

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE 2010-2011 PROPOSED BUDGET
MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2011**

A Public Hearing on the 2010-2011 Proposed Budget was held on Monday, April 18, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT, with Chairperson Donna H. Hemmann presiding.

Present: Councilors Drake, Kotkin, Manousos, Montinieri, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Console, Chairperson Hemmann.

Absent: Councilors Hurley, McAlister.

Present from the Board of Education: Gina P. DeAngelo, Stacey M. Hodges, Mary Beth Maluccio, Martin Walsh, Vice Chairperson Tougas.

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager; Thomas McDowell, Interim Superintendent of Schools; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk, and staff from both the Board of Education and Town Hall.

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.

Chairperson Hemmann explained the procedures for the evening. Speakers will be called in order on the sign in sheet and allowed to speak for ten minutes on items pertaining to the budget. After all persons have spoken one time, she will call on persons to speak a second time.

Mary Beth Maluccio lead the pledge of allegiance.

PRESENTATION BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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 Road, spoke in favor of funding for the Public Library. Visiting a library is a good way to judge a town.

Patti Silva, 24 Hillcrest Avenue, spoke on behalf of the Board of Education's budget that will allow the hiring of three instructional supervisors. She also spoke in favor of all day

kindergarten but felt the Board of Education should take its time so that the program includes all kindergarten age children.

Jack Conners, 14 Penny Place, spoke in support of keeping the budget the same, having level funding.

Martha Connely, 12 Fairmont Street, commented that she recently met a couple who told her that really liked Wethersfield but felt Rocky Hill schools were better and they are planning to move to Rocky Hill. She noted that the 6% increase may be too big, and she felt that the school programs and staff can be saved for less than a 6% increase. She asked the Town Council to work with the Board and Education to approve a budget that protects our schools and the values of our homes.

Gloria McLean, 38 Midwell Road, noted that what attracts people to a town are strong community ties, involvement and an excellent school system. She noted that taxes provide access to all kinds of services that make Wethersfield special, and most important, is the education of the children.

Andrea Ginter, 19 Midwell Road, noted that by mandate, the schools need to identify gifted and talented students, but there are no services that need to be provided for these students. She also commented that after school enhancements are cut, stellar students may chose to go to magnet schools. She noted her support for the Board of Education's budget as it is now.

Bob Woodward, 456 Middletown Avenue, asked the Town Council to keep in mind the people on fixed incomes who are challenged with increases in heating costs and health insurance and people who are unemployed.

Dan Montano, 435 Old Reservoir Road, commented that the key word is balance. Also thanked the Town Council and the Board of Education for being fiscally responsible and holding the line on spending. He commented that the Board of Education's budget has increased \$12 million in the last seven years and noted that the Town Council has not been stingy with the Board of Education. Suggested eliminating the proposal for an all day kindergarten, eliminate the three new instructional supervisors and cut the present instructional supervisors, if possible, ask the teachers' union to refund the dues paid and put it towards their pension and not political ads, eliminate tax increases.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, advocated living with our means and keeping priorities straight. Recommended a zero percent increase for the Board of Education. Noted that yearly salaries of: President Obama, \$400,000 plus a \$50,000 allowance for expenses, Robert Gates, \$199,000, Hilary Clinton, \$191,300, Governor Malloy, \$150,000, Interim Superintendent of Wethersfield Thomas McDowell \$220,000, total cost of Central Office Staff \$1,800,000, and felt these numbers are out of line. Also, noted that the legal costs of Mr. Kohlhagen and Mrs. Hodges totaled approximately \$245,000.

Robert Cobb, 99 Meadow View Drive, commented on the Wethersfield Library for their helpfulness and other town services. He noted that 65% of the town's taxes paid go to the

Board of Education, but .82 of every dollar goes towards compensation of the Board of Education employees, with .18 of every dollar going towards miscellaneous items like books, busing and air conditioning. The bulk of the increase, or \$1.9 million, goes directly to salaries and benefits of Board of Education employees. He agreed that there are layers of bureaucracy at the Board of Education.

Kathy Kanya, 27 Meadow View Drive, thanked the Board of Education and the Town Council for their service during this difficult budget time and asked that they work together. She commented that she felt a 6% increase in the budget would be a responsible budget for the school system and noted that an all day kindergarten is overdue in Wethersfield. She asked the Board of Education to reconsider some of the line items slated for elimination: Festival Program, Math Olympics, after school programs and the home school liaison at the middle school.

Mary Ann Lindquist, 53 Stonegate Drive, spoke on behalf of the music program and noted balance is the key for the budget. She stated she teaches in a school system which continually tops the state in test schools spending less per student than Wethersfield.

Ballou Tooker, 65 Harmund Place, thanked the Town Council and the Board of Education for the time spent on Town issues and encouraged everyone to think outside of the box.

John Landry, 265 Dale Road, commented he would rather see a tax increase rather than see the Board of Education's budget slashed any further. Asked the Town Council to accept the hard work, hard decisions and compromises made by the Board of Education and pass the budget as presented. He noted his support for the Wethersfield Library, and also noted that he does not feel teachers' salaries are overblown.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that there are a number of areas that can be cut in the Board of Education's budget, would like to see something done with the empty bus seats, the ECS formulas used and eliminating the Minimum State Budget requirements. He suggested reducing the current \$48 million budget by \$2 million.

Baby Mathews, 23 Ancient Highway, stated that money is not always the solution. Great schools have great leadership. If more taxes are needed, then do it. We need to be able to trust each other. If we downsize now we may not get it back.

Rita Dikegoros, 16 Bay Roc Road, commented on maintaining the quality of life in Wethersfield and the need for a balance. She asked that the education arts system be preserved. She noted that she was concerned that if the Board of Education does not get the money that is needed, cuts to the middle school intramural activities, the liaison position, the drama program, the middle school students will have nothing to do. She also noted that she hoped that the Town Council and Board of Education can work together and give everyone what they need with a minimal tax increase.

John Miller, 45 Highland Street, noted Wethersfield is known for its school system and it should remain that way. He noted that in his opinion, the Economic Development has not

accomplished much and felt there was built in opposition with anything anyone wants to do. He also commented that if 80% of the costs are in the personnel end of the Board of Education's budget, then that's what needs to be looked at. He also commented that the Board of Education's increase should not be 6%, it should be reasonable.

SECOND TIME FOR SPEAKERS

Robert Cobb, 99 Meadow View Drive, commented on the Board of Education's budget, his objection to standardized testing and noted the salaries of the elementary school principals are higher than that of the Town Manager.

Michael Zaleski, 23 Black Birch Road, commented that at some point in the next few years, there will be a slow decline and people will stop buying homes in town and property values will go down. He noted that teachers teach kids, not books and computers.

Patti Silva, 24 Hillcrest Avenue, thanked the Council and the Board of Education for their work. She commented on the cuts to Public Safety and the discussions about closing an elementary school. Years ago, classroom sizes were larger and special needs children were not included in the mainstream classrooms. Special needs children are now included in the mainstream classrooms, together with their paraprofessionals and other support staff which require more physical space so she asked this be kept in mind. She also noted that catholic schools do not take special needs students.

Ballou Tooker, 65 Harmund Place, noted that he is against full day kindergarten.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, thanked Council for their work.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that the Board of Education's budget is overfunded due to the money that has been left over in the past two years. He noted that the Town needs to come up with new ideas to fund all the programs and think outside of the box. He also commented on the Housing Authority which has 187 students attending Wethersfield schools and felt the owner of the Housing Authority should be paying taxes so that the cost of educating these students are covered.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Avenue, commented on the Board of Educations' budget and even though the Board continues to get money, grades are not improving and student population has not increased that much.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:55 p.m., Chairperson Hemmann declared the meeting closed.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk
Approved by vote of Council
May 2, 2011