

Unapproved  
**PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING**  
**TOWN COUNCIL**  
**APRIL 19, 2010**

The Wethersfield Town Council held the annual Budget Hearing at a regular meeting on Monday, April 19, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in the Silas Deane Middle School, 551 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Drake, Kotkin, Manousos, McAlister, Montinieri, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Console, and Chairperson Hemmann and Board of Education members: Gina DeAngelo, Julie Montinieri, Penny Stanziale and Vice Chairperson Tougas and Chairperson Rodriquez.

Absent: Councilor Hurley and Board of Education members: John Cascio, Stacey Hodges, Mary Beth Maluccio and Tristan Stanziale

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager; Thomas McDowell, Interim Superintendent of Schools; and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

The Hearing began with the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Chairperson Hemmann opened the meeting and explained the procedures set forth in the Charter for the Public Hearing. She asked the members of the public to sign their name and address if they wished to speak so that the comments may be included in the minutes of the meeting. She said that she would call speakers to the podium in order and then allow anyone else wishing to speak to do so.

Prior to the public comments the Town Manager, Jeff Bridges and Interim Superintendent of School, Thomas McDowell presented their perspective budgets. The presentations are in the addendum to the minutes of this meeting as attachment #1 [Town] and #2 [Board].

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, presented his proposed 2010-2011 Town Budget. He said as proposed there is a .19 increase, the mill rate will change from 30.68 to 30.87 with the average home valued at \$190,000 the impact will be an increase in property taxes of \$36.58 per year. Jeff Bridges also stated the budget was crafted to show “what is done” and “what is accomplished” with the resources provided. There are pie charts and program descriptions for each of the Town departments. He realizes residents want to know “where their tax dollars go.” While it is always a struggle to show the value of the money spent, he can demonstrate it with this budget. On the Town side the budget is \$83,176,287 which is an increase in total spending of \$737,789 or .894% over the adopted budget for the current year. The proposed budget received from the Wethersfield Board of Education totals \$49,503,063. This is an increase of \$564,356 or 1.153% over the current year. The goal of this budget was to maintain existing service levels particularly for those functions that directly impact services to citizens. His presentation will show the Revenues and Fund Balance with the Grand List used for the preparation of this budget of

\$2,315,493,100; Debt Service, is \$3,778,518 a reduction of over \$305,000 due to refunding completed in March of 2010; Capital Improvements continues to be a challenged to address all the needs of the community with a budget set at \$1,189,600. The entire budget is available for review at [www.wethersfieldct.com](http://www.wethersfieldct.com), link is for the proposed 2010-2011 Budget.

Dr. McDowell, Interim Superintendent of Schools, stated that he arrived the day the Budget was due to be presented to the Town Council. He is impressed with the Wethersfield Schools and noted that the high school graduation rates, advanced placement, and furthering education have all gone up for Wethersfield students. There was a change from Economic Reference Group to District Reference Group placement. The overall quality of Wethersfield's school system reflects the teacher interest and the students' engagement in the learning process as well as the support of the parents and Town. He has visited all of the schools and will continue to visit them over the course of a two week period while he is serving as the Interim Superintendent. He mentioned while he had nothing to do with the preparation of the budget, he has been reviewing it. He will continue to support services and long range plans to meet the Board and Superintendents goals. Previously used SMART will continue as well as looking to reduce costs while meeting federal and state regulations and mandates. The budget represents rising health care costs, rising fuel costs and contractual obligations—the health care renewal increased 7.38 % and the fixed personnel salary and benefit costs of over \$40,000,000 or 82.7 %. This budget keeps the focus on the children and ensures a quality education system through continuous improvement.

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

1. Patricia Yagmin, 27 Jay Street, President of the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center, spoke on behalf of the center. She thanked the Council for its continued support, stated some of the events they sponsor such as Haunted Happenings, and a 3 day weekend event which requires a lot of volunteers. As volunteers, they work very hard to raise funds. The Nature Center should not be viewed as an expenditure but rather as an asset of the Town of Wethersfield. The volunteers help out with the care of the animals, family activities, camp programs as well as raising funds. Their most recent event held was their annual Spring Dance.

2. Garrett Hughes, 41 Sunrise Terrace, Treasurer of the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center, spoke on how the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center was established with government and private citizens working together. In 2005, the Friends and family of Eleanor Buck Wolf worked together to create the Center without any Town bonding and without creating any debt service expenses. They reallocated funds and Perry Cornwall helped and established a scholarship fund to support the Nature Center.

3. Annie Lonski, 100 Black Birch, a member of the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center, said she would like to see the contributions continue from the Town. She praised the many programs offered at Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center. She spoke of her child's hands on experience with the animals. Only five years old it created an interest for her and prompted her to participating in

a birding event. Not only did she look for various birds in her backyard but she also recorded what she saw and noticed it in her own journal.

4. Bill Haines, 516 Highland Street, spoke as a founding member of the Eleanor Buck Wolk Nature Center. He stated the Nature Center offers many green alternates for interested members of the community. It is the Town's most green facility. It offers a number of great lectures and programs and raise common intergenerational interests. Eleanor Buck Wolf was interested in nature and conservation. She envisioned a free standing nature center where people could continue to learn.

