

MEETING MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING/BUDGET WORKSHOP

TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL TOLLAND HIGH SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM

MARCH 27, 2013

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PUBLIC HEARING

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; Michael Wilkinson, Director of Administration Services; Beverly Bellody, Human Services; Clem Langlois, Public Works; Linda Farmer, Director of Planning and Community Development; Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records; John Littell, Public Safety/Fire Chief

1. Discussion of FY 13/14 Budget:

Mr. Scavone began by saying this will be a discussion of where the Council is with the budget and what questions and issues they may have. He opened the floor to the other Council members.

Mr. Freeman started the discussion by saying he needs some time to process tonight. From his perspective, there is no way he is going to vote on any kind of reduction. There is a lot to process from tonight and from information received today. He has his own questions.

Ms. Rubino is not that far away from what Mr. Freeman said. She has been to the BOE meetings and workshops. She wants to look at the information she received today and compare it to the information that she had. She heard the concerns of the community, and wants to take some time to process what she heard tonight. This impacts kids and adults alike. It's a tough decision.

Mr. Gill said we do have a serious communication problem. The pattern that they are in when it comes to the budget cycle is not constructed. He heard that people are not getting to vote on the budget that they want, but he believes they are not getting to vote on the budget that they want either. He heard a lot of negativity and that it can't be fixed. He doesn't believe that. It can be fixed. Our current infrastructure cannot be sustained with a 1% increase. The infrastructure needs to be changed, and it doesn't mean programs need to be cut. It will need to be cuts if we continue to defend status quo. We are doing some things to change the infrastructure already. It changes when they went to self-funded healthcare, and they are investing in the ESKO. If this was easy, it would be done. It is hard. This year is a Band-Aid at best. But in the meantime, he hopes it buys them the time to make some changes to the infrastructure. For this year's budget, he believes it is a reasonable balance.

Mr. Belsito goes along with the 1% budget for the schools. In the last five years, there has been a \$118 average increase in taxes, but the average house with at \$200,000 assessment paid \$2,215 over those five years. So, there has been a considerable increase in taxes. You need to look at where we've been and where we are now. He has \$68,270 that he wants to cut from the town side budget, although he is not yet done with the town side.

Mr. Stanford said when they get ideas to change the infrastructure; they run into problems with state mandates, federal mandates or they can't do it. He believes they are handcuffed and chained to the wall by the State and Federal government. The outrage needs to be voiced to our State Legislatures, Senators and the Governor. The biggest joke is the casino funding. The promise that half of the tax receipts from slot-machines would go to the towns to pay for education is gone. We are looking at potential revenue decreases of \$3.8m due to the elimination of the car tax and potentially \$1.2m if the ECS grant is changed. Where are we going to make that money up? We need to plan for the changes now.

Mr. Scavone said 4% increases in this town, with a 100+ student a year decrease is not sustainable. We forget about the compounding of the debt. He is concerned about the ability for us to pay as a community. We have top notch teachers, schools and students. The leadership and its people make a huge difference. Money doesn't make a difference. In the Superintendent's original budget of a 4.87% increase, they had the cuts. When the BOE instructed him to get down to 1%, not one program was affected.

Mr. Field said when he got the BOE's budget of the 1%, it included no teacher cuts or program cuts which he thought was good. Tonight, he heard about teacher and team cuts. He believes that this BOE budget does cut programs. He has not decided where he is on the BOE budget. On the town side, he is not done yet. He doesn't agree with Belsito. He thinks the town side needs more money. If it were up to him, he would have asked the Town and BOE to bring him a budget that would keep everything the same.

Mr. Freeman said his observation is more the willingness to pay. Part of this is on us. We do need to listen to the feedback in this room and outside of this room. We get plenty of feedback on both sides. In terms of willingness, you need to know what to fight for. He doesn't want to live in a town that cuts. It sucks. There are certain things in this budget being cut that he will fight for. He doesn't want to cut the truck driver and he believes the street sweeping should stick to the every other year schedule.

Mr. Field added that given how important tonight's meeting is to the town, he is disappointed in the turnout tonight. He is glad for those who came, and he thanked them, but it bothers him that we are going into the local election, and only 100 people showed up.

Mr. Freeman said when he looks at this budget; he is closer to 2% than he is to .94%. He believes Mr. Werbner not wasting money, but he also believes in the BOE more and more. There are needs that we are not meeting at the 1%. He knows some people want less, but we are going to have to meet somewhere.

Mr. Field said they need to be prepared to stamp something on Tuesday, April 2. Mr. Werbner said if they still needed time, he suggested having a discussion on Tuesday, and then having a meeting on Thursday night to approve the budget. He doesn't want to rush to make a major adjustment on Tuesday night to the mill rate should one be needed.

Mr. Powell commented that there are going to be additional needs coming up regarding security. When they look at the delivery of security, it is the town's responsibility, not the school. It is a reality of the world we live in now. The budgets do not reflect this on either side. Whether it is cameras and/or physical security, it needs to be looked at. Mr. Werbner agrees that a resource officer is important, but he disagrees with Mr. Powell that it should come from the town's side.

Mr. Rubino asked that they be provided a list of priorities from the BOE. She commented that when she goes to the BOE meetings, the conversation is all over the place. It is hard to embrace what they need when it is not written out. Mr. Field asked Mr. Werbner to also provide the Council with a priority list from the town-side should he wish to do so.

Betty-Lou Griffin – Commented that cutting paraprofessionals is the most ridiculous thing she's heard.

Sam Adlerstein of 164 Pine Hill Road – He said there is a fundamental problem. The Council and BOE don't talk. To think you can't get a short list of priorities is crazy. You can get that; don't let it be an obstacle.

Bob Rubino of 296 Weigold Road – He said they are having conversation. It is not appropriate to apply what they knew three months ago to what they know now. Let's not go back three months. Let's live here tonight.

A Resident: Her priority is getting her kid through school without dying or getting hurt. Also, there is no excuse to perpetuate early learning. To her this is a priority.

Mr. Powell added that this group of elected officials has done more than previous Councils and BOEs, and they are not done yet.

Kevin Moran of 50 Merlot Way – He has learned a lot in the last 45 days. The bottom line is that we can argue if you want to support it or not. We have a severe situation of key resources that are going to be gone if this budget doesn't pass. If what they say doesn't happen, there is going to be a lot of pissed off people. At some point, you need to trust each other. Trust, and if it doesn't work, the citizens will hold people accountable.

Mr. Gill recommended that more public get involved with your local town community and raise your hand. Put your name on the ballot, grab a mit and get in the game. It's a great job that he would recommend to anyone.

Meeting adjourned at 11:16 p.m.

Jack Scavone, Council Chair

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk