

ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING APRIL 26, 2005

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Wednesday, April 13, 2005) was held on Tuesday, April 26, 2005 at 5:45 p.m. in the Community Center Fireside Room with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Czernicki, Forrest (5:50), Fortunato (6:00), Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Karangekis, and Chairperson Morin.

Absent: Councilor Hemmann.

Present from the Board of Education: Claire A. Carney, Matthias J. DeAngelo, Vice-Chairperson Stacey M. Hodges, Chairperson Gerri Roberts, Dr. C. Patrick Proctor, Superintendent of Schools; Judith A. Golden, Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction; Karen Baldwin, Director of Human Resources; Susan Pinette, Director of Special Services; and Moe McCarthy, Supervisor of Maintenance & Operations.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien Town Manager, Dolores Sassano Town Clerk, and Lisa Hancock, Finance Director.

COUNCIL ACTION

Councilor Adil moved "**TO APPROVE THE CHANGE ORDER FOR NUTMEG COMPANIES IN THE AMOUNT OF \$68,902.22 FOR THE FAN COIL WORK IN THE LOWER LEVEL**", seconded by Deputy Mayor Karangekis.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the Building Committee voted unanimously on this and asked her to bring it to the Council immediately in order to expedite the work. She said that this work will allow the lower level to be compatible with the Phase II work that is planned for the main and upper levels for fan coils.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Councilor Adil moved "**TO WAIVE THE BIDDING REQUIREMENTS AND AWARD THE VOICE/DATA PROJECT FOR THE TOWN HALL RENOVATIONS TO SBC IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$22,998**", seconded by Councilor Montinieri.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that SBC is the Town's current vendor for the phone and data services and it is important to use the same vendor.

Councilor Montinieri asked if the Technology Committee is in agreement with this. Town Engineer Mike Turner said that they are aware of this; however this project is just for the cabling for phones.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

FIRE - 431 (C-67 to C-68)

Chairperson Morin verified that although the Conferences & Training amount has been cut, the Fire Marshal continues to attend mandated training. Fire Marshal Gary Santoro said that this is so.

BOARD OF EDUCATION - 200 (C-46 to C-50)

Dr. Proctor stated that the two large components of the Board of Education budget are the basic core budget and the opening of the Webb building.

Chairperson Morin asked why the Town budget book reflects a requested amount of \$40,270,952 and the Town

Manager's amount of \$40,133,174. Ms. Hancock explained that the original amount was an estimate and was higher and the final correct amount is \$40,133,174.

Councilor Cascio asked if the Board of Education and the Town are on the same page regarding the financing of the Silas Deane Middle School PAC position. The Town Manager said that the plan is for the Town to fund 1/3 and the Board of Education to fund 2/3 of the position with the intent that the Board of Education will take over the position in the future. She said that funds are coming from Town grant monies.

Councilor Forrest asked if there have been any adjustments to the \$40,133,174 since it was proposed. Dr. Proctor said that there are savings due to retirements each year and that the amount proposed for benefits could change slightly. Councilor Forrest asked Dr. Proctor if he anticipates any changes as the State solidifies their budget. Dr. Proctor said that the Governor has proposed to increase the State's percentage of payment through the Excess Cost Grant and this could affect the budget.

Councilor Czernicki left the meeting at this time (6:10 p.m.).

Ms. Hancock asked Dr. Proctor how many new positions have been added to the School budget this year. Dr. Proctor said that he is requesting 1.2 certified district-wide staff positions, 4 non-certified district-wide positions, and 11.35 new positions at Webb School. Ms. Hancock asked what level the certified positions are budgeted at. Dr. Proctor said that the certified amounts are budgeted at the Masters Step 5 level at a cost of \$64,000 with salary and benefits.

Councilor Fortunato asked how many staff remain on the ConnectiCare insurance plan. Ms. Baldwin said that there are approximately 60 staff remaining on this plan. Dr. Proctor said that this plan is being negotiated out of each contract.

Chairperson Morin suggested that negotiations include an equitable plan to take the place of the Connecticare Plan and also that retirees are offered the same insurance carrier as current employees.

Councilor Fortunato asked how many retirees participate in the ConnectiCare plan. Ms. Baldwin said that there are 48-60 participating in this plan and going forward, certified retirees will not be offered this plan and it is anticipated to negotiate this with the secretaries' contract as well. Councilor Fortunato asked if it is possible during negotiations to state that a particular insurance carrier will be offered and that there are not options. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she spoke with a Labor Attorney who informed her that insurance carriers can be changed as long as the value received from the new plan is comparable to the old plan. Councilor Fortunato asked Ms. Baldwin if she feels confident that the clerical union will support making the insurance carrier change and Ms. Baldwin said that it has been her experience that all the bargaining units understand the cost pressures present. Councilor Fortunato said that these are very tough budget times and that considerations should be given to part-time vs full-time school psychologists and moving around custodial staff rather than adding a full-time position. She suggested that more creativity be used when allocating staff. Councilor Fortunato asked to what extent the Board of Education interfaces with the Town's licensed clinical staff. Dr. Proctor said that he cannot change the present positions; however it may be possible to change the terms of positions to part-time status when new offerings are made. Dr. Pinette stated that she works very closely with the counseling services offered by the Town; however School Psychologists require a different certification and there are currently no psychologists for the Alternate Day Program or the Preschool Program; therefore there is the need for the current psychologists being full-time. Councilor Fortunato asked if the proposed School Psychologist position in the budget is to cover the two programs mentioned and Dr. Pinette said that it would have to be because one of the preschool programs will be at Webb School. Councilor Fortunato said that she understands that there is currently no fee or requested donation for participation in the ROPE or Crossroads programs and asked if it has been discussed to charge a minimal fee. Ms. Roberts said that there was quite an issue when the topic of changing the ROPE fees was raised.

Chairperson Morin suggested that a contest be held to see which class has the most participation in raising the most money for creative arts and he asked if the ROPE program is part of the school curriculum and was told that it is part of the health curriculum. Ms. Hodges said that this would be very difficult for accounting purposes.

Councilor Fortunato asked if any of the ROPE funds come from the Board of Education budget or if they're all from the Town side. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that they currently come from the Town budget. Ms. Hodges said

that the Board of Education interweaves the ROPE program into the school curriculum. Councilor Fortunato said that the program is very costly and she is not opposed to asking those in the community to help fund it in some small way.

Ms. Carney stated that she assisted in the ROPE program as she was eager to understand how the program helps to build team confidence and she now highly recommends the program to parents. She said that there is an increasing trend in schools for character development programs. Councilor Fortunato said that she finds great value in the program; however the Town needs to be practical in looking at costs.

Dr. Golden said that ROPE came to the schools with the option to make it an add-on or to make it part of the school curriculum and the Board of Education decided to make it part of the curriculum because of the hours required for the program. Dr. Golden said that she has discussed alternatives with Director of Social and Youth Services Dr. Stilwell; however, parents do not want changes made since they become very attached to the program and its value.

Chairperson Morin said that the Council is looking to make programs on the Town-side self sustaining by increasing revenues to offset their costs and this is what needs to be done with the ROPE program.

Councilor Fortunato asked the Town Manager when the Crossroads fees were last adjusted and was told that it was quite a while ago and she will check into this.

Councilor Cascio asked for an update on the pay for play legislation and Dr. Proctor said that it is not going anywhere. Councilor Cascio stated that he thinks that Wethersfield has a great plan for curriculum and staffing and asked if the plan for daily maintenance of classrooms is still being followed. Dr. Proctor said that this plan has taken a back seat to immediate projects such as kindergarten relocation. Mr. McCarthy said that the seven-year plan classroom renovations included in the budget costs approximately \$18,000 per year and since this year's work hasn't been done yet, he hopes to double up and do four kindergarten rooms instead of two. Mr. McCarthy stated that one school needed more work than another because of deterioration and he hopes to work on a few bathroom stalls in each school this year. Councilor Cascio said that the building and maintenance is equally as important as the curriculum and he would like to see the Board of Education back on the maintenance program. Mr. McCarthy said that some maintenance projects are delayed or stalled due to the activity levels in the schools often running until 10:00 p.m. Councilor Cascio said that he is concerned about the curb appeal of the school buildings in that they look horrible at times, and this is unacceptable.

Chairperson Morin said that the outside of the building is the Town's responsibility and the inside is the School's and he doesn't understand how school staff can walk past junk outside of school buildings. He said that the Town and schools need to work better together to do a better job.

Councilor Cascio said that so much money has been spent on the Silas Deane Middle School and now the Town needs to take care that it continues to look nice. Ms. Carney said that a bill before the State Legislature was proposed that would require that all schools budget 15% of their budget to facilities maintenance and this 15% would take away funding for vital supplies like textbooks. Councilor Cascio said that the Town and Board need to continue working together toward the maintenance issue. Councilor Cascio said that Wethersfield sports teams, especially at the High School level, need to be appropriately attired since they represent the community and he asked what the current budgeted amount is for sports uniforms, spring productions, and such, as he doesn't want to see these forgotten. Dr. Proctor said that the budget, every year, is all about balancing academics, activities, facilities, etc.

Councilor Montinieri commented on the 339% increase in capital outlay for building improvements due to the purchase of the Charles Wright modular classroom and asked if the amount can be paid over a period of time rather than as a lump sum. Dr. Proctor said that the lease is up and the decision had to be made to send the modular back or buy it. He said that as part of the redistricting, the decision was made to keep the modular. Councilor Montinieri commented that she is pleased to see that population is going down at all four elementary schools due to the opening of Webb School and this is the goal that was hoped to be achieved.

Councilor Adil asked the Town Manager if the outside maintenance of the schools is truly the responsibility of the Town. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the rule is ten feet from the building and out is the Town's responsibility. Councilor Adil asked what has happened to the proposed parking fee at the High School which failed last time it was brought up. Ms. Roberts said that the proposal failed miserably.

Councilor Montinieri asked the Town Manager how strict the Town's union rules are regarding union workers doing work outside their job description. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the workers could, technically, grieve this; however, this doesn't tend to present an issue with Wethersfield workers.

Mr. D'Angelo asked if this isn't what the consolidation of services is looking to alleviate by eliminating borders. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she has never received a grievance over this issue since she has been with the Town. She said that everyone is very cooperative regarding this. Mr. McCarthy said that, routinely, the departments work together to help each other and that the staff work very well together.

Chairperson Morin stated that he is impressed with the results of the Shared Services Committee in their involvement in bringing the Town and Board of Education working together. He said that he has received many phone calls complimenting both Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Turner in their cooperation to get things done. Chairperson Morin said that he agrees with Councilor Cascio's comments about curb appeal and that parents take a lot of pride in their schools and want to see the buildings looking their best.

FIRE - 430(C-64 to C-66) FIRE - 433 (C-69)

Deputy Fire Chief Charles Varca said that the Fire Department had a big decrease in their budget last year with 0% for the two years preceding that, although staff and energy costs have increased. He said that the Department continues to actively recruit and some of the Department's costs not incurred to the Town include hose testing (\$20,000), pump testing (\$4,000), and cleanup of the Firehouses (30 hours per week). Chief Varca said that the Department appreciates the Town's contribution to their pension program and said that the Department is looking for support in many areas of their Capital Improvements. Chief Varca said that the Consultant Fees includes the ten pre-employment physicals at a total cost of \$2,850 and this was cut to \$850 by the Town Manager. He said that this would cover the physicals of only three new members and requested that the Council increase this to the original proposed amount. Chief Varca said that the Town Manager has cut the amount for Cleaning & Household Supplies from the \$500 requested to \$0 and this account pays for cleaning supplies to maintain the fleet of fire vehicles; therefore any money put back into this account would be greatly appreciated. He said that the Support Services account provides funding for pizza and dinners after drills and meetings, and although the requested amount has been decreased from previous years, the Town Manager dropped it even further and he'd like to see some of this restored.

Councilor Adil asked about the Department's storage problem and Chief Varca said that storing at the Town Garage is difficult because there can be a problem if the right people aren't around with keys to the facility and although the Department is looking into and using any space available, they would appreciate any funds to restore Company #1 with an additional bay and one half as well as administrative offices above. Councilor Adil asked for an update on the roof at Kelleher Court. Chief Varca said that the roof has been replaced and now the interior work is being completed. Councilor Adil suggested that the Council members tour all of the Town's public safety facilities.

Councilor Fortunato asked Chief Varca to explain the recruitment strategy and what the optimum number of firefighters is. Chief Varca said that Captain Paul Thompson has a good handle on the recruitment and there is quite a time commitment involved. He said that the Department currently has 100 firefighters and he is unaware of any set optimum number. Councilor Fortunato asked what the cost is to bring on a new firefighter. Chief Varca said that it is approximately \$3,000-\$4,000.

Councilor Forrest thanked Chief Varca and his staff and asked about the required physicals. Chief Varca said that each new member must take a physical with the Hartford Medical Group and this physical includes lung function testing, hearing testing, basic physical and drug screening. Chief Varca said that current firefighters also need to take mandatory physicals periodically.

Councilor Cascio thanked the Volunteer Fire Department for all the work they do and for saving the Town by willingly volunteering. Councilor Cascio commented on the increase in Personnel Services being due to the Homeland Security issue and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that part of this is due to the fact that the pension and tax abatement monies were not budgeted into the proper accounts in the past.

Chairperson Morin said that the Fire Department budget is very well done and everyone appreciates what the Department does for the Town. He said that the Council will look at every item from every department and do their best.

Captain Gordie Harris stated that the Wethersfield Fire Department prides itself on having an ISO Class 3 rating based on the fact that the Department has good apparatus and not replacing the snorkel could hurt the re-evaluation of this rating. He said that a reduction in the rating could result in higher homeowners insurance rates for residents in Town; therefore the replacement of this apparatus is critical. Captain Harris also addressed the storage shortage issue and said that this really needs to be looked at.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Capital Budget includes the replacement of the Hurst tools which is very important for safety.

NON-DEPARTMENTAL - CONTINGENCY - 910 (C120 to 122)

Finance Director Lisa Hancock explained that the Contingency has increased by \$30,000 due to the Council approved loan for the Moeller Building and she said that the budget may only require \$20,000 instead of the \$30,000 listed due to fund-raising efforts.

Chairperson Morin asked where the \$89,000 for windows at Webb appear in this budget and Ms. Hancock said that the amount is not currently in the budget.

OTHER FUNDS - DEBT SERVICE - 920(C-123 to C-124)

Ms. Hancock said that the amounts listed are those required on the debt service schedule to make the Town's annual debt payments and \$635,000 for debt to be issued in June for bonds is not listed in this amount. She said that in order to delay the budget impact of this, the principal payment has been delayed out for one year and only the first interest payment will hit this year.

Councilor Fortunato asked if there is any cost such as penalties or fees to do this and Ms. Hancock said that there is none.

INSURANCE AND RISK MANAGEMENT - 930 (C-125)

Ms. Hancock explained that the Insurance Account has increased slightly due to the transfer of insurance coverage for the Board of Education's property and liability. She said that the Insurance Account has been underfunded for the past few years for this and the total cost has increased approximately 10% because of new properties.

Councilor Forrest asked why the Town is paying the Board of Education's insurance and Ms. Hancock said that the Town is responsible for the buildings it owns and this is something that the Council may consider sending this back to the Board of Education budget.

METROPOLITAN DISTRICT TAX - 940 (C-126)

Ms. Hancock explained that this budget reflects a fiscal year increase of approximately 5%; however the actual MDC increase is 7% - 8%. She said that she and the Town Manager attended the MDC meetings to provide input in their budget development process and this did make a difference.

RESERVE - RETIREE COSTS - 960 (C-129)

Ms. Hancock explained that this account now includes the funding for the Police Department retiree medical costs. She said that this account also includes the compensated absences for Police Department retirements and two retirements

are expected. Ms. Hancock said that the biggest hit to this account deals with Heart and Hypertension which had previously been funded through the Police Department budget and there is a significant increase (\$128,000) to cover the shortfall of previous years.

Councilor Adil asked Ms. Hancock how she came up with the \$128,000 and why she feels comfortable with this amount. Ms. Hancock said that she worked with CIRMA to look at the current liabilities, and an actuarially anticipated amount was derived. She said that this amount should get the Town to the break-even point.

Councilor Forrest asked what compensated absences are. Ms. Hancock said that this is for payments owed to retirees for accumulated vacation or sick time not used.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that the salary portion of this budget has been moved to her Department. She introduced Emergency Management Director Dick Fippinger who provided an overview of Wethersfield's Emergency Management budget.

Mr. Fippinger said that he takes a great deal of pride in being the Emergency Management Director and provided a presentation of his responsibilities and duties. Mr. Fippinger posed the following questions to the Council in the case of a disaster striking Wethersfield:

- If forced from your home, would you expect to receive assistance from a Town-sponsored shelter?;
- Would you expect that the shelter would be stocked with items needed by you and your family at such time of emergency?;
- Do you expect your Town leaders and emergency services people to work together under unified command in a suitable emergency command post?
- If you were told that the Emergency Management function has not been funded in the Town budget since the fallout shelter constructed during the cold war, would you believe it?;
- Would you believe that dispatchers told the Fire Chief that they could not dispatch fire emergencies to the Chief on his hand-held portable radio in the office of Company #1?;

Mr. Fippinger stated that plans are to continue at a \$0 budget for Emergency Management for the foreseeable future. He said that his stipend of \$3,000 is jointly and equally funded by the State of Connecticut and the Town of Wethersfield and is currently the only money expended for Emergency Management preparation in Wethersfield. Mr. Fippinger said that there is no active Council oversight concerning Emergency Management as there is with Police and Fire as he thought there would be when he took the position. He said that the International Incident Management System calls for an in-place, active Emergency Management structure and process. Mr. Fippinger said that the Council has voted for the Wethersfield Homeland Security funds to go directly to CRCOG for regional activities; therefore restricting the direction of the funds for the Town's own needed expenditures. He said that due to corrupt governing at the State level, the funds have been frozen at the Federal level, and the State has received none of the 2004 or 2005 funding. Mr. Fippinger said that he can spend no money on emergency training or equipment testing, and cannot train people to work together in unified command at an EOC which the Town does not have. This situation leaves Wethersfield unprepared and falling behind in serving the population during a disaster.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis asked Mr. Fippinger if he is aware of any towns in the area receiving funding from CRCOG for their portion of the grants. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that no Town in the State has received funding. Deputy Mayor Karangekis asked if CRCOG has made attempts to get the funds flowing to the proper places. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that everyone is making attempts to do this and that the State Representatives need to push to get the money through. Deputy Mayor Karangekis said that serious noise needs to be made to push the funds through to the Towns.

Mr. Fippinger said that funds were promised by CRCOG for Towns' Emergency Command Centers and since Wethersfield is at zero development on their EOC, funds will be used for basic supplies and he would like the opportunity to specify how the money will be expended on the EOC. Mr. Fippinger said that rather than spend the

funds on basic supplies, he would rather be allowed to purchase super electronics and radios. He said that there is controversy with CRCOG as to what Town's should be allowed to spend funding on. The Town Manager stated that she has heard otherwise from CRCOG.

Deputy Mayor Karangekis said that if the Town Manager has heard that funding is available there should be some way to influence CRCOG to cut loose some of the funds. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that no Town in Connecticut is receiving funding and Connecticut's State Representative need to put pressure on the Homeland Security to do so. She said that the State has received the 2004 funding and CRCOG has yet to distribute it to the local level.

Councilor Montinieri verified that the Town Manager's rationale for not funding any money in the budget is that she is anticipating the receipt of CRCOG funds. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that some of the bond money for the renovation of the Town Hall will be used to update the Council Chamber as well as an EOC.

Councilor Forrest asked if the EOC is the first step in the Emergency Management process. Mr. Fippinger said that the first step was the completion of the Emergency Management Plan two years ago and the second step is to develop an EOC which will cost \$25,000 for radios and \$10,000 for other items. Councilor Forrest asked what the next step would be. Mr. Fippinger said that it would be to staff volunteers, intensify training, and delegate responsibilities at an approximate cost of \$8,000 which would also include technology upgrades and scientific advances.

Councilor Fortunato asked what the deficit will be between what is received from the State, the bond funding and the total that is requested. Mr. Fippinger said that he is requesting approximately \$2,500.

Councilor Forrest asked if the funds for supplies are part of the stocking of the EOC and Mr. Fippinger said that they are for the shelter and the EOC is a totally separate matter.

Councilor Montinieri suggested that an advertisement for donations to the shelter be published and Mr. Fippinger said that he'd like to see the stocking of better cots or air mattresses, energy foods, and clothing beyond what is provided by the Red Cross.

Chairperson Morin suggested that an announcement for donations be made at Wethersfield Churches as well.

Councilor Cascio said that although this is a great discussion, he does not feel that it is a budget discussion and the Public Safety Committee needs to meet to discuss these issues. He said that the issue is a national issue and both Mr. Fippinger and the Town Manager are on top of it.

Councilor Cascio left at this time (8:25 p.m.).

Councilors continued to discuss options and issues regarding the shelter and the EOC, and indicated that the CRCOG issues need to be resolved first.

Councilor Fortunato suggested that Homeland Security funds be used for the requested reader for a Police vehicle since she thought that the funding was discretionary.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:42 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION ON APRIL 27, 2005 AT 5:45 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF THE TOWN HALL**" seconded by Councilor Montinieri. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council 5/16/05