

[NOTE: These minutes are made available to the public prior to Town Council acceptance.]

ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING MAY 2, 2006

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Wednesday, April 26, 2006) was held on Tuesday, May 2, 2006 at 5:30 p.m. at the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato and Chairperson Morin.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Rae Ann Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk; and Lisa Hancock, Finance Director.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien distributed and reviewed a memo of answers to supplemental budget questions asked at the April 27 budget workshop. The Town Manager announced that she is comfortable with taking an additional \$225,000 from the fund balance to use toward offsetting the tax rate.

COUNCIL ACTION

Councilor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$600 TO THE ASSISTANT TO THE TOWN MANAGER SALARY**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

The Town Manager explained that this will allow Ms. Palmer extra hours to work on her duties as Assistant to the Town Manager, as opposed to grants, which is not taking up as much of her time.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$7,106 AS A NET AMOUNT TO THE TOWN MANAGER'S WAGES AND EMPLOYEE INSURANCE COVERAGE**", seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$1,500 TO THE TOWN CLERK'S OVERTIME BUDGET**", seconded by Councilor Cascio. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE TOWN TREASURER SALARIES & WAGES ACCOUNT BY \$500, AND THE ACCOMPANYING FRINGE BENEFIT ACCOUNT APPROPRIATELY**", seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$31,012 FOR SALARY AND FRINGE BENEFITS FOR A PART TIME FINANCIAL ANALYST IN THE FINANCE DEPARTMENT**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato.

Councilor Drake stated that he does not support the motion as there has been ample opportunity over the past few years to work together with the Board of Education and this hasn't been done. He said that he agrees that Ms. Hancock

needs the extra help; however, he feels that current staff from the Town and Board are not being utilized as they should.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that she is in favor of bringing in someone with the proper financial expertise to work with Ms. Hancock. She said that there is an opportunity with the position for tremendous financial growth for the Town, and she sees the position as a revenue generator down the road.

Councilor Kirsche stated that the goal was for the position to justify itself through its earnings; however in tough budget times, this modest goal is not worth carrying.

Councilor Adil stated that he supports the motion and that the position will be reviewed after one year to confirm whether it is paying for itself and beyond.

Councilor Drake clarified with Councilor Adil that if the position does not pay for itself in one year, he will agree to do away with the position. Councilor Adil responded that he would. Councilor Drake said that the biggest problem in Town is with staff salary increases of 5% per year, and because of this he cannot agree to add more staff, but rather work with the current staff instead.

Councilor Forrest stated that this is a position for the Town and the Finance Department cannot wait a year for the resources to provide the revenue generated by it for today and the future.

Councilor Kotkin stated that he supports the motion as the Finance Department needs someone who is experienced in cash management, and he does not believe that there is a staff member of the Board of Education who has this expertise. Councilor Kotkin spoke to the low level of investment with the Firefighters Pension Fund, and how this position could work on generating better returns on this fund. He said that although this is not the full-time position requested, the possible outsourcing of retiree payments could potentially free up time within her department to accommodate a part-time only position.

Councilor Walsh asked if there is any obligation to a part-time employee and the Town Manager said that there is not. Councilor Walsh agreed with Councilor Drake that this could be moved through Shared Services to work with the Board of Education in the long-term; however, the Finance Department needs the staff now and he supports the position.

Councilor Cascio said that although he supports Ms. Hancock, he does not support the part-time position because he feels that if the position is needed that badly, it should be a full-time position that would be more dedicated to the job. Councilor Cascio stated that every office needs help and although financial is one of the Town's weakest points, it is getting stronger.

Chairperson Morin stated that he supports the part-time position as he does not feel comfortable with the cost of a full-time position. He said that he agrees with Councilor Drake's opinion; however, the part-time position gives the Town the opportunity to provide the Finance Department with the assistance needed.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilors Cascio, Drake, and Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 6-3-0.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$22,500 FOR SALARY AND FRINGE BENEFITS TO THE DATA SERVICES BUDGET FOR A CIO POSITION**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that this position was referred to the Information & Technology Committee and the Shared Services Committee and both voted to recommend to the Council that this position go forward. She said that the Town will be responsible for 25% of the cost and the Board of Education will be responsible for the remaining 75% along with fringe benefits and any secretarial support.

Councilor Adil suggested that this position be evaluated after one year to justify its continuation.

Councilor Drake stated that he supports the position; however he does not support to whom and how they report. He said that, outside of Shared Services, the Council did not have the opportunity to provide input on the position.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that the process for this position began prior to the election in 2005 which is why Councilor Drake has not had the benefit of prior discussion of it. She said that this position is an example of how the Town is taking advantage of an opportunity to collaborate resources with the Board of Education. She said that this is an interim position that will be evaluated in one year.

Councilor Kirsche stated that he has no faith that this position will be given a hard look next year. He verified that the position will be a promotion of an already existing Board of Education staff member and questioned who will be performing the performance review. The Town Manager said that a joint review by herself and the Superintendent of Schools will take place.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that she has very high expectations of the proposed individual, and the Town will certainly get something for their investment in the position in terms of growth opportunity.

Councilor Drake commented that the Library's model for their computer system and computer support is fantastic and should be followed.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato commented that their model was looked at; however it is comparing apples to oranges.

Chairperson Morin states that this position gives the Council a chance to see how the Town is operating in terms of technology.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Drake voted NAY. The motion passed 8-1-0.

Councilor Cascio moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE ALLOCATION TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION BY \$400,000**", seconded by Councilor Kirsche.

Councilor Drake explained that he supports the High School technology, the school security initiatives, reimbursable student transportation, additional pupil tuition, and the increase in heating and electrical costs, plus a 3% increase over last year's budget which equates to a budget of approximately \$42,300,000. He said that the Board of Education needs to get their wages and salaries in control and cannot continue to increase them by 5% every year. Councilor Drake stated that out of 215 districts in the State of Connecticut, Wethersfield is ranked number eleven in average teacher salary. He said that the Town cannot keep increasing taxes by 8%-9% each year.

Councilor Cascio stated that the Council allocates an amount to the Board of Education who then decides where and how to spend the money. He said that he does not support the proposed teacher leader positions for the amount of \$117,000, and, as he understands it, the Board of Education will be receiving an additional \$110,000 from the State. Councilor Cascio stated that after these two cuts, the Board of Education would be looking at only a \$200,000 reduction.

Chairperson Morin reminded the Council that they can earmark any items for deletion in the Board of Education budget; however, it is the decision of the Board of Education as to how they spend the Council's allocation.

Councilor Cascio stated that he is an advocate and supporter of the Board of Education, but in these tough budget times, they need to review their budget to make further cuts. He said that a net reduction of \$200,000 will not be that painful for them.

Councilor Forrest asked if the Board of Education's proposed budget includes the \$110,000 from the State and the Town Manager said that it includes half of that or \$55,000.

Councilor Forrest stated that he is comfortable with a reduction of \$300,000.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted NAY. Councilor Cascio and Councilor Kirsche voted AYE. The motion failed 2-7-0.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE ALLOCATION TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION BY \$275,000**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

Councilor Kotkin stated that the Council does not have control over the line items in the school budget, and the additional \$55,000 in funding from the State is a starting place for their deliberations. He said that he is leery about any other additional reductions since there are a lot of initiatives for the High School in the proposed budget. He said that the High School building is reaching capacity and that he supports the air conditioning for the High School.

Councilor Adil stated that he understands Councilor Drake's frustration and also that demographics have changed, allowing for more diversity in schools, more special education needs, and more security issues.

Councilor Cascio stated that he hopes that if the Board of Education does not receive the allocation they anticipate that they will not go after issues that will create a lot of hysteria. He said that the Board of Education needs to hear from the Council as far as initiatives and concerns. Councilor Cascio said that he is not satisfied with the Board of Education's budget because there are no initiatives for maintenance of the new buildings.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that she supports the reduction of \$275,000 as it does not impact education programs.

Councilor Walsh said that he also supports the reduction of \$275,000, especially with the additional \$55,000 funding for special education. Councilor Walsh said that he disagrees with other Councilors' comments about the teacher leaders not being a necessity at the High School. He said that he sees this initiative as a positive move given the new requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Councilor Cascio said that he'd like to see a follow up of the Board of Education's allocation of their funds. He said that Wethersfield has always piloted books and this is not a new initiative. Councilor Cascio said that, in all his terms of serving on the Board of Education and the Council, he has never seen a reduction of pupil services and he doesn't think that any reduction in the allocation will impact the students at this point.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Cascio and Councilor Drake voted NAY. The motion passed 7-2-0.

At this time, Town Manager Bonnie Therrien asked Ms. Palmer to review the Alarm Ordinance registration fees and the memo sent out regarding them. Ms. Palmer explained that the purpose of the registration is to provide a listing of all owners of alarms in Town, along with the name of a secondary key holder, in order to help the Town manage false alarms. She said that there are 90-110 false alarm calls per month in Wethersfield. Ms. Palmer said that there is a cost to administer the program and to purchase and maintain the necessary software, and this is what the registration fee is for.

Councilor Drake questioned why the two police officers who respond to a situation can't just leave once it is determined that the alarm is false. Ms. Palmer said that the officers stay until the alarm is reset due to security reasons.

Councilor Adil suggested that those who use this service should bear the burden of the costs of such.

Councilor Drake suggested that, in order to cover costs, a fee be charged for false alarms rather than to charge a registration fee to each resident with an alarm.

Chairperson Morin suggested that this be sent to Public Safety Committee or the Budget & Finance Committee for review. The Town Manager said that she will look at the options.

Councilor Cascio asked the Mayor if he is considering a reduction of \$14,000 in the proposed budget to reflect the false alarm fees. Chairperson Morin said that he is not prepared to do this.

Councilor Cascio asked if there will be any increase in the Sergeant position or if any hours will be added. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there is a way, through negotiations, to achieve a solution without putting in a Sergeant and a Patrolman.

Councilor Kotkin asked the Town Manager if the Police budget is a fair representation of what she would expect the Town to spend and she said that it is.

Chairperson Morin stated that he does not support the Fire Department Officers receiving a stipend on top of their salary.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$140,000 FOR THE FIREFIGHTER'S POINT SYSTEM TO BE IMPLEMENTED OCTOBER 1, 2006, AND THAT THE CHIEF, ASSISTANT CHIEF, DEPUTY CHIEFS, LIEUTENANTS, STAFF, AND CAPTAINS BE EXEMPT FROM THE POINT SYSTEM**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato.

Councilor Drake said that he supports the \$200,000 Fire Department request and also the \$12,000 for hose inspection, and the secretary position.

Councilor Cascio stated that he also supports the items Councilor Drake has named, and suggested that the Town Manager look into a phase-in of the \$200,000. The Town Manager stated that she could phase it in over a two or three year period.

Councilor Kirsche stated that he supports the motion as everyone must realize what the Town gets from having a volunteer fire department and the millions of dollars saved by this. Councilor Kirsche said that the recent tour of the Fire Department facilities made him realize how much work the firefighters do on top of their forty-hour work week. He said that because of this he supports their request for a secretary.

Councilor Adil said that he'd like to see a study done by next year of all of the Fire Department facilities and he said that it is unfortunate that the Federal Government is requiring unfunded firefighter training mandates. He said that he'd rather not see a phasing in as long as cuts can be found somewhere else.

Councilor Kirsche stated that the Fire Department personnel are an important investment of the Town, and they need to be protected and kept happy.

Councilor Kotkin said that he supports the \$140,000 amount because the \$60,000 can be used elsewhere, and also because the points program needs to be introduced with some type of oversight and not rushed into.

Councilor Forrest stated that Councilor Adil has made an excellent motion, and that he agrees with Councilor Kotkin's implementation suggestion.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Forrest moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$10,710 TO THE PREVIOUS \$140,000 FOR THE APPROPRIATE FRINGE BENEFITS**", seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Kirsche moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$43,026 FOR THE FULL TIME FIRE DEPARTMENT SECRETARY AND FRINGE BENEFITS**", seconded by Councilor Cascio.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that she'd rather see the Department work with the scheduling of people they already have to make arrangement for secretarial coverage before hiring a full-time person.

Councilor Walsh said that he agrees with the Deputy Mayor and hopes the Department will work with their current personnel to fill the time slots for coverage.

Councilor Adil said that he hates adding full time personnel and would prefer to keep the Fire Department secretarial staff at part-time to alleviate paying benefits.

Councilor Cascio clarified that the Fire Department currently has two part-time clerical staff and he said that it is important to keep in mind that the Fire Department is here for the safety of the Town. He said that there is extensive paperwork required to meet the needs of State requirements; therefore, he supports the motion for the full-time secretary.

Councilor Kirsche stated that the Fire Chief made it clear that there is increased necessary paperwork due to Homeland Security requirements, and having a full-time secretary would make it easier to cover the unpredictable hours of the two current part-time staff. Councilor Kirsche said that he does not want to nickel and dime the Fire Department on this as it is a direct reaction to the new reality of Fire Department requirements.

Councilor Adil asked if there is a way to provide additional support to the Fire Department with Town Hall clerical staff and the Town Manager said that the Fire Department needs coverage at night and she will not pay a full-time union person to do this.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that from the Fire Chief's presentation, she gets the idea that there is an issue with staff management.

Chairperson Morin said that he supports Chief Flynn; however, he'd like to see the current staff utilized.

Councilors Cascio, Drake, and Kirsche voted AYE. All other Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted NAY. The motion failed 3-6-0.

Councilor Walsh moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$15,000 TO THE BUILDING SERVICES GENERAL REPAIRS TO BUILDING ACCOUNT**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Cascio moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$10,000 TO THE PHYSICAL SERVICES OVERTIME BUDGET**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

Councilor Cascio said that since the Town is not in the position to hire additional staff for the Physical Services Department, this additional \$10,000 will allow for three extra hours per day for the maintenance of Wethersfield during peak periods such as springtime when weeding and mowing can easily get ahead of the staff.

Chairperson Morin said that this amount should make a dent in the maintenance of the Town, and he hopes that the priority will be that this additional allocation will be for the little things that aren't getting done. Chairperson Morin said that the funding can also be used to spruce things up before the start of school.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Drake voted NAY. The motion passed 8-1-0.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she suggests that the Council stay with their current service at \$29,000 and hold off on the full-time custodial position until the renovations are completed.

Chairperson Morin said that there would be a net savings of approximately \$25,000 by staying with the current service.

Councilor Cascio stated that part of the justification in hiring a full-time custodian is to help out when the building is locked. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there are issues with this; however, she is looking to save money.

Chairperson Morin said that some of the benefits of hiring a full-time custodian are that there is ownership of the building and better security at night, and the custodian is there during the day to help Town staff in the building.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there are maintenance and custodial issues during the day for which work orders have to be processed with Physical Services or Town Hall staff attempt to resolve the issues themselves. She said that the Town Hall is often locked at night regardless of a list that is provided to the private custodians stating the schedule of meetings.

Councilor Forrest asked what the difference is between the cost of a full-time custodian and the cost of the current custodial service.

Ms. Hancock stated that the current cost of the custodial service is \$29,000 and for them to go full time will be \$47,000. She said that to hire one and a half custodians, the cost will be \$50,293 for salary, plus fringe benefits making the difference approximately \$25,000.

Councilor Drake suggested that meetings be moved to school buildings where there is custodial coverage at night, rather than the Town Hall. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Town Hall renovations include a number of meeting rooms just for this purpose. Councilor Drake said that the whole world seems to work on contracted cleaning services and creating another union position will mean another 5% - 6% each year.

Councilor Kotkin suggested that the Board of Education and the Town share their back up custodial resources.

Councilor Cascio told him that the Board of Education and the Town cannot share positions as this will create union problems.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$47,000 TO THE TOWN HALL CUSTODIAL SERVICES ACCOUNT AND ELIMINATE THE FULL- TIME CUSTODIAN AND PART-TIME CUSTODIAN POSITIONS PLUS FRINGE BENEFITS**", seconded by Councilor Walsh.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Cascio voted NAY. The motion passed 8-1-0.

Councilor Cascio asked for more information on the need for the increase in hours for the Senior Center Coordinator.

Chairperson Morin said that he's hoping that the AdHoc Committee reviewing the Social & Youth Services programs will be able to identify this.

Councilor Adil asked if the Social & Youth Services Department would be a good candidate for the zero-based budget approach to look at and justify their services and the Town Manager said that they will be the next Department to do this.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato inquired as to how the Social & Youth Services Department will be utilizing their escrow funds. The Town Manager said that they have approximately \$300,000 in escrow, part of which will be used to make up for the part-time wages of the Crossroads and Ropes programs.

Councilor Cascio asked if each full-time Library staff member will be working their full shift during the Library renovations, and if not, can their hours be banked to allow for the Library to be open on Friday. The Town Manager said that this would have to be negotiated, but right now they are working all of their shifts.

Chairperson Morin said he'd like to see the Library staff help elsewhere in the Town Hall where needed.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that she has received a listing of the projects the Library will be undertaking, and this list will also be provided to the Council. Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that she is concerned for the safety of the Library employees during the renovation. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that it will be much like the Town Hall side where the employees continued to work during the renovations. She said that the contractor and the Health Department monitor the situation constantly.

Councilor Kotkin asked if it is realistic that the five extra associates in the Library will be needed by October and the Town Manager said that she will check on this; however, as far as she knows, this is still accurate. Councilor Kotkin commented that if the associates are not needed until January, there is a certain amount of funding in the budget that the Library won't need. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the children's area will move before the upstairs of the Library is done so they should need the five associates by October.

Councilor Drake expressed concern that the proposed Library budget is a 10% increase over last year and Chairperson Morin stated that this is because of the renovation and the requirement of additional staff. Councilor Drake said that he hopes there's not a 10% increase again next year.

Councilor Cascio asked if there were any concerns or problems associated with removing the Support Services from the Parks & Recreation budget. The Town Manager said that the only one she heard from was the basketball league. Councilor Cascio asked if it was a liability issue and Chairperson Morin said that the league had an issue because they were using the funding to subsidize kids who couldn't afford to pay. Chairperson Morin said that if a kid can't afford to pay, the league should be letting him/her play anyway.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$1,000 TO THE NATURE CENTER FOR SATURDAY STAFF AND FRINGE BENEFITS**", seconded by Councilor Walsh.

Councilor Forrest said that he supports the motion since the Nature Center is the pride of the Town of Wethersfield and opening up on Saturdays is the right thing to do.

Councilor Kirsche asked for an explanation and was told by Councilor Adil that the Saturday opening and staff would allow for birthday parties and other special gatherings.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Regarding the Park Improvements in the Parks Facilities Maintenance budget, Chairperson Morin asked the Town Manager to work with Little League to share in the costs of the outfield fences.

Councilor Adil stated that there is a safety issue involved with the woodchips and playground equipment and that the lack of proper maintenance could result in a liability issue.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$4,000 TO THE PARKS AND RECREATION EQUIPMENT BUDGET**", seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 8-1-0.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that Ms. Hancock reviewed the budget and is recommending that a reduction be made to the health insurance benefits across the board.

Councilor Cascio moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO CUT THE HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS ACROSS THE BOARD BY \$117,171**", seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Adil suggested that the Shared Services Committee address the repair of the press box at Cottone field as this has become a safety issue.

Councilor Cascio said that he brought to the attention of Mr. McCarthy the repair of the press box since this is a safety issue. He said that Mr. McCarthy said he'd find out the cost for this.

Chairperson Morin said that the Board of Education has a responsibility to bring this forward to the Council in its budget, and hasn't. He said that it's frustrating to hear comments like this. He said that the maintenance of the track at the High School falls into this same category and asked that his frustration be relayed to the Superintendent of Schools.

Councilor Cascio moved **"RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE TRANSFERS OUT TO CAPITAL NONRECURRING BY \$7,000 FOR THE TARCO LEAF VAC"**, seconded by Councilor Walsh.

Chairperson Morin verified that the cut is being made because the item came in at a better price.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Chairperson Morin stated that there is a decent amount of money in the Contingency Fund this year and although he certainly doesn't want to drain the fund, he suggested that some of the requested items be purchased through this fund. He said purchasing in this way could offset next year's budget increase.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the \$225,000 could be used to offset the mill rate or to purchase some items this year. Ms. Hancock confirmed that there is currently \$178,000 in the Contingency Fund with transfers still to occur this fiscal year.

Councilor Forrest moved **"RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$25,000 FOR TREES ON THE SILAS DEANE HIGHWAY"**, seconded by Councilor Adil.

Councilor Forrest stated that the Silas Deane Highway is an integral part of Wethersfield and the aesthetic value of it needs to be improved. He said that he has reviewed the Master Plan for the Silas Deane Highway with the Town Manager, Assistant Town Planner, and Betty Rosania, Chair of the EDIC, and discussed ways to improve the Highway with the \$250,000 left in the grant which is mostly being used for the Town Center project at the Church Street/Silas Deane Highway intersection area. He said that his motion would allow \$25,000 to purchase and plant trees out from this center area.

Councilor Kirsche stated that if the Council cannot support an additional \$13,000 for a full-time secretary for the Fire Department, he cannot support \$25,000 for trees.

Councilor Cascio said that he supports curb appeal and the Master Plan for the Silas Deane Highway, he said that there is still a lot of construction and paving to be taking place on the Highway; therefore, it is premature to allocate \$25,000 for trees at this time. He said that the trees do not go in first and then start tearing up sidewalks and grading around them.

Councilor Drake asked if this is private property and the Town Manager said that there are right of ways between the sidewalk and the street where the trees will be planted.

Councilor Kotkin mentioned that there is currently \$2,500 in the Silas Deane Tree account. The Town Manager said that she will be using this money also, so as to close out this escrow account.

Councilors Adil, Forrest, Walsh, and Chairperson Morin voted AYE. Councilors Cascio, Drake, Kirsche, Kotkin, and Deputy Mayor Fortunato voted NAY. The motion failed 4-5-0.

Councilor Cascio moved **"RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$1,600 FOR THE FACES GROUP TO REFURBISH TWO CEMETERY STONES"**, seconded by Councilor Adil.

Councilor Walsh said that he supports the motion; however, he doesn't believe that the group will be able to refurbish two stones for this amount since they are so damaged.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE ALLOCATION TO RESERVE FOR RADIO TOWER REPLACEMENT BY \$100,000**", seconded by Councilor Walsh.

Councilor Cascio asked the Town Manager for her opinion of the reduction and she answered that she has an estimate for the replacement from Motorola and she is trying to spread this over a ten year period. She said that if a reduction is made, the Town will need to make up the difference in the future.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$10,000 FOR TREES ON THE SILAS DEANE HIGHWAY**", seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that she supports an allocation for trees along the Silas Deane Highway; however, she feels that \$25,000 is too much.

Councilor Drake asked when the planting of the trees will occur since he can't imagine that the Town will be in any position in the next year to put a tree in the ground.

Chairperson Morin said that there are numerous areas along the Silas Deane Highway where trees can be planted for beautification.

Councilor Cascio said that he does not oppose the planting of trees; however, he is concerned about investing man hours in the planting and proper maintenance of these additional trees, especially since the Council just voted to add \$10,000 to the Physical Services Overtime budget to give them more time for the current maintenance issues throughout Town. He questions why the Council would want to create more work for these staff members when they're having enough of a challenge maintaining what the Town already has. He said that the trees are a good idea, but premature.

Councilor Kirsche stated that he does not oppose trees, but wants to consider the budget priorities. He said that Wethersfield is currently so far from the Master Plan unveiled at the Rocky Hill Town Hall that these trees are simply a stamp on the envelope. He said that the construction needs to take place and bricks installed before trees are planted. He said that the trees may need to be ripped out by the time the Town can afford bricks or the expansion of the highway takes place.

Councilor Forrest said that the planning of the Silas Deane Highway has been taking place for forty years and nothing has yet to be done. He said that the trees are a start to the redevelopment of the Highway and the Highway is a priority within the top five for the Town. He said that if the Plan is followed, the trees will not need to be ripped out.

Councilor Adil asked if Town staff would be planting the trees or if part of the \$10,000 allocation would be used to hire a private company or arborist for the planting. The Town Manager said that the Town staff would do it. Councilor Adil asked if the tree planting was a top priority of the Revitalization Committee or if they'd allocate some of the funding for the stone structure on the corner of Church Street and the Silas Deane Highway.

Councilor Forrest stated that the Plan will be followed; however, for the center area, the \$250,000 allocated seems to have taken care of that intersection in terms of pavers, sidewalks, and street lights. He said that what he is looking for is to expand out 50-100 feet from that area.

Councilor Cascio stated that he supports Arbor Day and trees, but planting new trees means that they will have to be

maintained when the current trees throughout Town aren't being maintained. He said that the Council is not leading by example.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Cascio, Councilor Drake, and Councilor Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 6-3-0.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the canopy over the fuel system is absolutely necessary. The Town Manager said that this is the last item she added to the budget, and the Town does not 100% have to have it.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE TRANSFERS OUT TO CAPITAL PROJECTS BY ELIMINATING \$35,000 FOR THE PHYSICAL SERVICES CANOPY OVER THE FUEL SYSTEM**", seconded by Councilor Kirsche. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Cascio spoke to the importance of the Town Clerk's Office completing the revisions to the Code Book. He asked how the task will be completed by adding additional hours to or by increasing staff in the Town Clerk's Office.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she recommends preparing the revisions by the present staff and hiring an outside firm to complete the task.

Town Clerk Sassano stated that before the Code Book can go to an outside vendor, her staff has to make all of the correct updates and revisions. She said that any ordinances passed by the Council that affect any chapter of the Code Book require a revision to the book to keep it up to date.

Councilor Cascio stated that these are very important documents for the Town and the revision needs to be done appropriately with considerable concentration. He said that he is concerned that the staff will be duplicating work to correct the Code Book if it comes back incorrectly.

Councilor Adil stated that this would be a perfect job for the Library Staff to assist with during the Library renovations. He suggested that someone from the Library could even cover the basic work in the office so as to free up a member of her Office to work on the Code Book revision.

Town Clerk Sassano stated that tasks in her office can only be addressed by someone who has been sworn in as an Assistant Town Clerk; therefore Library staff would not be adequate.

Councilor Adil stated that the Town could certainly lay off Library staff during the closing of the Library; therefore he believes that these staff members would be happy to help in other offices in the Town Hall rather than receive a pink slip.

Councilor Kotkin said that he hopes that the Town Manager and Town Clerk would be able to utilize hours by the Library staff, during the closing of the Library, to assist with the Code Book revision.

Chairperson Morin asked how many hours would be required to accomplish the Code Book revision task.

Councilor Cascio stated that you can't really put a specific time on the task as it depends on the work flow in the Town Clerk's Office. He said that while the staff member is allocating time to concentrating on the Code Book revision, they cannot be distracted by tending to customers at the counter and on the phone. He said that there are increased demands on the Town Clerk's Office while the staff tries to make the office more user-friendly.

The Town Clerk said that if a member of her staff were to work on the Code Book revision five hours per week, the task would take several months to complete.

Chairperson Morin said that the Town Clerk has part-time staff to complete the task and the Council can allocate funding to cover the five extra hours per week to work on the revision.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the part-time staff would be eligible for benefits if their hours are increased.

Town Clerk Sassano said that she currently has two part-timers in her office who work up to 19 1/2 hours per week and any overtime would put them over the part-time limit, allowing them benefits.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that benefits could be offered for one year until the project is completed.

Ms. Hancock stated that as long as the average weekly hours for the whole year do not exceed 19 1/2, benefits do not have to be offered. She said that it will all depend on the number of hours needed for the Code Book revision, combined with the regular hours of the part-time staff member.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if there is any revenue such as grants that will support this position going to full time. The Town Clerk said that the grants do not pay salary.

Councilor Drake said that the assistance of the Library staff makes the most sense.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the revenues brought forward are \$150,000 additional investment income, \$36,000 in private duty, and \$225,000 for use of Fund Balance to offset the mill rate.

Ms. Hancock explained that the way funds have been set aside is that she works with the reduction of the collectible on the taxes; therefore it is not set up as a revenue account. She said that she has put in a 98.5% collection rate so that the Town reserves a portion of their revenues that would be collected as non-collectibles. She said that she would have put in the rate as 99%; however she reduced it to 98.5% to have a cushion to take into account the possible impact of the car tax. She said that the final adjustments from the Board of Assessment Appeals were much higher than originally anticipated and the Tax Collector has stated that she is more comfortable with the 98.5% rate rather than 99%.

Councilor Kotkin asked what the current collection rate is and Ms. Hancock told him that it is 98.6%. Councilor Kotkin asked why the elimination of the car tax would not require an additional adjustment. Ms. Hancock explained that there is a 98.5% rate built into the budget right now and this was put in with the anticipation that the cushion built into the non-collectible would offset the car tax impact of lost revenue to the Town. Councilor Kotkin asked what not having a car tax has to do with the collection rate. Ms. Hancock said that it's all part of how the taxes are built up on the Grand List. Councilor Kotkin asked what the average collection rate over the past few years has been and Ms. Hancock answered that it has been between 98% and 99%.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO RESTORE \$64,000 TO REVENUE BY ADOPTING A 98.6% TAX COLLECTION RATE**", seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Cascio moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO PLACE \$128,464 FROM REVENUE SHARING INTO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT RESERVE ACCOUNT**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

Councilor Drake suggested that funds be allocated to decrease the mill rate/taxes.

Chairperson Morin said that he would consider splitting the funding between the two.

Councilor Cascio moved "**TO WITHDRAW HIS MOTION TO PLACE \$128,464 FROM REVENUE SHARING INTO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT RESERVE ACCOUNT**", seconded by Councilor Adil. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

At this time (10:40), the Council took a five minute break.

Ms. Hancock announced that the tax increase currently stands at 7.75% with a mill rate of 32.48, and the overall increase in expenditures is 7.31%.

Councilor Cascio reminded the Council that these figures could change by the time the Council votes to approve the budget.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ALLOCATE \$100,000 FROM REVENUE SHARING TO OFFSET TAXES AND \$28,464 INTO THE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT RESERVE ACCOUNT**", seconded by Councilor Adil. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO ADD \$8,371 TO REVENUE FOR THE PILOT GRANT**", seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Kotkin asked the Town Manager to check on the amount available to allocate to the Registrars of Voters salaries, and she said that she will. Councilor Kotkin asked about the \$9,000 difference in the Town Clerk's Salaries & Wages line item total once the part-time clerical position going to full-time is deducted. The Town Clerk said that she put this into her salary since each year she puts in a request for her salary based on what other Town Clerks are making, and also based on the salaries of the other Town Hall Department heads, who actually all make more than the \$64,000 she has requested. Councilor Kotkin asked what the percentage increase is over last year and the Town Clerk said that she does not know. She said that her present salary is \$52,000 and the requested amount is what the job is worth. Ms. Hancock said that the \$64,000 represents an increase of approximately 21%.

Councilor Kotkin moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER APRIL 3, 2006 BE, AND HEREBY IS AMENDED AS FOLLOWS: TO REDUCE THE TOWN CLERK SALARY LINE ITEM BY \$5,000 PLUS THE APPROPRIATE FRINGE BENEFITS**", seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 11:10 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET ADOPTION SESSION ON MAY 10, 2006 AT 5:15 P.M. IN THE TOWN MANAGER'S CONFERENCE ROOM AT THE TOWN HALL**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk