

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
HICKS MEMORIAL MUNICIPAL CENTER
6th FLOOR COUNCIL ROOM
MARCH 15, 2017**

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Shirley M. Bailey

Present: Richard Field, Chairman
Robert Green
Kristen Morgan
Joseph Sce
David Skoczulek
Paul Krasusky

Also Present: Steven Werbner, Town Manager
Michael Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services
Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records
Walt Willett, School Superintendent
BOE staff
Board of Education members

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm.

BOE Superintendent Walt Willett went through a presentation on the BOE budget: "Tale of Two Tollands". There are 380 unfunded mandates and enrollment is down. Over 10 years staff positions have been reduced by 37. Dr. Willett believes we are at a crossroads or consolidation vs. expansion. He wants to maintain what we have to create a "lighthouse" concept to seek partnerships and draw students from other districts to Tolland over the next five years. Consolidation would only bring a loss of control for our schools. We need to maintain our SRBI/RTI programs so that we prevent kids from going into special Ed. Dr. Willett wants to create a PR campaign to bring these new students to Tolland.

Town Council members, BOE members and residents had questions and comments such as: How do we recruit students? What is the timeframe to bring students to Tolland? Do you have a 5 year plan? A letter on funding should be sent to State leaders from BOE and Town Council.

Town Council Members Joseph Sce presented the TC with a letter talking about the Fire Dept. budget and the need for a Fire Study. The budget has gone up 27% in the last 4 years compared to other expenses that have gone up 8.9% over the same period. The letter is attached. Town Manager Steven Werbner asked for and received consensus approval from the Town Council on the changing of the recycling program to every other week pick-up and the vendor contract extension, as well as the format for the Budget Mailer.

Various residents made the following comments: Put 2.1% to referendum; support Dr. Willett; vote down budget that holds us disproportionately harmed compared to other towns; need to be realistic high mill rate will bring down property values; harder to sell voters on no vote on zero increase then to go up to 2.14%; if we have a high mill rate like 39 mills people will not come here.

Meeting adjourned at 8:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Wilkinson
Director of Administrative Services

Before beginning this recommendation, I would like to make it clear my opinions are not based upon the performance of any member of the Ambulance or Fire Prevention service providers but rather the stark reality we are dealing with as a result of the state's current fiscal situation and its impact on our town. In fact nothing but praise can be given to the hard work the mostly volunteer group does for this town.

However, due to the position we have been put in, it's important to look at every aspect of costs this town incurs, what is driving those costs and the trends we see in respect to these services. Steve's budget recommends a 50% reduction in the town's police security through a reduction of 2 resident troopers partly attributable to additional costs for the town's assumption of 100% of the troopers' salaries. Considering the resident trooper program cost the town approximately \$773,000 for the current year, it is only reasonable to examine the other public safety services of the town.

The ambulance and fire prevention services for the 2017 fiscal year are budgeted for \$1,088,000. The current year budget represents a 27% increase in costs over the past 4 years with an average of 6.8% per year increase. This compares to an 8.9% increase in total expenditures over the same 4 year period with an average of 2.2% increase. A significantly greater increase in costs is being incurred for these services relative to total costs of the town. In addition, the following increases in expenditures are recommended over the next 5 years:

Year 1	Stipend for volunteer firefighters	20,000
	Replace ambulance	214,000
Year 3	Building Upgrades	3,000,000
	Replace rescue and ET truck	1,500,000
Year 5	Replace ambulance	285,000
	Refurbish ET truck	130,000
		<u>5,149,000</u>

Some of the ambulance costs come out of the ambulance reserve fund, but that only represents at best 10% of the total costs noted above. As Steve has pointed out, the costs of fire equipment is outpacing that of inflation. With these significant costs and significant reductions in the BOE budget and other town services, it's time to re-think how we are providing these services.

For comparison, the town of Vernon has approximately \$1.4 million budgeted for its fire and ambulance services. Of that budget, approximately \$688k is spent on water from the fire extinguishers leaving approximately \$685k for the remaining services. This is a town with a much denser population and greater variety of structures to deal with. We are also surrounded by towns, each with their own fire departments servicing all the same equipment our town is servicing.

Since I am not aware of any one on the Town Council with experience to determine if there are efficiencies that can be gained with our services or if we are spending our funding in the most efficient

manor, I strongly recommend the Town Council direct the Town Manager to seek a consultant or consulting firm to audit the Ambulance and Fire Rescue services with the goal to see how expenditures are being incurred and what areas of efficiencies can be gained considering the town's needs and surrounding resources available. There could be several opportunities for savings such as regionalizing certain aspects of services provided.