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ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING MAY 10, 2006

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Tuesday, May 2, 2006) was held on Wednesday, May 10, 2006 at 5:15 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room 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; and Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Morin stated that this has been a very smooth budget process and he appreciates the fine job the Town staff did in answering any questions the Council had.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that with the current cuts and additions the amended budget will reflect a 7.42% tax increase which equates to an additional \$371.69 per year for the average appraised house of \$165,867. She said that the mill rate will increase by 2.24 to 32.43. She said that the expenditure increase in the original proposed budget was 7.8% which has decreased to 7.33%.

Chairperson Morin said that the Council has tried with this budget to maintain the services residents are accustomed to with very few new initiatives. He stated that the most compelling initiative addresses the Firefighters.

Councilor Adil moved "**RESOLVED, THAT THE WETHERSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL ADOPT THE TOWN BUDGET AS SUBMITTED BY THE TOWN MANAGER ON APRIL 3, 2006 AND AS AMENDED BY THE TOWN COUNCIL IN THE SUM OF \$74,737,749 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2006**", seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Councilor Drake said that everyone did a great job on the budget and he supports it since he really can't disagree with what is in the budget; however, in thinking long-term, the Town needs to look at how services can be done differently or a 7%-8% increase will be needed each year. Councilor Drake stated that Wethersfield is rated the 11th highest paid out of 215 districts in Connecticut, and the Board of Education needs to take a look at their teachers' salaries.

Councilor Adil said that the Town Manager did a good job of paring down the original, higher budget. He said that, unfortunately, all of the initiatives cannot be undertaken at this time, yet good priorities have been made. He said that no one wants this type of tax increase to continue and hard choices regarding services need to be made in the near future. Councilor Adil commented that the Town Manager is doing a great job with union negotiations and reducing health benefits. He said that he likes the idea of zero-based budgeting and that the Town needs to continue looking for initiatives to share with the Board of Education and Social Services to reduce duplicated services.

Councilor Cascio stated that the budget process was more exciting this year and a considerable amount of respect was shown between Council members. He said that the Town Manager's budget, excluding the Board of Education, needs to be looked at in terms of services and the core responsibility of the Town Manager to put forward a responsible budget was there; however, he's concerned about some unfunded areas and also areas where funding was allocated that he doesn't agree with. He said that he is happy about the \$10,000 increase to the Physical Services overtime allocation, yet he is still on the edge as far as the overall budget.

Councilor Kirsche stated that he supports a large majority of the budget and agrees that the process was constructive and healthy. He said that, during last November's elections, there was a mandate for the maintenance of Town services, and therefore he supports the budget in its majority. Councilor Kirsche said that the Town needs to progress with zero-based budgeting and tougher union negotiations. He said that he is concerned that a \$300,000 compromised cut to the

Board of Education would be reasonable, yet a seemingly arbitrary \$275,000 was voted on instead. Councilor Kirsche said that he understands the good intention of the \$10,000 allocation for trees along the Silas Deane Highway, but this is not only not affordable, but the Town already does not have the Physical Services infrastructure to support what we already have. He said that the Town needs to focus on maintenance before planting trees along the Silas Deane Highway, especially when \$13,000 plus benefits can't be added to the budget for a secretary for the Fire Department. Councilor Kirsche stated that during the last campaign there were consistent references to the unanimous votes of the last few budgets which implied a consensus that didn't exist, and based on this and his lack of full support of the proposed budget, he cannot vote for it.

Councilor Kotkin thanked the Mayor, Town Manager, Town and Board of Education employees who helped the Council, and him in particular, through this budget. He said that he appreciates the process, development, and knowledge that a budget entails. He said that the budget as proposed meets a lot of the Town's needs as well as much needed resources for the High School. Councilor Kotkin stated that the budget also meets the needs of the Firefighters. He said that there was a lot of consistent support for most elements of the budget and he wholeheartedly supports the budget as proposed. He said that he hopes the increase is not as high next year.

Chairperson Morin stated that the budget continues to provide for the people who need it and adds to Physical Services and the Firefighters. He said that the Chief of Police is satisfied with the more than adequate funding of the Public Safety budget. Chairperson Morin said that philosophically there will be differences; however, everyone works hard to develop the budget and he supports the budget as proposed.

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

Councilor Fortunato moved **"THAT THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR LIBRARY PURPOSES BE SET AT \$1,512,992 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2006"**, seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Councilor Walsh moved **"THAT THE TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS FOR SCHOOL PURPOSES BE SET AT \$42,483,440 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2006"**, seconded by Councilor Forrest.

Councilor Cascio stated that he is a strong advocate for public education and appropriations to the Board of Education; however, without being able to direct how the allocation is spent, he is not sold on the initiative for teacher leaders in the amount of \$117,000. He said that in these economic times of Wethersfield looking to maintain, this is not an initiative that needs to be included in the school budget. Councilor Cascio said that he served on the Board of Education for ten years and was Chairman of the Board, and he is having a difficult time with this budget. He said that although the Board of Education budget has already gone through three separate cuts, he believes it still needs to be further reduced.

Councilor Adil stated that the Board of Education budget is a large percentage of the whole budget and has gone through three cuts already and he feels that the Board is responsibly trying to combine services when possible and to maintain school buildings. Councilor Adil said that he likes the initiatives going forward and understands the need for the mentors at the High School as being an initiative for the entire school system. He said that the High School is reaching a level of population for which extra funding is necessary.

Councilor Walsh stated that he echoes Councilor Cascio's comments regarding the teacher leader initiative and stated that he's concerned about the Town's responsibility to fund and provide opportunities for teachers to go through administration; however, he trusts the judgment of the members of the Board of Education. Councilor Walsh spoke of the disconnect in test scores between elementary and middle school and then again between middle school and high school. He said that the teacher leader positions will allow the curriculum directors to focus more on K-8 students to fix the gap and realize a dramatic improvement in the test scores.

Councilor Drake stated that he believes the Board of Education budget should have been reduced by \$750,000 and it is not the responsibility of the Council to micromanage the Board of Education and School Administration; however, the Board of Education is worse than the Town in terms of the wages and compensation paid to its school teachers in

comparison to other towns. He said that he has not seen any effort by the Board of Education to attempt to rein this down; therefore, he cannot support the Board of Education budget.

Councilor Cascio stated that he is concerned that the Board of Education budget does not include any initiatives for the funding of facility maintenance of currently renovated facilities. He said that he sees nothing regarding a facilities maintenance plan, and this is disturbing. Councilor Cascio stated again that he is still not convinced of the necessity of the teacher leaders and will need more review of this. He said that this is not a new initiative, but rather something that had existed in the past and is now being brought back.

Chairperson Morin said that the Council is elected to take care of the Town side of the finances and the Board of Education is elected to do the same for the school system. He said that he supports the Board of Education budget as is and he said that the Town is where it is today because of years of the Council not funding items such as roads and roofs since the first thing they cut to keep the tax increase to 4%-5 1/4% was to cut maintenance. Chairperson Morin said that he is committed to the residents of Wethersfield and will not do this. He said that everyone wants the Town to look good, but doesn't want to spend the money to do it. Chairperson Morin said that he has heard numerous comments about the \$10,000 included in the budget for trees and reminded everyone that Wethersfield has the distinction of being recognized as a "Tree City USA".

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

Councilor Forrest moved "**THAT THE TOTAL AMOUNT TO BE RAISED BY TAXES FOR THE TOWN, LIBRARY, AND SCHOOL PURPOSES COMBINED BE SET AT \$64,576,176 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2006**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Cascio and Councilor Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 7-2-0.

Councilor Adil moved "**THAT THE TAX RATE ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL TAXABLE PROPERTY BE SET AT 32.43 MILLS FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING JULY 1, 2006**", seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. Councilor Cascio and Councilor Kirsche voted NAY. The motion passed 7-2-0.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Chairperson Morin thanked those present, including Board of Education members and the press, for being in attendance at tonight's meeting. He thanked the staff of the Town and the Board of Education. He said that he appreciates the zero-based budgeting and the Town Manager's comments that things need to be done differently and in conjunction with others.

Councilor Drake requested of the Town Manager that the resolution for tax relief for seniors be brought before the Council in the near future.

ADJOURNMENT

At 5:55 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk