

MARCH 21, 2005 SPECIAL MEETING

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special joint meeting with the Board of Education on March 21, 2005 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Czernicki, Forrest, Fortunato, Hemmann, Montinieri, Chairperson Morin, Board of Education members Carney, DeAngelo, McKenna, Walsh, Vice-Chairperson Hodges and Chairperson Roberts.

Absent: Deputy Mayor Karangekis.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Patrick Proctor, Superintendent of Schools; Judith Golden, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Susan Pinette, Director of Special Services; Karen Baldwin, Director of Human Resources; David Whall, Director of Business Services and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Morin introduced Superintendent of Schools Patrick Proctor who proceeded with a PowerPoint presentation outlining the Wethersfield Public Schools 2005-2006 Education Budget. Dr. Proctor stated that it has been and continues to be a very challenging budget process. He said that he will be presenting the core budget as well as the Webb budget, since the Webb School will be opened in September, 2005. Dr. Proctor said that there are substantial increases in benefits and energy costs as well as the continued under funding of the mandates in Special Education at both the State and Federal levels. Dr. Proctor stated that the Board of Education has held several meetings to review the budget and has done due diligence in looking carefully at the spending plan. He said that the Board voted unanimously on March 9, 2005 to bring the spending plan to the Town Council.



[At this point Dr. Proctor gave a slide presentation, offered here for [download in Adobe PDF* format](#) (64 KB).]

Dr. Proctor stated that one of the major themes of the budget is that in opening Webb School, services in the rest of the school system are not undermined, but rather maintained wherever possible. Dr. Proctor made the distinction between maintaining current services and stepping aside with some long-range plans, such as textbook acquisition, technology plan, and class size reduction, for this year only because of Webb.

Councilor Czernicki asked Dr. Proctor if all of the Wethersfield elementary schools have a full-time nurse and Dr. Proctor said that they do and Webb School will have one as well. He said that the nurse position from the Kindergarten Center will move to one of the elementary schools.

Dr. Proctor explained that a safeguard of well over \$200,000 is built into the budget for additional special education student placement. He said that a five-year running average of 4-5 students is used to calculate this amount. Dr. Proctor said that nearly every district is facing unanticipated costs and circumstances among high-cost students and Wethersfield receives only 65% of State reimbursement for mandates for this type of student. He said that these students need to be supported; however the State needs to provide more funding. Dr. Proctor said that the Governor's budget contains additional support for reimbursements for excess-cost students.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the \$40,000 per student includes the \$17,000 for transportation. Dr. Proctor said that it does not.

Dr. Proctor said that increasing enrollment is currently not driving the Board of Education; however, in the years ahead, enrollment will become a budget factor.

Councilor Hemmann asked for a breakdown of the enrollments for Early Intervention and Pre-K. Dr. Pinette explained that the difference of thirteen students is due to children, from birth to three years of age who are coming into the Early Intervention program. Dr. Proctor stated that the number of children in this category is increasing.

Dr. Proctor stated that many of the new certified staff positions are linked to the opening of Webb School and the new non-certified staff positions are based on the needs of the entire school system.

Councilor Cascio asked if the School Resource Officer will appear in the Board of Education budget. Dr. Proctor said that the position is covered by a grant in the Town budget. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the portion to be funded by the community is in the Police budget. Councilor Cascio asked if the nursing positions fall under the category of non-certified staff. Dr. Proctor said that there are no new nurses being hired; however, they would show up in the non-certified staff category. Councilor Cascio asked if it could show up in the category of requests for new staff not funded. Dr. Proctor said that it could have been put in this area. Councilor Cascio asked if the school system currently meets all State mandates for nursing. Dr. Proctor said that it does. Councilor Cascio asked if there is full coverage in all Wethersfield schools. Dr. Proctor said that there will be and that the cost for a school nurse is approximately \$50,000. Councilor Cascio verified that the nursing supervisor will be placed in one of the elementary schools and asked if there will be coverage in that school if she is absent for supervisory reasons. Dr. Proctor said that coverage will be provided by a substitute nurse.

Councilor Czernicki asked Dr. Proctor to speak on the subject of class size and asked how many world language classes at the Middle School have over twenty-five students. Dr. Proctor said that there are several classes with between 25 and 30 students. Councilor Czernicki asked if the same numbers exist in other Middle School curriculum areas. Dr. Proctor said that they do not exist in other areas. Councilor Czernicki asked Dr. Proctor to provide a breakdown of the request for the Middle School Special Education new staff not funded.

Dr. Proctor said that there are students coming up from elementary school and to deliver the services ideally, it would be helpful to have an additional full-time position. Councilor Czernicki asked Dr. Proctor to break out the non funded positions at the High School with regard to the number of students in those classes. Dr. Proctor said that in Physical Education and Health there are eight classes with between 26 and 29 students, and twenty-one classes with 30+ students, which is not unusual in many high schools. Dr. Proctor said that a goal is to have all class sizes under 25 students. Councilor Czernicki asked if the classes are leveled and she was told that Foreign Language at the Middle School is not leveled. Dr. Proctor said that in Social Studies there are eighteen classes with between 26 and 29 students, and three classes with 30+ students. Councilor Czernicki asked if the Social Studies classes at the High School are leveled and was told that all academic classes at the High School are leveled and the lower the level, the smaller the class size. Councilor Czernicki referred to the Extra Pay account of the Certified Salaries and Wages category which represents stipends paid to all athletic coaches as well as stipends paid for non-athletic extra-curricular assignments and asked if anyone can apply for these positions. Dr. Proctor said that there is a process for the selection of these positions and believes that those within the school system are given the first opportunity for consideration. Councilor Czernicki asked if there are any special salary obligations for school staff who hold these positions which would not apply to the general public. Dr. Proctor said there is a stipend associated for every position which is prescribed in the teachers' contract and that this applies to anyone hired from within or outside the system.

Councilor Hemmann asked Dr. Proctor if the numbers showing for the opening of Webb School are close to those anticipated for the budget. Dr. Proctor said the staffing costs were projected to be approximately \$.5 million and the material costs appear to have been underestimated.

Councilor Cascio asked if the certificated personnel salary amounts for new staff at Webb School are the step 1+ benefits. Dr. Proctor said that the hiring will be around the Masters step 3-5 and the amounts shown in the Power Point presentation do not include benefits. Councilor Cascio asked what the amount would be for the first step and was told that the amount for bachelor's step 1 is \$39,000. Dr. Proctor said that the budget reflects a mid step and it is hoped that in hiring the salary will come in lower than that.

Councilor Fortunato asked if there is currently a full-time Psychologist employed in every school. Dr. Proctor said that there is. Councilor Fortunato asked if the Custodial position is new or if hours are being added to the current position. Dr. Proctor said that it is a new position which will provide for three full-time custodians at the Webb School. Councilor Fortunato asked if the Lunch Aides are Board of Education employees and was told that they are new part-time Board of Education employees. Mr. Whall explained that the Food Service contract applies only to the cafeteria workers and not the Lunch Aides; therefore the Lunch Aides are Board of Education employees.

Dr. Proctor explained that some of the costs for textbooks, materials and media collection are due to the redistricting transition and not just the start-up of Webb School.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the costs for textbooks, materials and media collection for a building start-up typically come from the building project or from the annual budget. Dr. Proctor said that some items can come from the project budget; however the project budget is facing limits with respect to available money.

Dr. Golden clarified that with a renovation, media collection is not reimbursable like it is with a new building. She said therefore that none of the textbooks, materials and media collection are reimbursable. Dr. Proctor explained that the Technology Resources are reimbursable.

Councilor Forrest asked how many projectors are going to be purchased. Dr. Proctor said that he does not know this yet, but he would like to purchase at least one each of printers, projectors and whiteboards with a goal of four printers, three projectors, and three whiteboards.

Councilor Cascio asked if any of the supplies from the Kindergarten Center can be used at the Webb School. Dr. Proctor said that they can be used at the Webb School as well as other school buildings.

Councilor Adil asked if the reduction in the amount of savings for the Alternative FICA Plan is due to current part-time employees having the option to join the Plan. Dr. Proctor said that this is the reason and that it will be mandatory for new part-time employees to join the Alternative FICA Plan.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the reduction of three teachers by consolidation within the system has caused concern with respect to class sizes. Dr. Proctor said that the reduction will result in class sizes at the three grade levels affected will increase to 24 students per class. He said that there are currently six or seven classes in the system at this level already.

Dr. Proctor stated that the vagaries of growth with respect to employee benefits are something with which all administrators struggle. He said that the Town Pension Plan is also a moving target as budgeting has to do with the history of the pension plan and the changes in the structure of the plan. Dr. Proctor said that energy costs are always up and the question is just how far up they will be. He said that there is a substantial increase from last year at this time until now. Dr. Proctor said that Wethersfield is protected in the area of Special Education Tuition & Transportation for four placements, but the actual number of placements won't be known until into the next budget year. Dr. Proctor explained that the overall goal of the Wethersfield Board of Education is to enhance student learning opportunities and outcomes.

Councilor Czernicki asked if a study has been conducted of the recurring costs associated with the opening of Webb School. Dr. Proctor said that most of the costs will be recurring costs either for Webb itself or because of the reallocation of resources from the other elementary schools which will need to get back on track next year. Councilor Czernicki referred to the \$90,000 that the Council appropriated to the Board of Education last year which Dr. Proctor chose to put into the salary line and asked if the salary increases in the 2005-2006 proposed budget are based on the salary with or without the one-time \$90,000 appropriation. Dr. Proctor said that the proposed amounts are figured on the recalibrated base which includes the \$90,000. Councilor Czernicki said that in doing this, the one-time appropriation has become part of the salary line henceforth. Dr. Proctor said that the amount had to be put into the salary line because this was the area that last year's budget was in such deep deficit. Councilor Czernicki said that she understands that the need was there; however she had had concern that this would boost the base amount of the salary line. Dr. Proctor said that it actually did not boost the salary line since this account was under-funded to begin with and the \$90,000 achieved what the real base should have been. He said that last year's school budget would not have ended

in the black without the \$90,000 appropriation. Councilor Czernicki asked if the \$90,000 was leftover from the bonding of one of the projects. Dr. Proctor said that the money was energy savings. Councilor Hemmann said that the money was refunded and the \$90,000 was bonded and will be carried over the length of the bond.

Councilor Cascio referred to Transportation Services and asked what the increase cost would be just for Webb School. Dr. Proctor said that across the system there is no substantial transportation services cost increase other than those realized by the rollover of current services from one year to the next. Councilor Cascio asked if the consolidation of the Munis System is built in to the Board of Education budget and was told that it is not built in to the budget. Councilor Cascio asked if there has been any discussion as to the Board's part of the payment. Dr. Proctor said that the discussion is ongoing and that a resolution has not yet been reached.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that included in the Town budget is \$180,000 which will cover the phase in of the Munis System. She said that the payments starting in the 2006-2007 budget year will need to be discussed.

Councilor Cascio asked Dr. Proctor where the legislation regarding pay for play stands. Dr. Proctor said that he is unaware of the status, but it hasn't surfaced yet, if ever. He said that he continues to monitor this. Councilor Cascio verified that the approximate amount will be \$60,000 and was told that this is correct.

Councilor Fortunato asked Dr. Proctor if the Board of Education has considered reviewing its policy on bus transportation in terms of the radius allowed for bussing. Dr. Proctor said that because of redistricting, the Board is looking at reassessing or realigning the transportation system; including a review of the policies; however a reduction of the radius will add to the costs of transportation. Councilor Fortunato suggested a review of the policy with respect to the amount of transportation usage by Middle and High School students. Councilor Fortunato asked Dr. Proctor for the amount of school employees who are currently under the Connecticare program. Dr. Proctor said that there are fifty-two employees currently under Connecticare. Councilor Fortunato asked if the proposed new positions will automatically be covered under Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Dr. Proctor said that this is correct since the goal is to phase out the Connecticare program. Councilor Fortunato asked if there is any progress in getting the fifty-two current Connecticare participants to move over to Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Ms. Baldwin said that the fifty-members are part of the Secretarial bargaining unit and negotiations with this unit begin on March 30, 2005. She said that there have been preliminary discussions regarding the Board's and District's need to maintain costs while still providing a high level of benefit. Ms. Baldwin anticipates that there will be willing participants to look at other plans. Councilor Fortunato asked when the new contract will take effect. Ms. Baldwin said that it will take effect on July 1, 2005.

Councilor Forrest asked what happens to any monies left over at the end of the Board of Education's fiscal year. Dr. Proctor said that any remaining budget monies cannot be carried over by the Board of Education and therefore are transferred back to the Town. Councilor Forrest commented that the leadership and development of the Board's Plan is fantastic; however, he questions how the success of the education system is monitored and gauged so that the Town knows that the Plan is working. Dr. Proctor said that there are multiple measures used beginning with early readiness and reading assessments through CMT and SAT results. He said that a major indicator is the number of students who go on to college and the types of colleges they attend. Dr. Proctor said that not only academic, but athletic and community achievements are all a part of the Wethersfield educational experience.

Councilor Hemmann asked Dr. Proctor how he is running with the current Board of Education budget and he told her that it is very tight. Dr. Proctor said that he is actually running slightly in the red at the current time mostly because of increased energy costs and additional high-needs students.

Chairperson Morin thanked Dr. Proctor, his staff, and the members of the Board of Education for attending the meeting and said that the Council will meet with them again in approximately one month. Dr. Proctor thanked his staff as well.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:00 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

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