

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL TOLLAND HIGH SCHOOL – AUDITORIUM APRIL 23, 2014 – 7:30 P.M.

ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jack Scavone, Chairman; George Baker, Vice-Chair; William Eccles; Richard Field; Paul Krasusky and Jan Rubino Ben Stanford

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ben Stanford

OTHERS PRESENT: Steven Werbner, Town Manager; Michael Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Jack Scavone called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Recited.
3. **MOMENT OF SILENCE:** None.
4. **ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION**

- 4.1 Pursuant to C9-9 of the Town of Tolland Charter, the Town Council shall arrange for an annual budget presentation. The annual budget presentation is intended to provide information and encourage public discussion.

Mr. Scavone added 4.2 to the Agenda. Mr. Adlerstein will show some slides regarding the BOE's budget.

Mr. Scavone advised that prior to the Annual Budget Referendum the Town Council is required by Charter to arrange for an Annual Budget Presentation. He reviewed all the public meetings held on the budget to date, and advised that a presentation will be given on April 24th at the Senior Center. A PowerPoint was used.

The budget referendum will be on Tuesday, May 6th. The question on the ballot will be:

“Shall the Town of Tolland’s proposed 2014-2015 budget of \$53,175,832, reflecting a spending increase of \$1,331,107 or 2.57% which is equal to a 2.849% tax increase of .86 mills compared to the current mill rate and requiring a tax rate of 31.05 mills, be adopted? Yes/No”

This budget will maintain town services, continue to provide quality education for our children, provide for certain programmatic improvements and produce a fiscally responsible budget. The expenditure summary for FY2014-2015 was reviewed: Town Departments: 4.12% increase; Capital Expenditures: 39.11% decrease; Debt Service: 4.08% decrease and Board of Education: 3.13% increase. Total 2.57% increase. In looking at a pie chart, 70% of our money goes towards education, the town operating budget is 21%, capital improvements are negligible and debt service is 8.5%.

The BOE requested 3.44%. The Town Manager recommended: 3.13%. The Town Council adopted 3.13%. The slight difference was due to the Resource Officer's compensation. Even though 3.13% was adopted, if you consider the Resource Officer's funding, the BOE did receive 3.44%.

A slide showing tax implications on three houses was reviewed. Residents are encouraged to go to the calculator located on the town's website to figure out how the increase will affect them.

Mr. Scavone said that this Town Council and BOE have been more involved in this process. They have worked very hard to investigate everything; to work together to come up with a budget that has something in it for everyone. He added that if residents really want to make a difference in this town, get involved. You can get involved by educating yourself, sign up for e-blast, follow Facebook and Twitter, sign up for a Board or Commission. You can make a difference. He is proud to serve with all who put time into this budget and thanked them. The town needs knowledgeable people that care.

He reminded that the town has two (2) polling places: the Hicks building and the Senior Center. The polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. If anyone has any questions regarding your voting district, please contact the Registrars of Voters 860/ 871-3634, the Town Clerk's Office 860/871-3630 or the Town Manager's Office 860/ 871-3600.

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Mr. Scavone finished by saying that the Town Council only has the ability to approve a dollar amount requested by the BOE, and invited Mr. Adlerstein to give his presentation.

4.2 What is in the BOE's budget and why:

Mr. Adlerstein, Chair of the BOE, spoke about the BOE's budget process and what their budget contains. Back on December 3rd, the Council and the BOE met and came up with a goal in common, which he read. They dove deep in the budget process. He showed a budget plan, and reminded it is still a work in process. There are three parts to it: 1.) they wanted to maintain level services, 2.) focus on priorities and (3.) look at potential cost savings. A slide was shown detailing the year over year cost changes. The health insurance cost is approximately \$5m of their budget. This year is a perfect storm, because there is a lot of change happening, including the common core curriculum, mandated teacher evaluations and student testing.

The common core curriculum is designed for full day kindergarten. More than 75% of districts have implemented all-day kindergarten. For the most part, implementing all-day kindergarten is not a choice, but a necessity. With regard to the Resource Officer, the biggest benefit beyond safety is prevention and reducing risky behaviors. A slide showing that 31% of sophomores disagree or strongly disagree that they have not been teased or bullied. Also, binge drinking and the use of marijuana are on the rise. Putting a school resource officer in the school is the opportunity to do additional prevention work. The principals are very supportive of having the Resource Officer in the schools.

With regard to pay to participate, a committee was formed to look at our fees. In 2003, about 10% of our athletics programs were paid for by participation fees. In 2012, 75% of our athletics programs were paid for by participation fees. The plan was to reduce them a little bit over several years. Last year, they did not get reduced. This year, there is a modest reduction in the budget. This applies to clubs and athletics.

With regard to the reduction in enrollment, there has been a decline and they forecast a decline in the foreseeable future. In this next year, enrollment does not come down enough in a particular grade to cut a class, although it does make an adjustment to class size, which is a benefit. In FY ending 2016, they do see that there will be an impact in particular grades to reduce classes.

If there is a surplus from this budget, they now have an opportunity to use a reserve account. It gives the BOE the opportunity to set aside some money, so that as issues come up they can be addressed.

Mr. Doyle, Vice Chair of the BOE, began by saying if you really want to make a difference, get involved. They have been looking at the low cost and no cost options that can be used. Through their project with Honeywell, Honeywell has agreed to do some volunteer work in our middle school (painting the bathrooms). They are asking residents to come out and volunteer as well. The residents will be doing some of the prep work, so that when Honeywell comes in for that one day, they will be able to finish the job. It is an opportunity to make improvements to our schools without costing any money. They are looking at June 14th and June 21st for volunteers to come out and help.

Mr. Scavone said going forward, it is critical that we not go from a one year budget to another one year budget, etc. The thinking of this group of people is to look at two years, three years, and five years down the road. They want to investigate the needs of the community, and plan for them.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

A Resident: She looked at the statistics over the last five years and those that have been anticipated for student enrollment in the next three years; our population is down 432 students in the last five years. If the BOE is estimating 21.5 students per classroom that is 21 classrooms full of children that we are no longer educating. Despite that, the BOE budget in the last five years is up 15%, and the number of full-time equivalent positions has only dropped 2.5 positions. Is anyone bringing this to the BOE's attention? Now that we are educating fewer children, maybe it should go to tax relief or the town?

Mr. Scavone said they have been involved in this for the last couple of years, and there have been conversations on this. Again, the Council can only approve the number. If the numbers do not look right, it is their responsibility to act. The BOE decides what the number is and why. Mr. Adlerstein said there will be significant reductions in personal in the following budget year. Ms. Rubino said there have been facilities studies, open workshops and the BOE meetings where public participation is encouraged. She suggested that is when these issues should be brought up. Mr. Krasusky said a lot of times the increases of the costs are outpacing the decreases in enrollment. An example is the health insurance costs. Mr. Eccles said it is unfair to say that the BOE is not aware of the enrollment rate. Mr. Adlerstein mentioned it in his presentation. Mr. Adlerstein recommended that she look at the class size. When you compare our classes to other districts, our sizes are larger. He doesn't believe they are out of line.

Dale Kasai of 32 Marbella Lane: He complimented the Council and the BOE on their work. The public has been invited to the meetings and workshops. He believes a lot has been learned by both the Council and BOE. Anyone is welcomed to comment on anything at the meetings. He is pleased to hear that all-day kindergarten is a necessity.

Kathy Gorsky of 211 Gehring Road: She is not sure how many staff they have lost over the last few years, although she has seen huge reductions in programs and opportunities in our school system. For example, World Language has been cut hugely, the music department has taken a hit, and pay-to-play has gone up, which is an issue for families.

Gerry Griffin of 40 Cervens Road: He asked for an explanation as to why the budget increase for the town and BOE was 2.57%, but the mill increase was 2.849.

Mr. Eccles said the amount of money that the town has to raise is not \$53,000,000. We get approximately \$12-13m from the State. That number has not changed from last year to this year. So, when we have to come up with the difference, the percentage is a larger percent of a smaller number. Mr. Eccles used an example to clarify his explanation.

Mr. Scavone thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting.

6. **ADJOURNMENT:** Bill Eccles moved to adjourn the meeting; Seconded by Rick Field at 8:16 p.m. All were in favor.

Jack Scavone, Council Chair

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk