in this environment.

He suggests that the Town Charter get revised at some point in the future, although it would be a 6 – 9 month process, and won't help us now. This is his recommendation: For the first referendum, he will present the most responsible budget based upon the numbers that are known from the Governor. He suggests that they put out notices that the budget should not pass based upon the uncertainty associated with the State's numbers. They will investigate if paper ballots could be used to reduce the cost, limit the hours of voting, and limit the voting to one location. Each referendum costs \$3,000. He would rather spend \$3,000 multiple times and get it right, rather than guess on a 14% increase in taxes or a 0% increase in taxes. This has nothing to do with whether the BOE should have 2.14% or the town should have 2%. It is the process we are dealing with, and the circumstances that we are faced with. He is not changing his numbers no matter what anyone says.

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

Mr. Werbner said this is something they do regularly. Dr. Willett and he talk about things they can do in a collaborative fashion. They most recently have collaborated on the School Resource Officers, and they have been working closely with the health insurance fund. At this point, he doesn't have any other recommendations or suggestions.

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

Before the public asked questions, Mr. Adlerstein offered to give some context regarding the BOE's budget.

Sam Adlerstein used a PowerPoint to discuss the BOE's budget, and provided handouts to the Council members. He said they organized their budget around 4 "C's": Curriculum, Comprehensive Assessment, Culture and Community. The BOE wants to be the District that attracts people, and retains students so that they do not leave. He used the analogy involving an egg toss. He commented that Mr. Belsito said at

least week's meeting that the radical numbers the Governor has proposed are not going to happen. It is just a starting point. Mr. Adlerstein said he contacted 25-30 towns and showed slides providing comments regarding what the other towns are doing. Of all the towns that he spoke to, only one other town is doing what Mr. Werbner suggested.

Mr. Werbner said that is incorrect. He is a member of CCM and has contacts all over the State of Connecticut. The vast majority of people are taking the Governor's numbers and using them for revenue; a vast number of the communities are taking the teacher pension and putting it into the BOE as an expense. He said we are not doing that. A vast number are coming up with the types of increases that he is talking about. People are not ignoring what the Governor is recommending; they are doing exactly what Mr. Werbner has done. He is not the only one out of 32 towns that is doing something different. He said Mr. Adlerstein's statement is not true.

Mr. Adlerstein did clarify that he only received the BOE's perspectives. He did not speak to Town Managers.

Mr. Adlerstein continued his presentation quickly in an effort to allow for public comment. A slide was shown titled 17-18 BOE Budget and the content of it was explained. He provided four scenarios. The first scenario is: 2.14% Budget has a 0.8 staff reduction and gets them on track for the 4 C's, maintains the quality of services, draws people in town, and allows them to retain their students. For his next three scenarios, he drew lines through them, because they would consist of huge reductions.

In order to start the regular Town Council meeting on time, questions and public participation were deferred to the 'regular' Town Council meeting. Please refer to those minutes.

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

Joe Sce referenced an e-mail put out by Dr. Willett. He wanted confirmation that to have a 2.14% budget, with essentially no staff increase, means that all their costs have to do with contracted salary increases, which is driving this whole thing. Could it be possible to open negotiations with the Teacher's Union again to revise their contract to not call for increases considering what is going on in the State?

Walter Willett said he can make a request of the Teacher's Union to reconsider. He didn't want to talk for them, but as they went through the process, the agreement settled upon was a result of all kinds of data. Other districts were paying more than Tolland was. The settlement was to balance that out a little bit, even though it didn't make it all the way there. He is not sure how they will react to such a request.

Mr. Doyle also mentioned that the budget presentation document shows other factors impacting the budget.

5. Adjournment: Mr. Werbner adjourned the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

Steven R. Werbner, Town Manager

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk