

ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING MONDAY, APRIL 28, 2008

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Wednesday, April 23, 2008) was held on Monday, April 28, 2008 at 5:45 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center with Chairperson Adil presiding.

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

Absent: Councilor Forrest

Also present: RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk; Lisa Hancock, Finance Director; Nancy Stilwell, Director of Social and Youth Services; Lori Schroll, Administrative Analyst, Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector; Chandler Rose, Assessor; Charles Flynn, Fire Chief; Brian Schroll, Gordie Harris, Mark Guerra, Deputy Chiefs; Greg Rinick, Immediate Past President of the Wethersfield Volunteer Ambulance Association, David Courter, Vice President of the Ambulance Association

Chairperson Adil called the meeting to order and asked the Assistant to the Town Manager, to provide the information on the Police budget that had been previously requested.

RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager, discussed the zero based budgeting used for the Police Department budget this year. The Department was asked to throw out all of the old numbers and look at what it does and how it does it and why it does it. Mandated services are looked at first. Then the Department was asked what is needed in an ideal world to provide those services. It was a little harder to do that with the Police Department because a separate analysis needs to be completed for staff. How many calls are received daily and at what hours, etc. and see if the Department is properly staffed. That is usually done with software. They borrowed Hartford's software but were unable to use it. They said that they are continuing to work on it and are assuming that the right level of staffing is being used. They broke their functions down to Public Safety, Criminal Investigation, Operation Support, Crime Prevention/Community Relations, Town Government Support, and Private Duty. Town Government Support and Private Duty, Crime Prevention/Community Relations are not mandated. Operation Support keeps the Department going. Criminal Investigation and Public Safety were considered mandated services. Public Safety/Law Enforcement included patrol and dispatch. Some of the other units were considered Public Safety as well. Operations support is not mandated but is needed to run the Department. It includes the people who do the budget, fleet management, alarm maintenance, traffic, records management (mandated), radios, prisoner control, human resources, training, animal control (mandated), school safety, purchasing, scheduling, and property control or evidence (mandated). The Crime Prevention/Community Relations includes school crossing guards, Accreditation, school resource officer, DARE, the motorcycle unit, and the Explorers. The zero based budget is the budget that the Police Department requested, with a new staff of a full time Animal Control Officer and Juvenile Officer.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there is a different budget than what they would have come up with had they used the traditional budget method.

RaeAnn Palmer said that in this case the budget was bigger because the Department really started to analyze items. This budget is similar to what it would have been. A real staffing study would have to be done to see if staffing levels are appropriate.

Councilor Console asked who would do that kind of a study.

RaeAnn Palmer said that Town staff could do it if it could get the software to work or someone could be hired to do it. The software is very complicated. All of the calls that were received by dispatch for a time period, usually six months are fed into the software. The data is looked at by hour of day and day of the week. Then you have to do a beat, or patrol analysis. In the long run it is probably better to hire someone to do it. Hartford has a software package to do that

kind of analysis which we were able to borrow but not able to use. They have not set it up or used it yet and could not help us. If they set it up Hartford said that they would help Wethersfield.

Councilor Console asked if someone could volunteer to come in and look at the software. Ms. Palmer said they could call her.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the Town charges the full amount that it can for Private Duty, like overtime, pension, and benefits, including retirement.

RaeAnn Palmer said yes.

Lisa Hancock said that future medical benefits are not included. They are based more on regular pay, not overtime and would be very difficult to compute.

Councilor Kotkin asked if there was a State Statute that bars the Town from charging for the future retirees' medical benefits.

RaeAnn Palmer said that she doesn't think the Town is barred from doing so.

Lisa Hancock said that she does not think there is a Statute but the Town needs to be careful that it does not price itself out of providing a service and then grievances can be filed.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Town is facing some very big costs and Police Officers are able to retire with full medical benefits from the age of 45 or 46 years old until they start receiving Medicare.

RaeAnn Palmer said that she would look into it.

Councilor Roberts said that she would like to see what surrounding Towns are charging for a rate, too.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there is a State Statute that addresses some of these issues.

Councilor Hemmann said that there are reports that are run. Can some of the analysis be based from these reports?

RaeAnn Palmer said that she has looked at the report but has not done anything like this manually.

Councilor Hemmann said that if she ran reporting for the six month she could see trends and get a beginning for the data and have not lost any time in starting the analysis.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 6:15 p.m., Councilor Roberts moved "**TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS**" seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors presents, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0. Also present during executive session were RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager.

At 7:01 p.m., Councilor Roberts moved "**TO ADJOURN THE EXECUTIVE SESSION AND ENTER THE PUBLIC SESSION OF THE BUDGET MEETING**" seconded by Deputy Mayor Montinieri. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

SOCIAL AND YOUTH SERVICES

Nancy Stillwell, Director of Social and Youth Services, said that this has been a very productive year. The Department has met all of its goals and had a successful collaboration with the Keane Foundation and the Police Department which has allowed for the expansion of the Crossroads program at no additional cost. A new staff member started in September who has worked out beautifully. The Department has worked with the High School to restructure its community service program with the civics class. There has been a lot of response for the mobile food share program.

It comes once a month. Last month 77 people took advantage of it. The food bank use is up 27 percent at the moment. It looks like there are about 400 applications for energy assistance, another increase. The Department is working with ITN in Middletown to get the independent transportation program running. Members of the Department along with the Police Department will be going to Hartford to do crisis intervention training in June. It will help the Police with dealing with people with mental health issues and avert the use of deadly force. It will also teach how to complete committal paperwork for hospitals so that people are not bounced back and forth. The training is done by a group of mental health and police experts that was formed about 15 years ago. There are a number of new grants that the Department receives. A challenge that the Department faces is Dial-A-Ride. The bids came in on Friday at \$23,000 above what is in the budget. She said that she did contact Logisticares corporate office and asked them what the bid was based on. He said that the consumer price index for transportation has increased 7.3 percent in the last 12 months and motor fuel has increased 26 percent. There has been very good success in working with the faith community. She said that there will be more friendly shoppers and drivers for ITN which is very much needed at this time. The budget is only maintenance.

Councilor Roberts asked if the number in the Dial-A-Ride account is \$23,000 short.

Nancy Stillwell said that it is short.

RaeAnn Palmer asked the Director to discuss the expansion grant.

Nancy Stillwell said that the expansion grant gives Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington an additional \$95,000 a year combined that adds on to the transportation service that the Towns were using. With the expansion grant, the Towns were able to resume transportation on a fifth day of the week and cover medical appointments to a broader range of Towns. In order to continue to receive the grant, the Towns must continue the current level of service.

Councilor Cascio said that the Parks and Recreation Department does not run a program unless it is self-sustaining. What is the current charge for people to use Dial-A-Ride?

Nancy Stillwell said that it is \$30 a year for unlimited use. She has recommended going to \$40. There are about 400 subscribers.

Councilor Cascio said that the current budget is based on \$30 per subscriber. He asked if raising the fee would jeopardize any grants.

Nancy Stillwell said that it would not.

Councilor Cascio said that he would hope that the users would understand the increase because of the increase in fuel.

Nancy Stillwell said that she would think that most people will understand an increase. The Town is taking in about \$12,000 a year. The increase will give the Town about \$16,000.

Councilor Cascio said that \$40 is a bargain for a year of transportation. He said that this is a service the Town provides and \$50 may be necessary.

Councilor Console said that he agrees with the \$50 charge.

Nancy Stillwell said that the only thing that worries her is that the Town may end up granting more waivers or start to grant partial waivers.

Councilor Cascio said that the \$50 charge equates to \$1 per week. Residents need to realize that you can't go anywhere for a \$1 a week.

Nancy Stillwell said that if the Town loses a lot of subscribers, the issue can be looked at again next year.

Councilor Roberts asked how many riders the Town has.

Nancy Stillwell said that there are about 400 subscribed riders. They don't all use it regularly. Some use the service sporadically and others use it 3 times a week.

Councilor Kotkin said on page 169 the Department request for Dial-A-Ride was \$235,199 and the Town Manager's figure is \$205,820 and what is the new number based on the bids.

Nancy Stillwell said that the Town went out to bid initially and Logisticare was the only bidder. They had not bid correctly. They misinterpreted some of what was in the bid. The \$205,820 was put in the budget because it was thought to be a reasonable amount to cover the cost. The bids came in this Friday at \$229,000.

Councilor Kotkin said that \$229,000 is what is needed to maintain service. Under the salary and wages, the Town Manager took out of the permanent part-time account \$8,000 for the senior center coordinator.

Nancy Stillwell said that she was looking to expand the position but the Town Manager eliminated the expansion. Donna currently works 25 hours a week and the Department would like her to work 30 hours.

RaeAnn Palmer said that it is on the Town Manager's priority list. All new positions and additional hours were removed from the budget and prioritized in a list.

Councilor Kotkin said that on page 167, even with the Town Manager's reduction it looks like a \$23,000 increase request from you and the Town Manager endorsed a \$15,000 increase. Why is there that much of an increase in the part time account?

Lisa Hancock said that during the 818 contract negotiation pay raises and scale changes were approved.

Nancy Stillwell said that the Senior Center Director position was reclassified with a payout included.

Councilor Kotkin said that on page 168 in the Health Insurance account, the Department request was \$143,000 and the Town Manager took out \$20,000.

Lisa Hancock said that she took that money out. In the past, the Town has taken the cost of the insurance and spread it across all of the Departments without having the retiree amount in the appropriate account. There is a substantial decrease across the board.

Chairperson Adil asked if the Director felt the proposed fee increase for Dial-A-Ride would create complaints.

Nancy Stilwell said that initially there may be some complaints but many residents will understand. The Department may have to grant some partial waivers for those users who are burdened by the \$20 increase.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the Town Council will need to have an idea of the amount of additional revenue this will create. It will be roughly an additional \$4,000 because some of the increase was already budgeted. If 40 residents request waivers the increase will be more like \$3,600.

Nancy Stilwell said that people are registered in July for the year. The majority of the revenue is received then.

Lisa Hancock said that there is no increase built into the budget, yet.

TAX COLLECTION (page 38)

Marlene Desjardins, Tax Collector, said that nothing has really changed in this budget. She did ask for her part time position be increased to 25 hours a week from 19.5 hours but the Town Manager cut the request. The additional hours would allow her to work more on collecting back taxes. She thanked the Town Council for creating the policy on back taxes. Money is coming in to the Town. There was one on Highland Street for over \$100,000 that came in this year. Another one for \$25,000 came in and a third for \$20,000 is expected this week. A drop box was installed outside for the public. It is now accessible after hours. Credit card payments are now accepted on-line. ACH is also being used. It

is a service where a taxpayer's bank cuts a check and pays the taxes.

Lisa Hancock said that the Tax Collector is also looking to implement a new ACH for faster collection of money from the banks. Some of the larger escrow companies have Fed Wire. Normally, they would FedEx all of the checks for taxes and then the taxes would be prepared and brought to the bank. Now the Fed Wire can directly deposit the money into the Town's account. A file is also sent that downloads into the tax system and pays off the accounts. Also in July, the tax payments will be sent directly to the banks lock box because the Town will have their P.O. Box on all of the return envelopes. Since they will not be coming to Town Hall, it will eliminate the courier. This way the money will be credited each night to the Town's account.

Councilor Roberts asked if a senior citizen volunteer could help to answer phones in the office.

Marlene Desjardins said that the volunteer would have to be familiar with the system in order to answer any of the questions. The person would also have to know the Town's policies.

Lisa Hancock said that the Town would have to be careful. There is a confidentiality issue with that office. There is a lot involved with numbers and calculating and you need to make sure that the right information is given out.

Councilor Roberts said that the Town might be able to get the right volunteer to help out in lieu of the additional part time hours. Is that an option?

Lisa Hancock said that there may be some things that a volunteer could do.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the floater ever helps in the office.

Marlene Desjardins said that the new floater has not been trained in the office yet because she is being used in the Building Department.

Councilor Kotkin said that there is a large increase in moving a part timer from 19.5 to 25 hours a week because of the benefits. He asked why the decrease in the allocated amount for the technical assistant.

Lisa Hancock said that an employee that was being paid higher transferred to another Department. She had kept her salary from when she transferred into the Tax office from the Finance Office. The new employee will be at a lower pay level.

Councilor Kotkin asked where the collection rate would end the year and what was budgeted.

Marlene Desjardins said that she is hoping to be at 99.4 percent.

Lisa Hancock said that the budget represents 98.6 percent.

ASSESSMENT (page 43)

Chandler Rose, Assessor, said that he did not have anything cut by the Town Manager. This budget is in line with what it was last year. The 2007 Grand List increased by .63 percent over the 2006 list. It was another successful year with Personal Property Audits. An additional 20 accounts were audited, with a net gain of \$56,325. That does not include the assessment for the 2007 Grand List. There was an increase in the number of hits to the Vision Appraisal website. The big news is the 2008 Grand List Revaluation. It started on schedule. The data collection is currently being conducted. They are about 60 percent complete on the residential side and 75 percent complete on the commercial side.

Councilor Roberts asked what was the process if Vision Appraisal finds something that the Town was not aware of.

Chandler Rose said that the Town is looking at those items going forward only.

FIRE DEPARTMENT (page 98)

Charles Flynn, Fire Chief, said that all fire fighters are now certified to NIMS 100 and 200. The Chief Officers have all been certified to NIMS 300, one of them is to the 400 level. About half of the Department is also a medical responder. There was a 20 percent increase in training last year. There is a lot of mandatory training required, too. The Department has been able to sustain the equipment level with a good turnover level. The requests for this year are to finish off the 400, continue recruitment efforts, and work towards National accreditation. The biggest cut that the Town Manager made was in salary and wages. The Department was looking to increase the point system for the fire fighters by about 3.5 percent. The program was started about two years ago as an incentive to keep the firefighters in the Department. The Town Manager also cut subscriptions by \$1,000 and did not fund standby for storms at all. A storm standby is when firefighters are put in the fire house to reduce the response time during a major storm.

Councilor Roberts asked what the \$4,000 would have covered.

Chief Flynn said that would pay for the salaries for that standby time period. They receive \$15 and \$13 an hour.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the intention is not to stop the practice of standby, if the funds are needed, they will have to be found somewhere else.

Chief Flynn said another cut was to the outside services for doors. It is a cut the Department can live with. There was a cut to uniform dress shoes. The IT equipment account was cut. He said that the Department is trying to stay where it is per the Town's recommendations. The Department is in pretty good shape right now.

RaeAnn Palmer said that there is a cut to all IT budgets across the Town they are all in the Data Services, technology budget.

Chief Flynn said that the headsets in the equipment budget are going to be purchased with this year's funds. It is another one of the items that the Town is trying to get caught up on. \$7,000 was cut from the other structures budget for the remodeling of the kitchen in Company One. Under the Capital Improvement Program budget, the Town Manager is funding \$15,000 for pagers which is a three year rollover on the personal pagers used for notification. There is \$15,000 for low rise, high pressure air bags in the budget. The Department asked if that could be switched over for the security system for the fire house doors. The Department feels this is more important. The essential doors could be done now and other doors would be done at a later date. In the Capital Non-recurring Fund there was the replacement of a car. The vehicle that is being driven now is a 1998 totaled cruiser that was repaired. It would not be a new vehicle but rather a passed down vehicle from a Department Head.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the salaries and wages. He asked about the Fire Stipends-Old Abatement Funds.

Lisa Hancock said that she took a look at the actual expenditures. After the analysis it seemed more appropriate to fund it at \$80,000. In the past, the Town had a tax abatement program for the firefighters. The IRS said that the Town had to treat the abatement money like income and tax it. The Town changed the program to a stipend and it was included in the budget as a stipend expense. Each year, they estimate the best they can based on the number of volunteers that will qualify. It has been coming in around \$65,000. \$80,000 would more appropriately reflect an accurate number. If the new policy passes, there will be some funds in here that will still be paid out in cash and some that may go towards the tax abatement. It will effect the budget on the one side as the Town Council determines the mill rate for the taxable base and on the other side will be seen here as an expense. The Town Council will vote on the new policy at the May 5th meeting.

Councilor Kotkin said that there are three accounts.

Lisa Hancock said that she calculated the budget out and pulled out what the officers would get and showed that separately. There are really two separate programs, one for the officers and a point system for the other volunteers.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Town Manager's numbers should fully fund these accounts without an increase, keeping it flat.

Chairperson Adil asked how things were going in general for the Department. He also asked how the Wethersfield training would relate to surrounding Towns.

Chief Flynn said that there are no problems. Things are running smoothly. There are a lot of Departments looking at Wethersfield to see how it is doing. It is a testament to the officers. The Department is probably ahead of many Towns in training. Some of the officers training can be done on-line.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the Department's rating of 3 is solid, which is as good as it can be for a volunteer department.

Chief Flynn said that the Town is at ISO class 3.

Deputy Chief Brian Schroll said that he reviewed a fiscal survey from the 1980's. Now, every two years the State sends the Department out a form and if things don't change they won't come back in and reevaluate the Town unless you request them to. During the 1980's the Town was probably on the low end of the rating. The Department could probably better itself now based on record keeping, training, and testing that is currently done. The Town could be close to a class 2.

Councilor Kotkin asked what savings the homeowners would see if the Department was a class 2.

Deputy Chief Schroll said that he does not have that information. It is what the insurance adjusters base on the rates on homeowners insurance.

Chief Flynn said that there are only 19 Class 3 Departments, paid or volunteer, in the State.

Councilor Kotkin said that people do not realize the savings that they are receiving.

Councilor Hemmann asked if there was an effort to look for a single subscriber for all Town Departments for on-line training so that the Town can create more efficiency.

Chief Flynn said that he brought the program to the Town Manager's attention when the Department began the program. Some of the training is very specific but other training is more generic.

Councilor Hemmann said that the Board of Education should also be included for training and other subscription services.

Chief Flynn said that in the Fire Maintenance budget pays for the utilities on the buildings. There is no problem with this budget.

WETHERSFIELD VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION (WVAA) (page 132)

RaeAnn Palmer said that the Town Manager working with the Volunteer Ambulance Association to put together a study committee that included members of the Ambulance Association, Lt. Power from the Police Department, Chief Flynn and Deputy Chief Schroll from the Fire Department, a couple of former volunteers and herself to look at the Ambulance Association. She passed out the committees' recommendations. She said that she will summarize the recommendations after Mr. Rinick highlights the budget.

Gregg Rinick, Past President, said that the budget is very reasonable. The utilities are all reasonable. The volunteer stipends are going down.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the active membership is down. The hours that the volunteers are working are down, also. It was the overwhelming recommendation of the committee that the Wethersfield Volunteer Ambulance Association is a viable organization and provides a valuable service to the Town and that it should be supported by the Town maintaining the building and paying the stipends. However, there are some things that the Association could do like coming up with a more realistic goal for coverage. They have a very high commitment in terms of the time that they

cover and like all other volunteer association it is hard to keep members. The Association needs to maintain and improve statistical records and recordings. The Association needs to hire a part-time administrative support person. The Association bills for the services they provide. They bill the private insurance companies. The committee also asked them to look at a rewards system for their members to increase volunteers. The committee will get back together in six months. The Association also provides standby service for the sporting events in Town. If the Town didn't have the volunteers, it would have to pay Aetna Ambulance. Also, without the volunteers the ambulance companies would be negotiating costs to the Town for services. She said that the members on the committee are very committed to making the Association work.

Councilor Roberts asked how many participating members the Association has.

Greg Rinick said that there are 27 active people. They do not all ride duty shifts during the week.

Councilor Roberts asked how many people the stipend was for.

Greg Rinick said that the proposed budget is for 10 people.

Councilor Roberts asked what happens with the billing.

Greg Rinick said that they send out a first and second notice and then they write it off. If someone doesn't have insurance, they don't impose it.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that at a previous meeting, he said that the energy cost projections are increased by 10 percent on the Town side which the Town Manager tied to CRCOG. He asked if the Finance Director knew why the increases were higher on the Board of Education side.

Lisa Hancock said that she has asked the Board of Education for its information but has not received it yet.

Councilor Roberts said that the questions was whether or not the Board of Education was given the CRCOG information or not.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if the Board of Education was told 18 percent.

Lisa Hancock said that she does not believe that she sent anything to the Board of Education regarding the proposed increase. She said that she can certainly share that information in the future with the Board of Education.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if that 10 percent increase is based on actual cost of this year which has increases that reflect what is happening this year or is the 10 percent on top of that.

Lisa Hancock said that the 10 percent increase is on top of what has happened this year. The Department Heads looked at the actual numbers for this year. Some Departments didn't increase by the 10 percent.

Councilor Cascio said that he spoke with the Town Manager today about the transportation usage throughout Town to find out if busing is a statutory requirement.

Councilor Roberts said that the Board of Education looked at this last year. It is required by the State Department of Education. The Board looked at having parents sign a waiver if they were going to drive their children. She said that she believes the answer was that the Town has to make a provision for every child in Town.

Councilor Cascio said that if the Town doesn't do it, it may be not receive ECS funding.

Lisa Hancock said that there is a transportation grant that the Town receives.

Councilor Cascio said that he has family in East Longmeadow Massachusetts that pays a flat rate of about \$200 per student to use the bus. The family signed a contract with the Board of Education. He said that he was trying to be creative in coming up with savings. Half of the buses are empty.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked if there was any talk about reducing the size of the buses on the routes.

Councilor Roberts said that she doesn't know but she thinks the Board of Education just renegotiated the bus contract and it is down 3 percent.

Councilor Cascio asked if the Town can impose a transportation fee for parents who use the bus for their children to get to school.

Chairperson Adil said that if none of these things are feasible under State law then the Town Council should be talking to the Wethersfield Legislative delegation.

RaeAnn Palmer said that the Town Manager wanted to make sure that the Town Council supported the call to Senators on the firefighter bill because it looks like it has come out of the House but the Senators are a little iffy. This bill allows for paid firefighters to work as volunteers in their home towns.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:50 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2008 AT 5:45 P.M. AT THE ELEANOR BUCK WOLF NATURE CENTER**" seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

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

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council May 19, 2008