5. Martha Mayer, 133 Griswold Road, President of the Friends of the Library, spoke in support of the Library. She is in favor of the funding as proposed in the budget presented. She continues to support the public library. As an environmental consultant she has used the library and its resources for over 17 years.

6. John Foley, 63 Cider Brook Drive, spoke of the \$49,500,000 dollar school budget. He was in favor of continued support of the education budget. He is concerned with a reduction to the budget just to get to a zero increase in the overall budget of the Town. He stressed it was not the time, in these hard economic times, for teacher layoffs. Many, including his daughter, would have to travel to Massachusetts for a teaching position as other communities in Connecticut are also laying off teachers.

7. Patti Silva, 24 Hillcrest Avenue, commended everyone for their work with the budget and said she appreciates their efforts to bring it in at a .5% increase. But she does not support the current Board of Education budget because of earmarked monies for duplicating services of superintendents and legal fees.

8. Mary Fulton, 254 Highcrest Road, spoke in favor of the Wethersfield Public Library. She also corrected a member of the Board of Education on some of the facts concerning a parent statement previously read at a meeting of the school board as well as at a Town Council meeting. She also stated that she cannot support the school budget if money is going to the attorney fees, duplicate administrators, rather than the children. Her statement is attached in the addendum of this meeting as #3.

9. David Caruk, 149 Broad Street, said that he has been attending meetings of the Council, Board of Education and Ethics and as a taxpayer does not like being put at risk over a \$400 course fee. He has never seen this type of behavior and does not know how it will end.

10. Tracey McDougall, 45 Nott Street, questioned the Board of Education expenses regarding paying two superintendents of schools and \$200,000 legal fees while reducing the number of teachers. She asked the Board of Education to consider providing more detail in the budget so residents will know how the money is being spent and the amount of money spent on non-

education expenses. There needs to be a better accounting of the funds, more detail, and it needs to be in understandable language.

11. Marianne Cronkhite, 115 Spruce St, said she and her husband Mark, as well as Linda Rubera of 111 Spruce St have an ongoing issue with water pouring into their yards and basements for the last 13 years. They have paid over \$20,000 for drains and sewers in the yard but it is still not helping. They need more drainage help from the Town.

12. George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, speaks to the budget often so they should know how the money should be spent. He thinks the pain should be equally felt; many people are threatened by loss of their job. He knows that if the budget gets to almost zero, it can get to zero and if it gets to zero, it can get below zero. The Town cannot spend what it does not have. Special interests have opposite priorities and the Town cannot let things fall into disrepair. There is turmoil in the public school system. Most teachers are trying hard, things have to be addressed and not swept under the rug. It is the uncontrolled spending due to the people who created it and those being paid to solve it.

13. Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, said there are deep cuts in the State. They are eliminating bonuses for state employees. There is a shift in Connecticut and it trickles down to the Town. The Town needs to be aware of the dire straits it is in, ECS monies will dry up and not be available anymore. The Town can't keep spending money. A budget of 83 million -49.5 for the Board of Education; 33.6 for the town side and look at last year, the Board of Education had \$892,000 left and returned only \$46 to the Town. They encumbered money in September after the books closed June 30. They seem to be in limbo with a big accounting problem. Mr. Young expects the Council to follow up on it. They have 63 fewer students. There needs to be more visibility and transparency in what is going on with the Board of Education. The Board of Education has serious problems. The Town of Wethersfield needs to come in with 10% less than last year.

14. John Miller, 45 Highland Street, said he supports the school system and thinks its biggest asset is the perception that it is one of the best school systems. The Town needs to support it but be realistic this year. There is money there but it doesn't have to be spent. The Town doesn't need two superintendents to operate the school system or lose board members over it. Mr. Miller said he certainly doesn't want the system to lose the teacher in question. She is one of the finest in the system. There are some costs and essentially no growth in the grand list this year and nothing in the future, at least nothing that will make an impact. He said that last year the Wilkus farm cost some money and Wethersfield still does not own the property. Mr. Miller stated he never thought it was a good investment and thought the Town should have an updated appraisal performed on the property. He stated he would be surprised if the appraisal did not come in at least one million dollars less than the previous one and that he would pay for the cost of the appraisal if it was less than that figure.

15. Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main Street, thinks cuts are needed. She said consolidate functions of the Finance Department and outsource some areas. Her husband has a small business and finds it less expensive to outsource payroll. Ms. Ruhe also suggests the elimination of leaf collection as well as increasing class size as it did not affect education, families or the communities in the past. Ms. Ruhe thinks the Town could save money by cutting things that do not benefit children or public safety. She called for consolidation of functions and suggested the Town Council and Board of Education be more creative. Things should be looked at, not just at budget time, but year round. There are legislative mandates which play into the budgets of the Town. In-school suspensions, rise in more 16 & 17 year olds being treated in juvenile courts, eliminating ROPE there is not enough preventive work to keep kids out of trouble.

16. Beth Foran, 447 Main Street, gave Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk an article for the Hartford Courant and asked that it be read and given to the Town Council and Board of Education. