

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2011-2012 PROPOSED BUDGET
MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2012**

A Public Hearing on the 2011-2012 Proposed Budget was held on Monday, April 16, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT, with Chairperson Donna H. Hemmann presiding.

Present: Councilors Drake, Hurley, Kotkin, McAlister, Montinieri, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Console, Chairperson Hemmann. Absent: Councilor Stathis Manousos.

Present from the Board of Education: Interim school Superintendent Dr. Thomas McDowell, Board Members: Charles Carey, Gina P. DeAngelo, Tracey McDougall, Polly Moon, and Chairperson John Cascio; Mike Emmett, Assistant School Superintendent; Tim Howes, Director of Human Resources and Financial Operations; and Keith Rafaniello, Director of Technology. Absent: Tristan Stanziale, Elaine Steinmiller-Paradise, Martin Walsh, Vice-Chairperson Janis Malec.

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager; Rae Ann Palmer, Assistant Town Manager; Sue Smith, Finance Director; Laurel Goodgion, Librarian; Kathy Bagley, Director of Parks & Recreation; Mike Turner, Town Engineer; Nancy Stillwell, Director of Social and Youth Services; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, Jeffrey Morrissette, Deputy Fire Marshal and Chuck Flynn, Fire Chief.

Councilor Hurley led the Pledge of Allegiance.

OPENING REMARKS

Chairperson Hemmann called the meeting to order and welcomed the Town Council, Board of Education members, Town staff, Board of Education staff and the public.

Board Chairperson Cascio introduced the Interim Superintendent of Schools.

PRESENTATION BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Thomas McDowell, Interim Superintendent of Schools, presented the Board of Education's budget presentation. (see Power Point attachment #1).

PRESENTATION BY THE TOWN MANAGER

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, presented the Town's budget. (see Power Point attachment #2)

PUBLIC COMMENT

Martha Mayer, 133 Griswold Rd., spoke on behalf of the public Library and how well utilized it is and the changes in what a library offers. She is the President of the Friends of the Library.

Tony Martino, 374 Highland St., commented on centralization, accountability, saving nickels to make quarters. He also commented that there was no increase on staff on town side, but not true in schools, functions and services provided. He suggested that a study be done to see what the Library, Board of Education and Town programs offer for kids and to find ways to combine it.

Richard Pianko, 91 Oxford St., commented that parents say the school system is why they are here in town. He supports full-day kindergarten. He stated that we owe it to our students, not to be rushed into a short kindergarten period. He feels rushing kids to school in their younger years, causes them anxiety. New families advanced property values and teachers & babysitters, care for children during absence of parents, imparting knowledge and skills to children. Endorse full-day kindergarten to keep us number 1 and hold the Board accountable for results. We are all in this together.

Dan Montano, 435 Old Reservoir Rd., commented on the good cleanup after the storms. He wanted the Town to show a study for all day Kindergarten, following through to grades 7 & 8; it needs to see significant improvement. Data from other towns showed no negative outcomes from all day kindergarten. He emailed the Board for studies, but received no reply. Council needs to have priorities, there is not enough money and no one says no. He elected the Council majority because they are fiscally responsible.

Stephanie McKenna, 66 Harding St., commented in support of Board of Education budget, educational advantage will not be lost, as they will upgrade curriculum for grades 7 & 8 this fall. If we do not have it this year, we'll be the only town near Hartford without it; support the Board of Education's budget. She asked residents to stand to show their support for all-day kindergarten. [approximately 40 people stood]

Andrea Ginter, 19 Midwell Rd., supports more money for school budget and feels that it will increase quality of education at all levels and is needed at every level.

Ballou Tooker, 65 Harmund Pl., commented about magnet schools. Suggest Councilors talk to legislators. He feels that full-day kindergarten is taking kids too soon from their mothers' love and are rushing them. They are just babies. Education is 3 R's reading, writing, and arithmetic. A child has to express his thought.

Bob Woodward, 456 Middletown Ave., commented that he is a retired person and that the overall budget would take more than his increase in social security this year. He stated that the Town Council represents all of us and that they should balance the budget between needs before they increase it. He also stated that he is scared about the numbers for the high school. People made assumptions, even if tax rate stayed the same, it would double our taxes, keep it in mind.

Mark Miele, 45 Drummer Lane, commented that he sends his child to West Hartford Montessori School, and pays the \$10,000 per year. He'd rather she stayed in Wethersfield but he thinks it is important to go all day. Children are ready to learn.

Jennifer March-Wackers, 81 Hillcrest Ave., supports full-day kindergarten and the Wethersfield High School renovation and feels that we need both. Full-day kindergarten is not babysitting.

Board of Education established it as a goal, allow teachers to cover the state standards. It would put a negative twist to the system if, surrounding towns have it, and we do not. Glastonbury will offer it this fall. We either pay private tuition or have the town pay the magnet schools; Fully revamp curriculum to offset fade and fully fund the board budget.

Jack Connors, 14 Penny Place, commented on the challenge of unions. He asked if the union dues are taken out on Town side and if the Town pays it to the union leadership. He stated that union members should have to write their own checks for dues, Town should not do it. Town Manager Bridges said that the Town does a deduction for the dues from the paychecks.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Cir, commented that if referendum does not pass, schools will not close. Reports were good about the education received. He stated that taxes rise, squeezes individuals and Wethersfield residents are facing the same as elsewhere. Everything is going up and things are not going to change anytime soon. He feels that we need to tighten screws in Board of Education because people are just getting by. He commented that road improvement is a good idea. He suggested we should save money by having one superintendent of schools. He thinks Mrs. Robinson makes sense on all-day kindergarten and how important kindergarten would take care of children. Taxpayers are funding this cost with all-day kindergarten. He is glad Cloverdale Pond is in CIP budgets since nothing has been done for 40 years. Competition is healthy for government. Also, people need to compare public services and taxes and go elsewhere if taxes don't provide services they want and ask questions.

Doreen Garcia, 33 Schurburne; asked, "Why are you not practicing fiscal responsibility"? She commented that wages have dropped median income lower. If you grew up in a middle class household, you may have slipped down from it. She is against the high school referendum; it is extravagant and too expensive. She spoke of a \$20M referendum for the Hanmer plan and suggested we should get by with less. She is also against all day kindergarten and feels that it is the personal responsibility of family to read to their child, play with legos in order to get to high achievement for learning. Stop raising our taxes, and no more referendums.

James Griswold, 56 Grist Mill Rd., commented that the Town Council and Board of Education have a job to run our town and schools and that he is not against public education, but what happens after high school? Where is the college money going to come from? You are paying now instead of waiting for it. Cut your expenses and call your Councilmen if you think they are right; look to the future not just the present.

Aleeta Jeamel, 19 Morrison Ave., commented that she thought about the school system, but did not think about all-day kindergarten or the physical plan of the high school, but is voting for the referendum.

Tony Centurelli, 675 Folly Brook Blvd., commented that the roads idea is good; the tree truck is bad due to liability issues and is in support of full-day kindergarten.

Debbie Condon, 122 Beverly Rd., spoke briefly and commented that she was in support of the Board of Education and the high school referendum.

Marybeth Maluccio, 51 Baneberry Lane, spoke on behalf of the Italian program and commented on how cuts would affect this town's program. She stated the students need a 5-year program to use for college and scholarship qualification and asked the administration to spend money fairly by offering a 5th year Italian program. She also wanted the Town Council and Board to know that people felt strongly about Italian in the schools.

Jeffrey Cantin, 47 Buckland Rd., commented that he would take advantage of full-day kindergarten and felt offering full-day kindergarten would keep people from moving out of town.

Leigh Moran, 104 Church St., commented that she is in support of full-day kindergarten.

Carrie Anastasiades, 151 Two Rod Highway, stated that she feels it is time to invest in our school system with the high school and augmenting curriculum. She feels that test scores will go down and people will not want to move into town if something is not done soon.

Sara Zaiantz, 624 Nott St., commented that her child was accepted to a magnet school, but she would send her to Wethersfield if full-day kindergarten were offered here.

Marjorie Carson, 12 Avalon Pl., commented on the kindergarten curriculum and the condition of Hanmer School and its dire need of renovations. She stated that there is no way to know the main entrance and made mention of the broken down pavement, play yard, cracks and holes all over, etc.

Carrie Wilhelm, 65 Northbrick Lane, commented that she is in full support of budget but is concerned that the parent and teacher are limited by time.

Rob LaPlante, 472 Old Reservoir Rd., spoke briefly and stated his full support of all-day kindergarten.

Lee Sekas 117 Wells Rd., commented on the need to build up reserve and stop paying out money. He stated that town should keep things up-to-date, within means of money. He is unsure of Wethersfield High School referendum, but feels that all day kindergarten, may be good for some kids, but not for all, and asked to consider education tax.

David Caruk, 149 Broad St., spoke in support of all-day kindergarten and the high school renovation and didn't want to see the town or school system go down.

Carol Shafman, 626 Wolcott Hill Rd., said she has three kids and one child using services now, spoke of the importance of globally empirical data, not if but when, and how we support it. She suggested forming a committee to see how we can get ahead, more technology is needed. As she is an electrical engineer, she received her first computer at age 5. She highly recommends Con Academy Tools online because children learn from them.

Joseph Lombardo, 67 Fairlane Dr., made a comparison between Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, if he put his home in Rocky Hill, saving \$1000, but he is in Wethersfield, and wanted to know why there is a 6-8 mill rate difference. Expressed concern for doing so much all in one year and

thought it to be an ambitious program. He also briefly discussed the wage increases for the Town and suggested a living wage.

Patti Silva, 24 Hillcrest Ave., stated that she is in support of the library, public safety, and also is in support of the Board of Education proposed budget for 2013 and full-day program.

Kim Fluery, 433 Coppermill Rd., commented that parents are moving out of town to find better value; parents are not looking for free babysitting. Kids are ready for it, 5 year old, prepared to spend full six hours in school, strong foundation to succeed in later years, love of learning and love of school, give them it now. Move forward to support our kids and teachers.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., suggested Councilors come up with a charge for all day kindergarten; things need to be maintained, most likely embedded in budget and don't spend it on it. He also commented on how things, facilities, need to be maintained.

Filomena Marinelli, 16 Stonegate Dr., commented that the Board of Education should maintain the Italian program at Wethersfield High School. She stated that not offering Italian 5 is an injustice to students and would impact their ability to obtain scholarships. She then made a comparison that not offering five years of Italian would be like offering full-day kindergarten and then 1/2 day first grade.

Claudio Borea – 639 Highland St., Physicist, commented that he didn't come from our town schools but understands opportunities of education. He sees some things as disturbing such as the lawsuit costs and stated that the Town Council, Town Manager, and Superintendent need to balance things out. He also stated that we should not get in the position where we do things that become unmaintainable.

Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St., suggested that we hold off a year on all-day kindergarten and stated that children may feel rushed. She also commented on the needs of children in schools and raised concerns about resources, classroom sizes, and special needs children as well as state and federal mandated requirements.

Lauren Barbara, 281 Dale Rd., commented that she is in support of all-day kindergarten and that it should not be put off for another year. She also added that some children attended all-day preschool and then regressed in kindergarten. She again urged the Board of Education budget be passed.

Martha Conneely, 12 Fairmont St. commented that the town has some big maintenance issues and added that critical needs are not being addressed and that it is time to recognize investment needs in our buildings. Last year, \$20,000 was spent on seven schools. She also commented on the Coppermill Pond and that it would cost more to dredge it than what was spent on schools. She stated that amount of debt we carry (Standard and Poor) is actually low overall and that we should redirect money into programs.

2nd time speakers

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., commented on the pinhole leaks in pipes at the high school and suggested taking the pipe out and replacing it. He advised that we need to live within our means. He also expressed concern about large classes, schools being packed, full time kindergarten, and the 74M renovation cost.

Claudio Borea, 639 Highland St., commented on how things are going up on grand list. He stressed not to down play the importance of creative play for children and stated that some people think the school Department of Education will do full-day kindergarten and change the other curricular.

Martha Conneely, 12 Fairmont St., stated that she is in support of the referendum and commented on how the pipes are made from copper and are grounded with copper wires and it is the infrastructure that needs repair. She commented that our schools should be attractive enough to keep our children in school and that as a community our schools are thought to be less than what they were. She added that the average person coming to buy homes in town are under thirty and ask about the schools.

Third Time

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., commented that our property values are going down and that our test scores have been going down for eight years. He stated that short-term loans affect our payments on monthly basis because we borrow to have them. He also added that the Webb School, 2005, \$200,000 worth of windows, has not been finished.

ADJOURNMENT

At 10:35 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO ADJOURN THE PUBLIC HEARING”** seconded by Councilor Drake.

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

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk
Approved by Vote of Council
May 7, 2012