

**MEETING MINUTES
TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
TOLLAND HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM
MARCH 27, 2013 - 7:30 P.M.**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jack Scavone, Chairman; Richard Field, Vice-Chair; Sam Belsito; Joshua Freeman; Mark Gill; Jan Rubino and Benjamin Stanford

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

OTHERS PRESENT: Steven Werbner, Town Manager

1. Call to Order: Steve Werbner called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

2. PUBLIC HEARING ITEM:

2.1 2013-2014 Budget Proposed by the Town Manager

Town Government	\$10,907,859
Capital Improvement Reserve Fund	\$ 141,991
Board of Education	\$36,059,250
Debt Service	<u>\$ 4,735,625</u>
Total Proposed Budget	\$51,844,725

Mr. Werbner thanked all for attending the meeting, and apologized for scheduling the meeting tonight to those who observe religious holidays. The mandated budget schedule leaves little room for adjusting meeting dates at this point. He advised that those who could not attend the meeting can always e-mail, or call the Council and BOE members with questions or concerns. He thanked the Council, the BOE and the Superintendent for being dedicated individuals. He is pleased to see that the BOE, with a 1% increase in expenditures, can continue to offer all current programs and not impact current staffing levels. Although, he did state that reductions made in staff at the Superintendent level of the budget developmental process is primarily due to declining enrollment.

Tonight, Mr. Werbner discussed his recommended spending plan. The Council's recommended budget will be adopted on April 2nd. We are all concerned about the same things, the future of municipal services, including education and our ability to fund the level of services deemed desirable in this Community. What we know is this: we spend less than many other communities our size, for both town and education services. This has been verified by the State Office of Policy & Management. In his opinion, we are at a cross roads in Tolland. Revenue wise, we are on our own. From a service viewpoint and town operations perspective, we have breached a base level of service. We can get by with the budget he suggests for the town side. The spending plan for the town is workable. Going forward, we cannot continue to reduce personal and limit expenditure increases. The key is trust and open communication. He suggests that the Council appoint a Blue-Ribbon panel to study in detail the town and BOE budgets, level of service, future service initiatives and changes in service levels due to demographic changes, etc. Tolland is, and will remain to be, a great town to live. We must all come together to address our needs.

His presentation was given with the use of a PowerPoint. The first few slides outlined the FY 2012-2013 Achievements. Those include, but are not limited to: survival of Storm Charlotte, the Town and BOE are proceeding with the Integrated Audit phase of performance contracting, work is being done on the HVAC system at Town Hall, the PZC has completed the Tolland Village regulations and are in the process of finalizing regulations for the Tech Corridor, the Town and

BOE have joined five other communities and EastConn to form the first regional health insurance cooperative, and the town approved a \$5m road maintenance bond issue.

The budget process was reviewed. **The Referendum this year will be on May 7, 2013.** If the budget is defeated, votes will be every two weeks until a budget is passed. A list of meetings to come was shown.

He advised that the budget is a financial plan with sets of priorities and direction that the Town Officials, Council and residents believe accurately reflects the most important needs of Town operations. His goal is to take into consideration the expenses of all town departments, the available revenues and to make his budget realistic in light of the economic times so that it can be sustainable in the future.

Mr. Werbner went on to say that the Town and BOE services are of the highest quality, yet our cost for such services are in most cases lower than other comparable municipalities. A graph was shown comparing Tolland to the State average. Our equalized mill rate is substantially higher than the State average. He believes this is because we were the fastest growing community in the State in the early 2000's. There were improvements that needed to be made to school and municipal facilities allowing us to adapt to the influx of the population. We are now living with the results of that, which makes it difficult to add onto a mill rate that some feel is too high. We are a community that spends conservatively for quality service, but we are burdened with a relatively high base for our mill rate.

He explained the parameters for how he arrived at the financial plan he is proposing. His marching order from the Council included keeping any mill rate increase as low as possible, and in line with what was approved for this fiscal year.

The local financial concerns going forward include: we are heavily dependent on property taxes and state revenues as sources of revenue to fund local programs; the level of State aid to municipalities is insufficient to meet the growing cost to towns and cities and places an unacceptable burden on the local property tax, in particular education; senior citizens are finding it difficult to stay in their homes; and the State continues to impose many unfunded mandates on towns and BOE's. He outlined the impact of the Governor's budget on Tolland. One main issue is the elimination of the motor vehicle tax on all vehicles. This elimination would result in the loss of \$3.8m in motor vehicle taxes, which would ultimately mean an increased tax burden on the real estate, personal property for business and the higher valued vehicles.

He showed a historical pattern regarding Revenues, Expenditures, Grand List Growth and the Percentage of Tax Increases. For 2013/2014, the Grand List is at \$78,363. The historical pattern for the Grand List showed that in October 2002 we were almost at 4%, in October 2012 we are at .20%. We have had limited growth over the last 4-5 years. With the decrease in revenues from the prior year and limited grand list growth, there is no room for growth in the budget unless property taxes are increased.

On the Expenditure side, he is recommending a grand total percentage increase of .94%. The expenditures budget is \$51,844,725. The proposed expenditure reductions include eliminating: the Zoning Officer position, the Assistant Recreation Director position, one truck driver, funds for street sweeping, funds for over-seeding BOE fields, one year's annual contribution toward the cost of the next revaluation, as well as reducing bulky waste pick-up, reducing the hours for Crandall Park swimming pond and reducing the general fund contribution to the Capital Fund by not funding the depreciation account for rolling stock and deferring a purchase of a maintenance vehicle for the BOE. The proposed expenditure increases include: health insurance premium adjustment, establishment of a two year roadside tree trimming program, providing \$20,000 in matching funds

for use by the EDC and reconstituting TECDC to have a company or individual help move the Tolland Village and Tech Corridor forward, and proposal within the Capital budget for expansion of the Town Library. A snapshot was shown of the Library expansion.

He has recommended the Council establish a Blue Ribbon Committee called “Tolland 2030”, made up of representative from various Tolland Boards and Commissions as well as from a diverse group of residents with the express purpose of examining the base level of service the Town and BOE desire at a cost deemed sustainable through the year 2030.

With regard to the BOE’s request, it has been reduced from 3.78% to 1.0%, which is a reduction of \$994,283, but an increase of \$357,022 over current year expenditures. The town has a strong commitment to education. 69.55% of every tax dollar spent goes toward funding education. The Council is in the process of discussing the establishment of a reserve account, pursuant to Section 10-248. Funds put into the account cannot exceed 1% of the BOE’s current year’s expenditures.

Next, he reviewed the Capital budget and the significant capital projects funded by the General Fund, which total \$141,991. The Debt Service for the year: \$4,735,624, 32% town and 68% School. The mill rate would be increased 0.20 mills (30.19).

Mr. Werbner concluded by saying that sustainability is the key to any financial plan. There is a tax calculator on the website wherein anyone can go and plug in their assessment to determine what effect the change in the mill rate would have to your own individual tax situation.

3. Public Participation:

Linda Byam of 70 Woodfields Drive – She spoke on behalf of the Friends of the Tolland Public Library Foundation. She is in support of the Library expansion. She commented on the small size of the Library compared to other surrounding towns. The project would increase the Library by 43%.

Betty-Lou Griffin of Tolland Library Foundation Board – The Library is a source for E-books, DVD’s, access to on-line, etc. The proposed expansion would help our Library to better serve the needs of our community. She mentioned how some programs have needed to be moved due to the lack of community space. She reviewed the various funding sources for this expansion. She urges that the Library expansion project be approved without delay. Let’s bring this project to the town in a referendum in November.

Kate Farrish of 423 Old Post Road – She is also on the Tolland Public Library Foundation Board, but she is here tonight to read a letter from the Tolland Public Library Advisory Board that she is also a member of. They are asking the public to support the expansion. It will use existing space, while having minimum burden on the town or taxes. It will help meet the needs of today’s library users. The project will include an elevator to make Town Hall fully accessible to disabled residents and voters.

Susie Byers – Friends of Tolland Public Library – She is in support of the expansion. Tolland is a lovely community, but our Library hasn’t changed much in 30 years. It is small and it is not particularly inviting.

Nancy Brochu – Secretary of Friends of Tolland Public Library – She is here to support the expansion. The present facility is about 30 years old. Today, the Library is the center for the Community. The program room is often inadequate to hold the people who would like to attend programs. She urges the Council to approve this proposed expansion.

Paul Krasusky of 26 Susan Drive – He asked that everyone remember that Tolland is one of the lowest in per pupil spending. With regard to the 1% for the BOE, 6th grade is going up in the number of students, yet they are recommending cutting down the current team structure.

Ken Kittredge of 37 Farm Brook Drive – He loves the fact that he lives in a town that has all these community conversations. He is involved in a lot of them. He likes the fact that folks are coming out to talk. He was disappointed when he got the Town Manager's budget showing a less than 1% increase. He doesn't like that budget, and believes it underfunds the BOE and town side. He would like the opportunity to vote on a higher budget.

Jennifer Avery of 64 Tolland Farms Road – She thanked the Council, BOE and Superintendent for their work. She does not believe this budget faces the challenges we face.

Robert Green, Member of ZBA – He would like the Council to maintain the Zoning Enforcement Officer's position. He has worked with Steve Lowrey for a number of years and his expertise is superior and unique.

Mike Pascuzzi, Member of ZBA – Steve Lowrey has been a great help to him being a new member to the Board. He asked that they support his position. He also stated that he does support this budget as it is.

Sam Adlerstein of 164 Pine Hill Road – He thanked the Council and BOE volunteers. They put in a lot of effort and time in this process. He spoke of the staff reductions that are being proposed in the BOE's budget, and provided examples of the cost to each household to maintain those positions.

Hugh Jefferies of 121 Wildwood Road - He is seventeen years old. He can't vote, but he would gladly give what he can to have the town operate the way it should. No one likes to pay taxes, but to someone like himself, where else is the money going to come from. He doesn't think the truck driver should be eliminated. He thanked Mr. Langlois for his work, and for the updates he provides on Facebook. To him, it doesn't seem like it would take that much extra from everyone in town.

Kevin Moran of 50 Merlot Way – He said he feels like this budget is being forced upon us. We should give everyone the opportunity to vote on a budget that we want. We need to educate the residents in this town, so they can see the value they would get if they spent the money. There are a lot of people in this town that can find the dollars to support the things they want.

Karen Moran of 50 Merlot Way – Ditto to what Kevin Moran said. She wanted to thank the BOE, Council, Mr. Werbner and Mr. Guzman. This is not easy. The influx of the population is still here. The cuts that have happened on the town side and BOE side are affecting us now. She wants the opportunity to vote on a higher number.

Stacy Navratil of 192 Plains Road – She is worried as a parent about the schools. She worries about the "skip this now" and "add it back next year" mentality. At some point, we are going to have to pay the piper and add it back in.

Kelly Pabilonia of 33 Deer Meadow Road - She believes there are negative impacts to the BOE with the 1% increase. She would like the opportunity to vote on a higher budget. She would also like to vote for more on the town side.

Jackie Kolb of 34 Susan Drive – She is not comfortable voting for the budget she sees. The BOE's budget is clearly showing position reductions. She would like to advocate an increase to put teachers back. She does support the Library expansion program.

David Garritt of 23 Rudnansky Lane - Making the cuts to the BOE is a death by 1,000 cuts. He asked that the Council take a hard look at the BOE budget and the analysis done.

Jeff Champagne of 115 Virginia Lane – He thanked everyone for their work. He came to Tolland for the quality education system. He thinks investing in our kids' future is something we need to fight for. There is so much more we can do. He is willing to invest more. It is sustainable even in these hard economic times.

Deirdre Goldsmith of 21 Marlboro Glade – She is opposed to the 1% budget. She wants the Council to see that the people coming out to these meetings want a higher increase.

Literacy Paraprofessionals at Birch Grove – When you are considering getting rid of their positions, they want you to know they do a lot. Early intervention is the best time to help these kids. Mary outlined what their duties include. Their programs have kept children out of special education. Many times they are the best bang for your buck in the Tolland school system. Eliminating them will affect the parents and teachers.

A Resident – She works at UTC in financial. She commended everyone for doing a great job. She loves the school systems here. Her daughter has thrived here. She gets sad with all the cuts. When you make your cuts, you need to continue to improve. It's good to think the process through continually. Don't cut too much.

Patty Luetjen of 815 Shenipsit Lake Road - She opposes the budget. She wants to vote for a higher budget. She believes it would be more costly to eliminate Steve Lowrey in the long run. She and her husband are not near the average, but she would gladly pay more. She cannot understand how this budget does not affect programing.

Sue Schoch of 37 Farm Brook Drive – She thanked everyone for their work on the budget. We are a wealthy town that underspends on both education and town services. For four years running, the Town Manager has essentially given the same presentation only with changing the numbers a little bit. When do we go to the town and tell them what we need, and ask them to support it, rather than assuming they will not.

Sue Bezzina of 32 Deer Meadow – Her son has made improvements with the help of paraprofessionals. She is the only art teacher at TIS. She urges everyone to research what is going on in their town. We are not educating our kids the way they need to be. We need to work together to see how we can get more revenue in this town. We are the ones that will live with whatever we pass.

Steve Hadge of 8 Timber Trail – He thanked everyone for their work, he realizes it is an extremely hard job. He would like to vote for a higher budget. We can control what we do in our town. No one wants to spend more money, but when there is an emergency, we find the money.

4. Adjournment: Rick Field moved to adjourn the meeting; Seconded by Ben Stanford at 9:35 p.m. All were in favor.

Jack Scavone, Council Chair

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk