

Tolland

A Great Place To Live, Grow, and Dream

“Good plans shape good decisions. That is why
good planning helps to make dreams come true.”

- Lester Bittel, *The Nine Keys of Management*

First, we would like to thank Mr. Steve Werbner for this opportunity. The Community Conversations Focus Groups seem to be a first step in creating an active and informed citizenry concerning the budget process. For many of us, this was a great learning experience, for others, a wonderful opportunity to develop and provide ideas and suggestions to our town leaders. This activity placed people of varied opinions and beliefs about how the town should be run in the same room; it promoted respectful open dialogue, and cultivated mutual understanding among the group members. Agreement was not always reached, but considerate and thoughtful exchange permeated each and every meeting. In addition to creating a forum which fostered this level of understanding and open dialogue among groups of residents, hopefully, this activity will open up the budget process so that voters will not only be better informed, but will also have honest and actual input along the way. Thank you.

Background & Goals

Tolland Residents were asked to participate in a series of public meetings called Community Conversation on Town Services. The Town Manager, Steve Werbner, made a presentation entitled **“Your Town, Your Budget, Your Future: Tolland at a Crossroads.”** In the presentation, Mr. Werbner presented the desired conversation format and goals and objectives. The participating residents were divided into workgroups and each group was asked to provide feedback to Mr. Werbner, on the following five issues:

1. Develop a Vision, Policy or Results statement for Town Services.
2. Review and comment on the major activity centers and their cost as identified by Town Staff.
3. Review and comment on Town Revenue data.
4. Provide suggestions on cost efficiencies for Town services.
5. Provide suggestions on methods for communicating information to the general public.

Three Tolland citizen volunteer groups were formed; these “focus” groups met from late October 2007 through early January 2008, with a final presentation of findings on January 17, 2008.

Workgroup, or Focus Group, 2 consisted of Gary Lotreck (Chairman), Gerry Furrier, Karen Kramer, Sam Belsito, Carla Peck, and Bea White-Ramirez. Focus Group 2 began weekly meetings on October 25, 2007. David Smith, our Town Staff liaison, gave each of us a copy of the Fiscal Year 2007-2008 Operating and Capital Budget. Subsequently, we had weekly meetings amongst ourselves. Additionally, we had two meetings with all of the Focus groups. The first meeting was held on November 15, 2007, regarding Revenues for Fiscal Year 2007-2008 versus 2008-2009, and the second meeting on Expenditures, specifically an “Activity Center” approach for the Highway Department was held on December 5, 2007.

Critical Action Items

In the process of meeting, discussing, researching and drafting a Town Vision Statement, we all learned a great deal. We all had differing opinions at times, and at others, we all agreed. In light of the ongoing National Caucuses and Primaries for President, we thought a “one person, one vote” approach might be interesting. The following list is what each individual member thinks is the **one critical thing** Tolland Town Government could do to affect the most positive change in 2008.

- 1) **Ethics Commission:** Ad-Hoc Committee to review, analyze, benchmark other towns’ policies in an effort to tighten up our Ethics Policy, specifically the number of members of the Committee, Definitions, and Standards of Official Conduct.
- 2) **Purchasing Policy:** review, analyze, benchmark other towns’ policies in an effort to tighten up our current purchasing policy, specifically the guidelines and practices. Include provisions for non-discriminatory and minority based practices for vendors.
- 3) **Control of Overtime Costs:** Adopt policies that will reduce or eliminate overtime, while still providing services that are equal to or better than the current policy.
- 4) **Leader Must Act With Economic Realities in Mind** Elected and appointed Town leaders need to make decisions and implement policies based on the current economic realities in mind and always keeping in mind the taxpayers limited ability to accept or absorb large increases in property taxes. Residents don't want to just hear that government needs more money. They want to know and understand how the leaders are making difficult decisions to control annual increases in taxes keeping in mind the priorities of the taxpayers. Excluding grand list growth, budgets should be prepared based on no more than a 2- to 4-percent annual increase in taxes. If services need to be reduced, residents will accept them provided they are lower priority services. To say that all services are high priority is not acceptable.
- 5) **Communicate Simply and Effectively to Taxpayers Regarding Services and their Costs:** Taxpayers could better decide upon acceptable budgets with specific information concerning Activity Centers, the services provided, and their related costs.
- 6) **Committees:** Town Council to create Advisory Committees & Boards for any issue that warrants further research & analysis and/or requires stringent ongoing review. Resident volunteers would be appointed to these Boards and Commissions, for a specific term. These Committees and Boards could be permanent for some issues and temporary or Ad-Hoc for other issues.

Feedback from Focus Group #2 on Issues 1-5

I. Vision Statement: while asked to prepare a Vision Statement for Town Services, we prepared a Vision Statement for the Town of Tolland with the thought that the Town Services Vision would then come from this.

Town of Tolland's Vision Statement

Tolland will be recognized as a Town that provides efficient and high quality services, sound infrastructure, and recreational opportunities in a fiscally responsible and efficient way, maintains/preserves a safe environment, with an engaged citizenry committed to the betterment of the entire community. To that end, encourage a balance among open space, residential, and economic development, and provide a progressive educational system that meets or exceeds the challenges of a common core of knowledge.

II. Review and Comment on Major Activity Centers Identified by Town Staff

At the December 5, 2007 meeting with all the Focus Groups , Mr. Werbner distributed the draft activity center for the Public Works Department .

Given the limited amount of time for this overall project (2 ½ months from 10-25-07 to 1-17-08), we were unable to perform a comprehensive review of this activity center. In addition, we found the draft activity center to be lacking specific cost and output details.

We commend Mr. Werbner for starting the process of developing these department activity centers which are a good first step in creating a value-based approach to help residents and the Town Council understand and, subsequently, make decisions about the desired level of town services. This activity center approach, sometimes referred to as a Value Analysis Program, requires each department to determine the output products or services performed (i.e., what it does and assign a cost to each output). We recommend that Mr. Werbner and Town Council take this approach further with the following recommendations:

- Annually, ask each department to identify a series of budget estimates with proposed overall department increases accompanied by budget revisions that include specific cost reductions starting with reduced increases (i.e., 2.5%), level-funded (or 0% increase), and including reductions of 10 percent of their total operating budget. Each cost reduction proposal should also identify the pros and cons of the proposal and should be rational. For example, eliminating field maintenance might not be rational, but a proposal to reduce the frequency, outsourcing, or accepting lower quality fields would be appropriate and should be considered.
- As soon as all proposed department budgets with requested cost reductions are received, the Town Manager and/or Town Council will decide which ones make sense in the context of financial limitations and budget referendum rejections.
- Make Activity Center Information part of the budget presentation, so that all residents can more fully understand and appreciate the work efforts, goals and accomplishments in each department.

III. Review Revenue Data, Fiscal Indicators, and Provide Estimates on Total Revenue Available for Next Fiscal Year

Revenue Data/Fiscal Indicators

Fiscal Indicator	Tolland	State Rank	State of Connecticut Average
Per Capita Income*	\$29,892	66 th	
Debt Per Capita 2005	\$1,852	61 st	\$1,942
FY 2005 Adjusted Tax Levy per Capita	\$2,029	76 th	\$1,987
Median Household Income	\$82,990		\$65,521
Unemployment	3.4%	142 nd	4.3%
Equalized Net Grand List Per Capita	\$110,684	107 th	\$139,667
Housing Permits (Single Family)	59	28 ^{th**}	8,817
Population 2000 Census	13,086		3,409,549
Population 2006	14,700 +19%		3,510,787 +2.9%
Grand List Components			
Residential	82.6%		69.1%
Commercial	5.8%***		15.8%
Property Tax Revenue as a % of Total Revenues, FY 2005	70.8%	96 th	69.4%

*1999 Data, Source U.S. Census 2000, this is 104% of State Avg. **Rank 28 includes 36 five or more unit category, which brings the total housing units to 95

***At the Revenue meeting it was stated that even at commercial "build-out" meaning that all possible commercial sites were developed, at best Tolland's commercial Taxes would be 8-10%.

High Growth

Tolland's population has increased +19% from the 2000 census to 2006, making Tolland one of the fastest growing towns in the state. The number of Single Family homes built in the ten-year period from 1998 to 2007 is 951, and the increase in school-age children for this same time frame is +668. With the current market conditions, the high growth of the last 10-15 years may have slowed, yet the Grand List that emerged from this growth period will slowly increase at a rate of 2-3% annually.

Property Tax Revenue

The Net Taxable Grand List has grown +58 % in last 5 years, from 2003 - 2007 to \$1,181,085,207, an estimated market value of \$1.69 billion and a market value grand list per capita of \$117,200. After the 2004 revaluation, the Grand List value

increased +38%. Prior to the revaluation and in the year directly afterward, Grand List growth has been +3.8%, +3.87%, +2.6%, and +2.1%. For FY 2008 it is reasonable to assume Grand List growth would be +2% to +2.5%, bringing the Grand List up to \$1.2 billion to \$1.21 billion. At our current mill rate of 28.39 this would yield approximately \$34 million that would be collected from the tax levy for FY 2008.

Expenditures

We learned that the estimated expenses for Fiscal Year 2008-2009 are \$50,015,079, resulting in a - \$2,345,728 difference from FY 2007-2008, after estimating an increase of \$600,000 from Grand List growth and approximately \$400,000 in increases in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant. This is the primary problem we faced in our Focus Group – How do we close this gap of \$2,345,728? Where do we find ways to save money? How can we be more efficient? Will this gap represent a gap that we will have annually?

Additional Revenue Sources

Continue to pursue economic development of commercial entities through collaboration with Town Departments and Commissions;

- a. Consider innovative ways of making money
 - i. Increase current licenses, fees, tuition
 - ii. Additional Grants
 - iii. Other?
- b. Neighborhood Commercial Zone
- c. Gateway Design District – Tolland's High Tech Corridor
- d. South Green area
- e. Route 195 Corridor

IV. Cost Efficiencies for Town Operations

Objective: For our Group to provide suggestions for Town Departments and Services to find more efficient ways of working and propose ideas for potential savings from the various Town Departments.

1) Refuse and Recycling Services

GOAL: To reduce costs. Current refuse and recycling costs for FY 2007-2008 is \$1,374,619. During the summer of 2007, Tolland entered into a 5-year service contract with Willimantic Waste Paper.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Review current contract provisions
- Determine feasible future alternatives to current contract with Willimantic Waste
- Is a bag fee (such as Coventry utilizes) feasible?
- Is a fee per Tolland bin feasible?
- Recycle collection bi-weekly
- Could we open up a Transfer station for “permit only” trash/recycling drop off? (Avon)
- Does Tolland have to provide this service? (Avon does not provide any trash pick-up service; private vendors are hired by residents)
- How much would the mill rate go down without a service contract? Cost/benefit analysis needed.
- Committee to research and review

2) Pavement Management Plan

GOAL: Effective Pavement Management Plans (PMP) have, in some cases, reduced costs or extended the value of pavement expenditures by as much as 400% if pavement is maintained adequately through its life-cycle and not letting it reach a critical point. The goal should be to demonstrate to residents that a value-based PMP that was developed free from political influence is being implemented by the Town. To say that the highway superintendent and Department of Public Works (DPW) director develop a plan will be criticized as being biased or potentially politically influenced. We recommend that an independent qualified transportation engineering firm develop a PMP for the Town and the draft plan be available for public comment and review (Est. \$60,000). As the price of oil has skyrocketed over the last 5 years so too have pavement costs. It is crucial that effective decisions are being made based on roadway condition, traffic volume, and truck traffic.

PMP Elements

- Enlist an Independent engineer to develop PMP free from town influence
- Prioritize ratings based on road condition, traffic volume, and truck traffic to focus on arterial streets (e.g., Old Stafford, Old Post, etc) over collector, or local streets (cul de sacs).
- Develop full suite of pavement treatment options from roadway reconstruction (full depth or reclamation), rehabilitation (overlay, seal and overlay, etc.), and maintenance (chip seal, patch, etc.).
- Develop the framework for collecting information and tracking pavement actions and costs
- Focus less on resident complaints which tend to result in pavement of lower priority streets

Pavement Management Options

Reconstruction

Full Depth, Arterial Street
Full Depth, Collector Road
Full Depth, Local Road
Pavement Reclamation

Rehabilitation

Leveling course and overlay
1-½" Overlay
5% Patch, Crack Seal, then Chip Seal
20% Patch and Overlay
Cold Planing and Overlay
Crack Seal and Overlay

Maintenance

Chip Seal with Crack Seal
Crack Seal – Low
Crack Seal – High
5% Patch
20% Patch
Patch and Seal

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Recommend that maintenance be prime focus on all collector and local streets
- Prioritize roads based on level of service and use
- Develop repair or replacement strategies based on road category (e.g., repair potholes and cracks on secondary roads such as cul-de-sacs)
- Prepare plan in public domain with opportunity for review and comment
- Can we utilize a variety of methods to maintain high quality roads?
- Focus efforts on arterial streets.
- Tolland roads are in very good condition compared to more urban areas with extensive underground utilities. Residents will accept potholes and maintenance (e.g., crack repair, patch, etc.) knowing the town is controlling expenditures.

3) Revenue Committee

GOAL: Review, monitor and increase (if possible) all revenue sources, including Grand List, Local, State and Federal Grants, Licenses, fees and permits and Service Contracts. Town commitment to set fees at a level to supplement and support the costs for providing these services.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Develop Department Fees that Fund a Greater Portion of Town-Provided Services
- Inspection services fee increases to pay for department activities
- Annual review of user fees to cover costs of services
- When was the last time Tolland increased fees? Are our fees comparable to area towns'?
- Does Tolland collect a real estate conveyance tax of .25%? Research conveyance tax and consider making this permanent policy, as Governor's 2007-2008 Budget was silent on the extension of this, after 6/07 sunset provision. (Avon will continue to pursue this .25% tax in their FY 2008-2009 Budget).
- Ad-Hoc Committee to research/benchmark current level of licenses, fees permits in an effort to raise revenues and keep Tolland's fees at appropriate levels.
- Quarterly review report to Town Manager and Town Council on status of revenues
 - Short Term: Should we hire a part-time Grant writer to work under the direction of the current Grant Writer?
 - Long Term: Should we try to reduce our dependence on Grant monies? What are other towns doing?

4) Snow & Ice Removal

GOAL: Optimize current snow & ice removal services; save money; reduce snowplowing overtime monies.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Rely more on salt than sand
- Reduce frequency of Spring CB vacuum program (develop program to clean all catch basins over two year or longer period)Install temperature sensors on plows and sanders
- Install curb feelers to help reduce curb damage

5) Activity Centers--Town Departments

GOAL: Expand activity center methodology, gain efficiencies over time in measuring outputs, devise new goals.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Have each department quantify their output products and the costs for such products
- Require each department to identify a series of cost reductions up to at least 10% of their operating budget. Zero budget increase year to year, i.e., 2.5% increase for salaries and benefits, then 2.5% would need to be reduced in others areas of budget.

- Consider a bonus or incentive program to reward significant savings and to encourage additional savings measures.

6) Charter Revisions

GOAL: Charter Revision Commission needed to research and work on several changes that would make Town run more efficiently, change policies to be more current.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Acquisition of Real Property requires a two-thirds majority at referendum.
- Debt Issuance: three options emerge to research
 1. Amount that does not require voter referendum may be too high; lower current amount to ? (Current Debt Issuance is 5% of Grand Tax Levy or .05 x \$33mil = \$1.65 mil); or
 2. All bonding goes to referendum; or
 3. Bonding over certain dollar amount (i.e. \$150,000) goes to referendum
- Revise the deadlines for development and submission of the Town Budget and specified time for subsequent referendums to allow more time for public input and review.
- Develop a Board of Finance Committee to be appointed or elected. The Budget process is highly complex and time consuming. A Board of Finance would be the main entity working in detail with the Finance Director and the Town Manager to present a budget to Town Council. In this way Town Council would have more time to pursue broader Town goals and strategies.

Connecticut has 31 towns with a Council – Manager form of government. Of these 31 towns, 7 have either an elected or appointed Board of Finance:

Town	Appointed or Elected	Number of Members	Term
Avon	Elected	7	2 years
East Hampton	Elected	7	4 years
Glastonbury	Elected	6	6 years
Granby	Elected	6	4 years
Hebron	Elected	6	?
Rocky Hill	Appointed	3	2 years
Southington	Elected	6	2 years

7) Reorganize Town Departments

GOAL: Gain staff efficiencies and avert potential layoffs.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Reorganization is a valuable tool to effect positive change and organizational efficiencies
- Examples: Combine or cross train certain job functions in the Finance and Records Department to provide redundancy and needed support during peak periods.
- Similar approaches could be evaluated in the Public Works and Highway Departments.

- Each service, such as swimming, should be self-sustaining (those who want service should pay for it).
- Ad-hoc Committee to research instructor fees in an effort to standardize fees.

8) Group Insurance

GOAL: Save money through benefit design changes, funding (contributory vs. non-contributory) and/or carriers.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Attention on cost savings and cost sharing to reduce burden on taxpayer
- Possible consolidation of Life, Disability Coverage with the same carrier for additional premium savings
- Consider High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP)
- Consider Health Savings Accounts (HSA)
- Consider Consumer Driven (CD) Health Plan
- Dental Coverage: Contributory only
- Review Disability Plan Design: Elimination Period (3or 6mos?), Definition of Disability (Own Occ or His Occ?), Core/Buy Up Plan, etc. for savings of +5% to +35%.
- Develop plan to increase co-pays and co-insurance every year
- Ad-Hoc Committee or Permanent Committee to research/review/recommend

9) Energy Efficiencies

GOAL: To save money and be more environmentally conscious

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Install energy efficient lighting at Town facilities and investigate grants or CL&P rebates
- Research solar electricity
- Shut down all heating at Town Fire Stations that only store equipment
- Conduct energy audit of all Town owned buildings
- Look into Renewable Energy Certificates (EPA, Dept. of Energy grant potential)
- Create Ad-Hoc Committee for the above

10) Revise Financial Software & Procedures to Allow On-line Payment of Taxes or Fees

GOAL: Make more taxpayer friendly and save money.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Reduces Paper and Labor Costs
- Saves time/ is convenient

11) Payroll

GOAL: Research costs associated with outsourcing, consolidating Board of Education and Town employees in order to reduce costs.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Outsourcing of payroll should be done with a cost savings justification.
- Combine Town and Board of Education payroll
- Implement bi-weekly payroll

12) Overtime for Snow Removal

GOAL: Reduce overtime for snow removal.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Try to eliminate 50% of overtime the first year
- Schedule all departments so overtime is reduced
- Benchmark other towns to research/review/recommend changes in an effort to realize annual savings
- Increase all Town dump truck/plow trucks.
- Town of Tolland trucks to attempt to plow only during regular work hours.

13) Lawn Maintenance

GOAL: Reduce costs

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- No fertilization or weed control for lawns
- Cutting only on as needed basis
- Eliminate irrigation on all fields as water is a precious commodity and should not be wasted.

14) Equipment Purchases

GOAL: Reduce overall costs, create policy to routinely look for alternatives when equipment is needed.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Purchase slightly used vehicles instead of only new vehicles
- Research lease to purchase agreements for some vehicles/equipment
- Reduce current fleet of pool cars
- When buying new, require energy efficient vehicles (MPG/ Alternate energy)
- Research/benchmark/recommend changes for real savings in the 5 Year Capital Improvement Plan

15) Purchasing Policy

GOAL: Review of policy to include more diverse and inclusionary provisions, look for ways to save money, include public in the process.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Review overall limits-- too high without voter approval?
- Make process open to public, solicit public opinion on purchases
- Consider forming temporary Purchasing Committee for specific purchases, as Avon does

16) Library Needs Assessment

GOAL: Consider expansion of current library versus new facility.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Establish Committee to review current space, volumes, etc., and plan for future (see Avon's Current Library Expansion Committee Documents).
- Research Somers, Avon and Simsbury, all 3 towns are in process of expanding current library building, and Avon and Somers have formed Committees to do so
- Open process up to Public – solicit input through informal surveys, meetings, workshops.
- Research Grants for expansion of existing building vs. new building

17) Town Goals

GOAL: Change Town Culture to be more results driven and innovative, constantly looking for ways to innovate, save money and become more efficient.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Establish Town Vision Statement, Mission Statement, Strategic Goals, Timing of Goals, Measurement of Goals and specific Town Council goals
- Town Department Goals: to work together and detail these goals into strategies by targeting business plans each year. Include all of these goals in Annual Budget Report. (For Sample Goals, See Towns of Cheshire, Farmington, Coventry, Glastonbury).

18) Committees

GOAL: To review required Town services, benefits, provisions and policies, so they are more efficient, with a goal of saving time and money; to thoroughly research specific issues and benchmark or compare what other Capital Region/Tolland County/other towns are doing in particular areas in an effort to learn better ways to do things, save money and constantly improve; to encourage our citizens to become involved, let their voice be heard and help our Town become all that it can be: *make dreams come true.*

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- An informed, engaged citizenry will make each Budget Process more efficient, smooth and transparent.
- Ad-hoc committees formed for a few weeks, some formed for a few months, and some formed for a year or more will help Tolland citizens to become more informed, interested and trusting of the Town government process.
- Residents (actively working and retirees) have varied professional backgrounds, that will help on committees and ad-hoc committees.
- Ad-Hoc committees are used frequently in other Towns; this is free consulting that is aimed at making the Town more efficient.

Some examples of Towns with Advisory Committees for specific issues are:

Town	Board or Committee
Glastonbury	Insurance Advisory Committee
Mansfield	Solid Waste Mgmt/ Recycling Committee
Newington	Capital Improvement Plan Committee
	Employee Insurance Pension Benefits Committee
South Windsor	Strategic Planning Consortium
West Hartford	Risk Management Advisory Board
Enfield	External Audit for Board of Education
	This committee is currently forming to perform “in-depth reviews of the financial status of the school system” by prioritizing and analyzing expenditures. The 11- member Committee is comprised of individuals with accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, human resources and technology skills.
Ellington	Ad-Hoc Budget Advisory Committee (term through each budget season)
	Ad-Hoc Committee to Study Feasibility of Shared Services

Some potential Committees or Boards that Tolland could consider:

Committee	When Formed?	Estimated Duration
Ad-Hoc Ethics Committee	2008	3 months
Ad-hoc or Permanent Cost Containment Committee	2008	?
Solid Waste Mgmt & Recycling Committee	2009-2010	Ongoing after initial setup
Charter Revision Commission	2008	6-9 months
Insurance Advisory Committee	2008	Ongoing
Library Needs Assessment Committee	2009 - ?	Until Library Issues resolved

See Attached Lists of Specific Towns Committees in Addendum.

19) Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) award

GOAL: Present comprehensive Town budget information to residents, rating analysts and others; gain trust and respect of citizenry with full disclosure of budget information, help to maintain or raise bond ratings; fully utilize Budget as a communications tool.

Opportunities, Issues, or Questions Raised

- Enhance Annual Town Budget and apply for GFOA Award Annually. GFOA Awards goes to Budget presentations that act as a Communication Tool, Policy document, Operations Guide and Financial Plan
- Award would enhance budget understanding, assist to convey budget message thus help in passing budget with fewer referendums.
- The Town of Tolland has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting (CAFR) for 14 consecutive years; this is to be applauded. The next level of achievement awarded by the GFOA is the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. As Tolland residents become more familiar with the budget process, the items that are mandatory in applying for this award (see Addendum for list) become logical to include and sought after by the public. Additionally, many of the mandatory items have already been done in one form or another.
- Last year in Connecticut, the towns of Avon, Cheshire, Glastonbury, Manchester, and West Hartford, won the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.
- Please review the following hard copy of budgets that have won this prestigious award: Avon, Glastonbury, Cheshire, Manchester
- For 2006, the GFOA budget winners are: Avon, Bristol, Cheshire, Danbury, Glastonbury, Groton, Hartford, Manchester, Mansfield, Norwalk, Norwich, Plainville, West Hartford, Woodbridge

V. How to Best Communicate Budget Details to Residents

The following are suggestions to improve communication with Town residents.

- Website link prominently displayed dedicated to budget updates
- Make updates simple to understand ("Less is More" approach)
- Produce and broadcast monthly budget updates on CATV access channel delivered by Town Manager and Town Council representatives, as needed
- Connect residents with Town staff via targeted emails to better understand the concerns of residents and better respond to rumors and misinformation
- Connect with all interest groups (not just education and tax friendly groups)

Issues

- Residents must take initiative to obtain much of the information they seek about the Town, rather than having it "pushed" out to them by the Town.
- There is an "information gap" that seems to occur when residents do not have children in the school system.
- Budget is not fully utilized as a communication tool.

Elaboration

Open interchange of thoughts with all citizens to begin to create shared, honest communications as part of our culture. This will require a consistent effort to be helpful, accessible, consistent and unintimidating as a human source of information working to assure that those served always feel welcome. Emphasize friendly and courteous service to the public; and seek to improve the quality and image of public service.

- Recognizing that the Town Council is essentially a volunteer body that already contributes a great deal of time toward the betterment of the community, nevertheless, there may be additional benefits to meeting with the entire Council or one member in more informal settings. (This has now been instituted by Dr. Daniels, starting January 2008 on Saturdays in the Library).
- Create Ad-Hoc Committees
- Assist in strengthening and improving communication between the Town and public.
- Allow and encourage more public input at Town Council and Board of Education meetings.
- Increase understanding of how Tolland government functions

- Most residents are not routinely involved with Town government and are unaware of how local government is organized and functions. This is particularly true in understanding the different responsibilities of the Town Council as policy makers and the Town administration and staff that are responsible for policy implementation and the day-to-day operations of Town government.

1. Provide for non-threatening avenues for citizens, the Town Council and officials to interact for the greater good of Tolland.

2. Help citizens overcome reluctance to become involved in community issues.

3. Employ courtesy, respect and timely response to citizen inquiries, comments, and suggestions, regardless of perceived “side” a resident is on; genuine courtesy and respect of this nature cannot be overestimated.

4. Institute a goal for the community to plan and conduct periodic citizen surveys (every 2-3 years, if possible) to assist the Town Council and Town Manager in the development of the Vision and Goals of the Town of Tolland, as well as the evaluation of the effectiveness of public services.

5. Messages will gain power from consistency and repetition.

6. Encourage and enhance the use of public-access cable television.

- Increase cable coverage of public meetings and forums, to the extent possible. Town employees and/or residents could attend studio workshops to become certified producers.
- Use cable presentations to educate residents about large, long-term issues.
- Plan for web streaming or video and video-on-demand.

7. Utilization of Citizens as part of a communications toolbox.

- Neighborhood Advocacy Groups
- Citizen Newsletter or Citizens section in Town Newsletter
- Fact Sheet on Tolland Issues
- Community Calendar on web and hard copy sheet available at Town Hall and Library

8. Utilization of Employees as part of a communication toolbox.

- Department goals, mission statements, deliverable actions
- Employee newsletter

9. New resident “Welcome to Tolland” packet.

- For people moving into Town. This could include Town newsletters, parks & recreation guide, library flyers, past issues of *Tolland Monthly*, and any other

pieces that are available, such as magnets that list all direct-dial telephone numbers.

10. Create a “How are we Doing?” postcard

- Available at Town Hall, postage paid postcard for comments, include name and address or anonymous, (see Attached card from Town of Glastonbury)

11. Annual Budget Document--apply for the Government Finance Officers Award (GFOA)

- To win GFOA Award Annual Budget document has to pass national finance officer test serving as a Communication Device, as well as other criteria.
- In Connecticut, the following Towns have won the GFOA for Fiscal Year 2006: Avon, Bristol, Cheshire, Danbury, Glastonbury, Groton, Hartford, Manchester, Mansfield, Norwalk, Norwich, Plainville, West Hartford, and Woodbridge.
- Visit www.GFOA.org for more information
- See Samples of GFOA 2007-2008 budgets, enclosed: Avon, Cheshire, Glastonbury and Manchester

Addendum

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)

Homepage: <http://www.gfoa.org>

Explanation of criteria:

http://www.gfoa.org/downloads/BudgetCriteriaExplanations_000.pdf

Budget Criteria: <http://www.gfoa.org/downloads/BudgetCriteriaLocation.pdf>

Awards Brochure: <http://www.gfoa.org/downloads/budgetawardsbrochure.pdf>

Town of Avon, Connecticut Public Library

Homepage: <http://www.avonctlibrary.info/>

Library Expansion Homepage: <http://www.avonctlibrary.info/expansion.htm>

Library's Long Range Plan:

http://www.avonctlibrary.info/PDFS/long_range_plan_09-07_final.pdf

Library's Technology Plan:

http://www.avonctlibrary.info/PDFS/technology_plan_afpl_2007-2010.pdf