

## **PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2008-2009 PROPOSED BUDGET MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2008**

A Public Hearing on the 2008-2009 Proposed Budget was held on Monday, April 21, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Silas Deane Middle School Auditorium with Chairperson Andrew S. Adil presiding.

Present: Councilors Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil

Absent: Councilor Cascio

Present from the Board of Education: Gina DeAngelo, Janis Malec, Marie Massaro, Michael McKenna, Penny Stanziale, Tristan Stanziale, Raul Rodriguez, Vice Chairperson Julie Montinieri, and Chairperson Stacey Hodges

Also present: Bonnie L. Therrien, Town Manager; Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools; and Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, and Department Heads from both the Board of Education and Town Hall

### **OPENING REMARKS**

Chairperson Adil called the meeting to order.

Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, read the Call of the Special Meeting.

Chairperson Adil welcomed the Town Council, Board of Education members, Town staff, Board of Education staff and the public. He said that tonight is about listening to the public speak of its priorities for the upcoming budget.

Councilor Roberts led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dolores Sassano took attendance and explained the procedures for the evening. She said that the Superintendent of Schools would present his budget followed by the Town Manager's presentation. The Public would then be allowed to speak. She asked that those wishing to speak print their name and address on the sign up sheet. She said speakers will be called in order and allowed to speak for ten minutes on items pertaining to the budget. After all members of the public wishing to speak have spoken one time, the Mayor will call members to speak a second time. At the end of the meeting, she will read the letters and e-mails received into the record.

### **PRESENTATION BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS**

Michael Kohlhagen, Superintendent of Schools, said that tonight is about hearing from the public. He said that the Town must preserve its educational system and continue to invest in its children. The current economic times are reflected in this budget. The budget has no waste in it. This budget is strengthening an already good school system. He presented the following:



[Wethersfield Public Schools 2008-2009 Recommended Education Budget](#) [676 KB PDF\* file]

He concluded by saying that the Board of Education is sensitive to the financial constraints of the Town. The Town

needs to find a balance. It is an absolute necessity to preserve the school system as it is the Town's investment in the future.

## **PRESENTATION BY THE TOWN MANAGER**

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the proposed budget will represent a 2 mill increase or a 5.5 percent tax increase. She presented the following:



[Town of Wethersfield 2008-2009 Proposed Budget](#) [104 KB PDF\* file]

She reiterated that the majority of the tax burden is carried by residential property owners. Redevelopment would help ease that burden. Taxes will continue to go up if other revenue sources are not found. Services will also have to be eliminated. She said that she would take part in a budget forum with residents if there was an interest.

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

Doreen Garcia, 33 Sherburne Road, said that the Town-wide Radio System was not supposed to cost the taxpayers anything. The towers were supposed to generate funds for the Town. She said that as a taxpayer she was misled. She said she is confused that the Town Council is talking about purchasing open space so that it can't be developed and yet it is advocating paving wetlands on the Silas Deane Highway.

Ballou Tooker, 65 Harmund Place, said that taxes have become residents' lives. The problem is that the Town takes no action. People are being held hostage by environmentalists - can't drill for new oil sources and now ethanol is being pushed as a fuel source. Ethanol is made from corn so the price for food is now increasing. He said it is time to think out of the box and take back Town government. Residents must do away with some perks. He said he could dispose of his own leaves and hold garbage for collection every other week. He said that the Town Manager should present the budget for the residents, not for the Town Council.

Lucille Plouffe, 183 Stillwold Drive, said that this is a difficult financial time but the Library funding should not be cut. The Library serves all residents of Town. She said that she worked in the Library at Charles Wright Elementary School for years and has never spoken against a Board of Education budget before now. She said that the Board of Education needs to make cuts just like the rest of the Town.

Jim Turcotte, 11 Howard Avenue, said that he has been in Town for 50 years. He has put five children through the Wethersfield school system. He said that the Town needs to cut property taxes. The Town hired appraisers and they never came into his home but raised his taxes \$5,000. He said that the Town needs to cut personnel now and cut all raises now. He said that the Board of Education needs to cut, too.

Betty Heller Rosania, 88 Desmond Drive, said that she commends the Superintendent of School on his initiative for a Green Referendum. The students are the future of the Town and they must be prepared for the future. But it is time for core services only. She suggested larger classes and less transportation services. She said children would be healthier if they walked to school. Parents walking their children to school form a sense of community. She said that she is disappointed to see the number of high school students going on to college going down. She said that parents need to be involved in their children's lives. She is concerned with the underfunded retirement account. She said she hoped that the English as a Second Language was not being used as a crutch by students. She hopes students are transitioned out

as soon as possible. She thanked the Town Council for continuing to support economic development, the library and the public schools. She said that nothing comes for free. Residents must pay for core services and have users of peripheral services pay for them personally. The Silas Deane Highway is beginning to be revitalized. The façade grant program is very successful. The Economic Development Commission is trying to broaden the tax base. The Town must build up and reuse what it already has. She made the following suggestions: turn off every third street light, put traffic lights on flashing, increase the fee for Dial-A-Ride, increase the fee for the senior center, have the high school culinary arts department prepare lunches for the seniors, and have residents bag their own leaves. She thanked the Town Council for the opportunity to speak.

Yolanda Preysner, 160 Clearfield Road, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She said that she can easily bag leaves but she can't teach her children Spanish. The Town Council should fully fund the Board of Education budget. The budget is thoughtful and respectful to residents. The increases in the budget are to fund mandates. Investing in the schools will keep the Town strong. So many children stay in Town and this is an investment in the future leaders and taxpayers of the Town. She said that students, through the school system, are becoming civically proud. As part of the curriculum they have to complete community service hours. Students could assist the elderly and handicap in Town with the bagging of leaves. The Town must continue to support the Board of Education.

Edward Bedwarz, 4 Stillwold Drive, said that he has watched the budget for the last six years. The Town continues to tax and spend every year. The Charter should be changed so that a budget referendum is held and the voters can decide on the budget.

Virginia Judson, 74 Cedar Street, said that the Town Council pledged to see that 20 percent of the electricity used by the Town's municipal buildings and schools be derived from clean, renewable sources by 2010. Some level of funding must be included in this budget in order to accomplish that goal. The Clean Energy Committee interviewed representatives of two Clean Energy suppliers and recommended that the Town enter into a contract with Community Energy, Inc. for the purchase of 909 mWH of clean energy. To date no action has been taken on the recommendation. The proposed contract requires payment of \$9,999 by June 30, 2008. As the fiscal year is almost over and the DPUC will announce a new schedule effective July 1, 2008, it may be advisable to wait until the new options are announced. The money could still be used for the purchase of clean energy or clean energy equipment. The primary emphasis of the Committee has been on reviewing present usage and proposing savings wherever possible - conservation. Through the "CT Clean Energy Options" program the Town has already earned one kW PV panel to be paid for and installed by CT's Clean Energy Fund. With another 35 sign-ups, the Town will earn a second panel. The Clean Energy Committee, with the help of a consultant, is working on possible locations for the panels.

Maggie Pace, 26 Victory Lane, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She said that the budget will allow class sizes to remain where they should be. She said that the recommended class size level is not adhered to at all schools but it should be. She said that Highcrest has a growing population. The school may run out of classrooms. She does not want it to come as a surprise to the Town later on. She said that she supports the new initiatives in the budget, too.

James Griswold, 56 Grist Mill, said that he has lived in Town for about 25 years. The Town has to face the crisis situation that it is in. In the past five years his taxes have gone up 55 percent. He said that he can't take more tax increases. Salary increases are only 2 or 3 percent a year. People on fixed incomes are even worse off. He said that the Town Council has a tremendous job to do. He does not want to see the school system destroyed but thinks that the Board of Education and Town Council should sit down and see where some cuts can be made. He said that there are too many Town vehicles, Departments can be combined to save on clerical staff, and summer work staff at Physical Services can be eliminated. The budget can't support all of these things. It needs to be cut by 1/2 mill or 1 mill. He said that the roads need to be maintained and the Town Hall/Library project needs to be finished so that there won't be a bad image of Wethersfield.

Cathy Mohan Hallisey, 63 Drummer Lane, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She said it is a very realistic budget. She is sensitive to the impact of tax increases on the elderly. She always supports social security and medicare. She said that the Board of Education has made great strides but those students going on to four year colleges has dropped in the last five years. She supports the part time Guidance Counselor position being increased to full time.

The school has a diverse population that needs the Counselors to push them into applying to four year colleges. There are many unfunded mandates issued by the State. Residents should be demanding that the State pay for anything it mandates. In response to a previous comment, she said that the purpose of English as a Second Language (ESL) is to transition children into mainstream classrooms. The schools today are not what they once were. It is foolish to think they can be run the way they were run years ago. Children face enormous challenges and parents need to make sacrifices. She is willing to give up leaf pick up and every week garbage removal for the sake of the children.

Kathy Kanya, 27 Meadow View Drive, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She has a second grader at Highcrest. The class size is at the limit and it is a challenge to educate at that level. The proposed budget will strengthen the school system. She said that she chose to move to Wethersfield because of its school system. She thanked the Board of Education for what they offer the students in Town.

Karen Colangelo, 36 Old Common, said that she is a resident, parent, and teacher in Wethersfield. She supports the Board of Education budget. She said that it is very solid with no fat in it. The high school is in dire need of a Social Studies teacher.

Mike Cuddigan, 49 Westlook Road, spoke on seven items - 1.) The Town should not turn off every third street light. Some streets would be too dark. He asked if the police supported this idea. 2.) The Information officer was originally funded 3/4 by the Board of Education and 1/4 by the Town. Now it is not funded at all by the Town. He said it should be 50/50. 3.) The Children's section of the Library should not be closed at night. It is the only part of the Library that is fully functional. 4.) There are library shelves and Town Council chamber renovations in the Capital Budget. These items should be in the bond package. 5.) The Board of Education budget shows health insurance as self-insured. It should be reviewed. 6.) The Grand List growth is minimal. The referendum in November failed but redevelopment needs to happen. He hopes the Town will continue to look into why the referendum failed. 7.) The Board of Education salaries and benefits are the big ticket items in the budget. The Board of Education needs to look at strong negotiations with the union.

Joseph Koneski, 140 Eastern Drive, said that he is a former Town Council member and thanks the Councilors for their service to the Town. He said that the Board of Education is looking for budget increases in the name of the children. 7.9 percent increase is outrageous and insulting to taxpayers. He asked who receives an 8 percent salary increase? He asked how adding more supervisors will help the children? He said that supervisors were brought in from the bloated, failed Hartford school system. He said that school building projects are in the Town budget, not the Board of Education's budget. He said that the Board of Education is always holding up shared services plans. The Town needs to live within its means.

Marguerite Alpert, 7 Morrison Avenue, said that she supports the Board of Education's budget in its entirety. She said that one of the guiding principals of the Board of Education is to maintain class size. This is not the time to go back to the large class sizes from the 1940's. She said that she supports this well constructed budget. She said that the Library is a great egalitarian institution. The Librarians have done a great job delivering services at all levels during the renovation. She said that the Library priorities should be to staff the children's room and maintain the book budget. She said that the Town also needs to continue to fund the road and sidewalk maintenance program. Last year, she, along with thirty neighbors made great efforts to fix the problem of the sidewalks on Morrison Avenue. Morrison Avenue has no storm drains or snow shelf and the sidewalks are level with the street. The sidewalk is crumbling and curbing has not been replaced. It is a deplorable situation that will not go away. She requests that the Town revisit this issue.

Kathi Stickley, 147 Collier Road, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. The Board of Education presented a fiscally responsible budget of mostly fixed costs. The new initiatives amount to only .5 percent of the proposed budget. She said that Highcrest had large kindergarten classes this year. She recommended allowing parents to send their children to less crowded schools when their home school is overcrowded. She said that she too is willing to bag her leaves and have trash picked up every other week in an effort to save money.

Anne Riccio, 7 Hayrake Drive, said that she applauds all for their efforts. There have been many positive gains: road work, building improvements, and strides in education. She said that the Town has incurred the costs but the Town must think long term. She said that she understands the need for tax increases in order to move forward. She also

realizes that there are residents who are on a fixed income. The Town needs to work to keep the increases down. She said that she also supports the Board of Education budget. She would also like to convey Cindy Jacobs Ramirez's support of this budget.

Joan Nelson, 34 Farms Village Road, said that she is a parent and teacher in Town. She said that because of the budgets, the middle school has a new curriculum and new text books. Teachers devote much of their time to making sure students work towards State standards. The Town needs to support the Board of Education budget. She said she is sensitive to rising costs but the addition of the social studies teacher and guidance counselor are needed.

Lisa Ambrogio, 42 Highcrest Acres, said that she is a product of the Wethersfield School system. It has a great reputation then and now. She supports the Board of Education budget. It is meeting only the barest needs. It skims the surface of many other needs. The guidance position has been on the Board of Education's list for many years. The college application process is difficult and nothing like it used to be. She echoed the fact that society is nothing like it was fifty years ago. The Town and schools are different. She said that the Town has done too much band aiding and it costs more in the long run.

Nancy Andrews, 21 Stonegate Drive, said that she has two students in the school system. She supports the Board of Education budget. She said that she grew up in Town and came back to the Town to raise her family. The Town needs to preserve the good school system. The increase to the Guidance Counselor position is needed. The college application process is difficult. As Co-President of the Band Boosters, she said that the Wethersfield High School Band has won many awards, including best band in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. They will be holding a bottle drive this Saturday. The Band represents the Town with pride.

Judy Niedzielski, 149 Straddle Hill, said that she is the parent of four children, PAC Chairperson, and works in the school system. She said that this is a bare bones budget. The social studies teacher and guidance counselor will be helpful at the high school. The addition of a part time preschool teacher will be money well spent, too.

Robin Bourassa, 248 Dale Road, said that the Town needs to support the Board of Education budget to invest in the Town's children. She said that she attended Wethersfield public schools and is now a property owner and parent. She said that her parents still live in Town and are on a tight budget but it is important to maintain the Town's schools. If residents want success for Wethersfield, they must be willing to give back to the Town. By keeping the budget intact, the Town is supporting its children.

Susan Norsigian, 334 Fox Hill Road, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She said that the Town owes it to the children to have a competitive school system. It would be a vote of confidence in the Superintendent of Schools to move forward with this budget.

Holly Landers, 205 Broad Street, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. She is concerned with class sizes at some of the schools. She said that she would support cuts to the Town budget, but supports the Board of Education budget.

Tracy McDougall, 45 Nott Street, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget and the Library budget. She said that the issues are always the same. The Town needs to rethink how things are funded. Services need to be regionalized and the commercial tax base needs to be revitalized. Without redevelopment the taxes will continue to rise.

Michael Zaleski, 23 Black Birch Road, said he supports the Town and Board of Education budgets. Improvements are being made throughout Town. This is not the time to retreat. The school system in Town is good and homes are still holding their value. He said that his wife is a teacher at the High School and sees the impact of the Board of Education's budget first hand. He said that an almost 8 percent increase is a big increase but it is an invaluable investment. He said that nothing was said tonight of the Police and Fire budgets. Their budget requests are not being met. He said that it is imperative that the Town get aggressive with redevelopment. The vacant commercial properties need to be reused. He said that redevelopment doesn't happen overnight. He sees both the challenges and potential for redevelopment. He encourages residents to attend the Redevelopment Forum on June 11th.

Mary Fulton, 254 Highcrest Road, thanked the Town Council and Board of Education members for their time. Residents notice improvements. To cut back now would be a true mistake. She supports the budgets.

Joe Dituno, 807 Wells Road, said that recycling is something that all residents should be doing because tipping fees for the trash are so high. A notice should be sent with the tax bills stating that it is mandatory. He said that the Town is in traffic grid lock. Maple Street, Wells Road, and Prospect Street are full of traffic. He asked who would want to relocate on the Silas Deane Highway with such traffic. He said that his children left Wethersfield. When they return for a visit, they same nothing has changed. He would support recycling and trash pick up every other week.

Edward Teval, 894 Ridge Road, said that he respects the parents who are here supporting the school budget but he is old and grey and thinks another way now. He said the Town is in a dire situation. There is a high reliance on property taxes by residential property owners. He said that the Town Council was elected because residents thought that they could get the Town out of this mess. The Redevelopment referendum that the Town Council supported, failed. He challenged the Town Council to live within the budget. He said that seniors have fixed incomes and don't use many Town services. The Town needs to find another way to fund services.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said that it is not a good time to raise taxes. Over the past four years, the Town Council has hurt the economy by continuing to raise taxes. He said officials do not know how to run the State. All they do is tax and spend. The Town talks about energy conservation and then the Board of Education puts room air conditioning in classrooms and adds lighting to playfields. It is a joke. He said the middle school was just renovated and the doors don't meet the needs of the handicapped. He said that CREC comes out with per pupil spending numbers every year. Wethersfield is paying more than Avon. The cost difference between the per pupil cost of Avon and Wethersfield when multiplied by the number of students equals \$3,500,000. He said that education is a generic product. If Avon can educate students at one cost, Wethersfield should be able to also. Everyone at the table tonight should be fired and replaced by Avon staff. He said that the Wethersfield people are inept.

Brendan Hallisey, 63 Drummer Lane, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget, especially the social studies and guidance counselor positions at the High School. He said that there are classes with 30 students in them. The teaching poison would help with class size and allow for more AP classes. The guidance position will lower the number of students each guidance counselor sees allowing for more help with the college application process. He said that there has been a decrease in the number of students attending a four year college. He said that the budget increase may seem steep but the mandates are steep.

Chairperson Adil asked if anyone would like to speak for a second time.

Cathy Mohan Hallisey, 63 Drummer Lane, said that a per pupil comparison is not accurate. It is unfair. She said that the Town Council and Board of Education are volunteers. They should be respected. Residents should be angry with the State Legislators.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said that the Town Wide Radio System is operating in a deficit. He said that he thought the Town purchased it outright. He said that the per pupil expenditures come from CREC. It is the only place he can get the figures. There is a big discrepancy between Avon and Wethersfield. Some services should be outsourced.

Edward Teval, 894 Ridge Road, asked what the Board of Education members would do if the State passed a law requiring all high school seniors to pass a test. He said that the Board of Education would be in trouble.

Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, said that the Town Council members and Town Manager received copies of the comments she received via e-mail and letters from residents. She summarized the following comments:

Shelley Phillips, 149 Valley View Drive - supported the Board of Education budget.

Jerome Stavola, 58 Old Pewter Lane - supported the Board of Education budget.

Carolyn and Roy Carcia, 91 Windmill Hill - supported the Board of Education budget.

Beth Doffek, 40 Grandview Terrace - supported the Board of Education budget.

Gennaro and Susan Mascolo, 48 Goodwin Park Road - supported the Board of Education budget.

Vivian and Louis Bromberg, 16 Harvest Hill - supported the Board of Education budget.

Gena Hallisey, 187 Fairlane Drive - supported the Board of Education budget.

Brad and Mary Jayne Pederson, 24 Drummer Lane - supported the social studies position and guidance position.

Anna Maruca, 7 Southwell Road - against the proposed tax increase.

Filomena Marinelli, 16 Stonegate Drive - supported the Board of Education budget.

Chris and Eileen Montross, 250 Crest Street - supported the Board of Education budget.

Steven Piferi - against the proposed budget, in particular the Board of Education budget.

Jane Jylkka, 30 Hayrake Road - supported the Board of Education budget.

Bob Gaynor, 20 Orchard Hill Drive - spoke against the proposed Board of Education budget.

Sheila Verre, 98 Windmill Hill - supported the Board of Education budget.

Leslie Civitello, 26 Toll Gate Road - against turning off 1/3 of the Town's street lighting and closing the Children's room of the Library at night.

Elizabeth Foran, 447 Main Street - supported both the Town and Board of Education budgets.

Sean Gray, 903 Cloverdale Circle - said that he does not feel the Town has an economic plan that will attract businesses. The budget needs to address this situation.

Woodrow Warren, 9 Nutmeg Circle - for full justification of any increases in the proposed budget with closer scrutiny and monitoring of fiscal management.

The following e-mails were received after 4:30 p.m. on the day of the Public Hearing:

Joyce and Mario Ciampi, 35 Patriot Lane - support of the Board of Education budget

Melody Labbie, 89 Woodside Drive - support of the Board of Education budget

Chairperson Adil thanked the public for attending the Public Hearing and for their ideas. He said that the Town Council would adjourn to its budget workshops.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 10:38 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved to "**ADJOURN THE BUDGET HEARING TO THE NEXT BUDGET WORKSHOP ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23, 2008 AT 5:45 P.M. AT THE ELEANOR BUCK WOLFE NATURE CENTER**" seconded by Councilor Roberts.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk

*APPROVED BY VOTE OF COUNCIL MAY 5, 2008*

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\*These linked files are in Adobe's Portable Document Format. To view them you will need Adobe Reader installed on your computer. It is available for free download at:

