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## **SPECIAL MEETING JANUARY 11, 2003**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a joint meeting with the Board of Education on Saturday, January 11, 2003 at 9:00 a.m. in the Fireside Room of the Pitkin Community Center, 30 Greenfield Street.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Gardow, Hemmann, Morin, Deputy Mayor O'Connor and Chairperson Czernicki. Absent: Councilors Flynn, Fitzpatrick and Sassano.

Present from the Board of Education: Christina T. Fortunato, Thomas W. Grottke, Stacey M. Hodges, Michael F. McKenna, Janet G. Pilczak, Gerri Roberts, Joseph Soja, Vice Chairperson Claire A. Carney and Chairperson Penny Stanziale.

Also present: Joseph Swetcky, Jr., Interim Town Manager; William Papallo, Interim Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Patrick Proctor, Superintendent-Elect of Schools; Robert Buganski, Assistant Superintendent of Schools; David Whall, Business Manager; State Senator John Fonfara; Representatives Paul Doyle & Tony Guerrera; and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Town Manager Swetcky.

Chairperson Stanziale thanked Dr. Proctor, Superintendent-Elect and Dr. Papallo, Interim Superintendent, for attending this morning. They are in contact on a daily basis. She also wished to thank the School Building Committee: Dave Drake, Charlie Viani and Luke McEntire for going above and beyond the call of duty working on the Deane, Webb and Stillman projects.

Chairperson Czernicki called upon Mr. Drake to report on the possible reduction of the dollar amount of the ordinance.

Mr. Drake reported that the first goal was to try to fit everything into the existing building so as not to make major changes to the structure. The ramp and the administration building addition were untouched. The existing Superintendent's Office has been recently renovated and is to be left the way it is. The Media Center has also been renovated. We hope to leave what we can and see if we can add to it. The classrooms are left as they are in the plan. Mr. Buganski requested that the architect attend the meeting on Thursday evening. Regarding the Administration Building, the ramp will stay and we will take away the addition, an elevator or ramp will be added. The Media Center will be moved into an L-shape and that part of the building will be renovated. The sixth grade science area will be moved into the old media center area. The kindergarten areas will stay in the existing area indicated. These changes move us from the "intermediate" level of construction to the "light" level of construction. The architect ran through the numbers and a \$1.13 million reduction was made from that part of the project. The 7500 square foot Maintenance Building on the high end would cost \$30-\$50 per square foot which comes out to approximately \$375,000 and there is \$680,000 in the budget. There is a reduction of approximately \$250,000 and we'd still get done what we need. The escalation number was \$440,000. Escalation wasn't seen with the Silas Deane project. The amount could be cut in half and Mr. Drake wouldn't feel uncomfortable with completely getting rid of it. He feels very comfortable taking \$220,000 out of it. With the Silas Deane, it was completely taken out.

The Stillman School is a more difficult issue. The main thought is to do away with the whole addition to the front with the elevator, stairs and bathroom. The architect shared that some of the stairways would need to be replaced because they are not up to current fire codes. Of the \$720,000 reduction, \$500,000 would be the elevator. New prices for an elevator in the existing building were as low as \$50,000 for a three-stop elevator. Others were \$250,000. There is a big variation on the \$720,000. Mr. Drake feels that they will be able to get a lot of variations, possible even eliminate the bathrooms on the top floor. Based on eliminating the addition to the building and putting an elevator into the existing building, Mr. Drake said that \$400,000 would be deducted from the total for the project. Also, the costs for furniture

\$50,000, computers \$50,000, servers \$50,000 and security system \$100,000 and TV monitors \$15,000 is a total of \$265,000. Mr. Drake does not know why new furnishings are needed. The \$50,000 for servers seems too high. Of the \$265,000, he feels that \$150,000 can be eliminated. The escalation is \$150,000 and can be left alone. A total of \$550,000 can be taken from this building.

A total of approximately \$2 million could be taken from the complete ordinance appropriation amount.

Chairperson Czernicki thanked Mr. Drake, Mr. Viani and Mr. Buganski for their hard work in such a short period of time. She asked if any members of Council or BOE had any questions for the Committee.

Mr. Grottke asked Mr. Buganski if there is any concern with leaving the kindergarteners downstairs where they will be intertwined with the 1-5 graders.

Mr. Buganski said that the kindergarteners would be with the first and second graders and the 3-5 graders on the next level. He is comfortable with this.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked Mr. Drake to explain the Maintenance Facility's 7600 square feet. Mr. Drake said that he simply put in what was asked for. This is an addition to the existing Maintenance Facility. Deputy Mayor O'Connor called Standard Steel and was informed that they have a 7500 square foot building for \$37,000. Mr. Drake said that a high-quality metal building is needed. He wants garage doors, heated, insulated and wired. The \$37,000 is for a basic garage to put in a back yard. Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked in regards to bathrooms, can coed bathrooms be provided. Mr. Drake said that he would need to get approval.

Councilor Gardow questioned the need for surveys and borings with regard to the Stillman Building. Mr. Drake said that this will be required for both the elevator and the proposed parking lot.

Vice Chairperson Carney asked Mr. Drake to elaborate on information regarding the load-bearing walls. She also asked that he discuss the mechanicals such as the plumbing for the heating system.

Mr. Drake said that with the removal of existing load-bearing walls, reinforcements must be engineered and installed. There is a lot of expense involved with working through a load-bearing wall. There is also an expense involving the wiring. As far as the mechanicals go, the project is being approached as all mechanicals need to be replaced.

Town Manager Swetcky asked what the dollar amount was when this ordinance for renovations was introduced and what are the confirmed totals taken out of each.

Mr. Drake said that the original number for Webb was \$9,075,890 and \$3,687,084 for Stillman. The amounts taken out are \$1,130,000 from the Administration Building, \$250,000 from the Maintenance Building, and \$220,000 from escalation. This is a total of \$1,600,000. On Stillman the reduction is \$400,000. Furnishing, computers, etc. the reduction will be \$150,000.

Town Manager Swetcky spoke with the architect from Fletcher-Thompson this week and he was informed that the \$684,000 for the Maintenance Building does not include any storage. This is strictly money for renovations to the Town Garage to accommodate Board of Education Maintenance people.

Mr. Drake said that they are looking into the cost for a separate modular building for storage.

Councilor Morin stated that we need concrete numbers and a plan that is completely spelled out before we go forward to the public with this plan. We need to demand from the architect that we know just where and what the numbers are. He is not comfortable guestimating on the Stillman Building.

Mr. Drake said that in the time given, the committee has provided the best proposal amount possible that they are comfortable with. To get more detail, they will need more time.

Mr. Buganski said that if the Maintenance Facility was 7500 square feet that it would include some storage. The

original plan was for 5600 square feet; however with the additional 1900 square feet there is room for limited storage.

Chairperson Czernicki asked the paid staff of both the Town and the BOE if they were comfortable with the motion being introduced today. Have the reductions by the Building Committee allowed us to have the building at Webb that we require for grades K-6 and the renovations to Stillman and the opening of the historic building to satisfy the needs of the school system's administration.

Dr. Papallo said that he would be comfortable recommending the introduction.

Mr. Buganski said that there is a level of comfort with the Webb Building. His only discomfort with the Stillman Building is whether or not everything can be constructed within the current footprint. He feels that some addition may be required.

Chairperson Czernicki asked Town Manager Swetcky if the variances referred to by Mr. Drake are attainable.

Town Manager Swetcky said that anything is workable. It all depends upon what occurs when renovations actually start. These amounts are pretty close. His main concern is with the available space in the Maintenance Facility.

Mr. Roberts asked from whom the variances would be obtained.

Mr. Drake said that they are obtained from the State. The Historic District Commission would have a lot of input being that it is a historical building. Town Manager Swetcky said that HDC would get involved with both the Stillman Building and the Garage as both are in a historic district.

Ms. Fortunato expressed her concern that state and federal codes may be compromised with regard to access. Mr. Drake said that there will be no compromise.

Chairperson Czernicki thanked the Committee for their service to the community by working so hard on this project. She is pleased that the Town will be able to use the historic Stillman Building.

#### ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS, APPOINTMENTS FOR INTRODUCTION

##### **MOTIONS (1) INTRODUCING BOND ORDINANCE, (2) SETTING PUBLIC HEARING DATE, (3) REFERRING PROJECT TO PLANNING AND ZONING**

1. Deputy Mayor O'Connor introduced the following ordinance:

##### **ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$10,612,974 FOR ADDITIONS AND RENOVATIONS TO WEBB SCHOOL, STILLMAN BUILDING AND PHYSICAL SERVICE BUILDING TO ACCOMMODATE REOPENING WEBB SCHOOL AS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUE OF \$10,612,974 BONDS AND NOTES TO FINANCE THE APPROPRIATION**

2. Deputy Mayor O'Connor moved:

(a) that the Council hold a public hearing at its meeting on February 3, 2003 on the ordinance entitled:

##### **ORDINANCE APPROPRIATING \$10,612,974 FOR ADDITIONS AND RENOVATIONS TO WEBB SCHOOL, STILLMAN BUILDING AND PHYSICAL SERVICE BUILDING TO ACCOMMODATE REOPENING WEBB SCHOOL AS AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUE OF \$10,612,974 BONDS AND NOTES TO FINANCE THE APPROPRIATION**

(b) that the Town Clerk publish and post notice of such public hearing.

3. Deputy Mayor O'Connor moved that the proposed project be referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a report pursuant to Section 8-24 of the General Statutes.

The motions were seconded by Councilor Cascio and approved by the following roll-call vote:

In Favor	Opposed
Councilor Cascio	None
Councilor Gardow	
Councilor Hemmann	
Councilor Hemmann	
Councilor Morin	
Deputy Mayor O'Connor	
Chairperson Czernicki	

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

Chairperson Czernicki welcomed Representatives Doyle and Guerrera to the meeting and asked them to share their views of the upcoming and next year's issues and the funding forecast.

Representative Doyle expressed the regrets of Senator Ciotto who was unable to attend this meeting due to an obligation elsewhere. With regards to funding, he stated that at this point everything is on the table. There is a lot of support for maintaining State aid. The most optimistic picture is to maintain the status quo. He pledged to continue to fight for State aid; however, he cannot promise that there will not be any cuts. He hopes that the cuts will be minor ones.

Representative Guerrera shared the fact that revenues are simply not coming into the State. The economy is down and things look quite bad. Prices for construction projects are likely to be lower as contractors are very hungry right now. It is going to be a tough two years coming up.

Chairperson Stanziale brought up two hot issues in Wethersfield which are construction costs and reimbursement by the State. Also, Sheff v O'Neill and the support coming from Hartford for the magnet schools. She asked if anything has been heard regarding Sheff v O'Neill. She is concerned about the mandates imposed on Wethersfield. She asked about the Webb & Stillman project ED049's were submitted in June, 2000 and were approved in 2001. An update of any deferrals would be appreciated.

Rep. Doyle said that it has been pretty quiet. There have been no further mandates in the legislature. He said that he will look into it. Everyone is certainly focused on the budget at this time however.

Senator Fonfara arrived at this time.

Councilor Morin said that obviously any State aid cut to Wethersfield is catastrophic to the tax base. Wethersfield would need to cut services or increase taxes to maintain what we have. He asked the elected officials to work together to resolve issues. The State Legislature may have to look at the mandates that they send to the towns. If the towns aren't going to get the money, then some mandates need to be cut.

Chairperson Czernicki welcomed Senator Fonfara and caught him up-to-date with the discussion. She said that when decisions need to be made, the Council would like to have a preview of where the cuts will be.

Rep. Fonfara said that he would rather have the Town Council let him know where they don't want the cuts. It's easier to get guidance from the leaders of the Town and he will use his vote accordingly.

The basic consensus of the Council and the Board is "we don't want you cutting here, and we don't want you cutting there!". Chairperson Czernicki would like to see funding at the same level as last year, at least. Funding higher would be wonderful, but at least maintain the same level as last year.

Mr. Doyle cannot promise that he will not vote for a budget that does not have a cut. He maintains his promise that he will fight for State aid. He generally supports a broadband budget that has some cuts, some tax increases, and some union concessions.

Chairperson Czernicki stated that the Council is currently still very concerned for the Cove situation. There is a joint meeting with the MDC in mid-February. This is a very important issue.

Councilor Gardow verified that the Governor's plan is to take \$67,000 from this year's budget. This hasn't been voted on yet, but this number could go up. He tried to get a feel for the time plan for the budget resolution for next year and was told that any of this could drag on, but hopefully not.

Town Manager Swetcky is concerned about the budget plan uncertainty that is taking place. A lot of emphasis is being put on the Pequot Grant. This is a big chunk of money and a lot of capital projects are financed by this grant. This is being chipped away. If Grants do need to be reduced, give us the flexibility to cut back in tax. This flexibility is not there now.

Dr. Papallo spoke of the need for continued communication between the Town leadership and the State Legislation.

Chairperson Czernicki was asked if Wethersfield is part of a coalition of Towns as far as positions taken for State funding. Chairperson Czernicki answered that Wethersfield is part of both CCM and CROG and either she or Town Manager Swetcky attend executive meetings.

State Senator Fonfara and State Representatives Doyle and Guerrera left the meeting at this point.

A five minute break was taken.

Town Manager Swetcky referred to the packet distributed to each attendee. It addresses the Town's financial outlook for this year and next year. The first chart shows what has happened so far to the Town with the November, 2002 Governor's grant take backs. It also shows what is thought to happen in the current year's grant situation. The impact has not hit the Town severely. There is an approximate \$38,000 loss in state grant revenue. Wethersfield is slightly below the original projection, but still in pretty good shape. The Governor can only reduce certain grants and only by so much. The approval of the State Legislature is required for the rest. The December 6 Governor's proposed cuts will severely impact Wethersfield. Our General Fund will face a loss of approximately \$101,000 from the budgeted amount. Our Capital Budget will face a loss of about \$86,389 loss. Total loss would be about \$187,000. These proposals include a cut to the ECS grant by \$232,000. The Pequot grant (\$280,000,000) is the favorite target for cuts at this point.

Through December Wethersfield's revenue is still doing very well primarily due to conservative budgeting for the ECS grant. As of December 31 there is a revenue surplus of approximately \$500,000 and we are almost a percentage point ahead of last year's revenue collections. Interest revenue is down this year.

Town Manager Swetcky was asked if there is a large amount of outstanding tax payments. He said that each year there is approximately \$1million and that about 40% of this is collected. There are several large delinquencies out there that could make a substantial difference to the budget.

Councilor Gardow asked if the leaf collection and snow removal have had a large impact on the budget to this point.

Town Manager Swetcky said that the expenditure report provided is through November, 2002 and that he can provide an updated report at the next meeting. There is a substantial change to the report due to the snow. There is about \$12,000 left in the snow budget at this point. The spring operations will be impacted for leaf collection overtime at that time.

Town Manager Swetcky was asked if tax delinquencies would be posted. He answered that a time frame of posting was announced to the Council and other than the largest tax payer, the top ten delinquent tax payers came in to pay their taxes. A new list will be posted after this collection period (end of January).

Town Manager Swetcky shared the five-year expenditure forecast included in the adopted budget. For 2003-04, there is projected Town Budget increase of 13.7%. For the BOE there is a projected increase of 5.24%. The overall projected increase is 8.8%. This boils down to a 2.78 mill rate increase. The mill rate is currently at 33.8 and it would go to 36.58. This would be a tax increase of \$311 on a hypothetical average home. Future years show increases in the 4% range.

Next year, a growth in the grand list of .97% without changing the mill rate would generate \$474,000 in tax money. The Town has not had to make a pension fund contribution in six years. Our actuaries are now telling us that we have to make a contribution next year because of the reduction in the stock market. The maximum contribution will be \$824,000. This number could be reduced by as much as half.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked if the Department Heads who had been instructed to come in with a budget of 0% increase have been approached to try to come in with a 5%, 10%, 15% reduction in their budget. What he'd like to see is a 0% tax increase over all. The Council and Board need to lead by example. They have to spend wisely.

Town Manager Swetcky said that the budget direction manuals will be going out in a couple weeks. The manuals direct the Department heads to come in at a 0% increase. They have been made aware of this at a staff meeting. They have been assigned to report what impact programmatically a 5%, 10% and 20% reduction would have. What does this mean for each department? Also, can revenues or fees be increased? He's not looking to come to the Council with a zero tax increase, but rather a zero budget increase. A zero tax increase would mean substantial reductions, approximately \$2.5 million less than it is today.

The Budget forecast is showing a total Town and BOE budget increase of \$5.3 million. The revenue would be affected by a mill rate increase to 37.24 which is a 3.4 mill increase or a 10.2% increase. Taxes would increase approximately \$385 on an average home.

Finally, the forecasted Capital Projects request amount is \$3.7 million which is an increase of almost \$3 million over this year's budget.

Chairperson Czernicki concluded that the officials present need to continue to provide the best level of affordable services to the Town of Wethersfield. This will not be easy. She asked that the BOE reduce the increased budget presented by the former Superintendent. Consolidation of services needs to be looked at. Concessions of the Unions will need to be asked for. There may need to be a new fee schedule for services provided.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 11:30 p.m. Deputy Mayor O'Connor moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Cascio. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 6-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano,  
Town Clerk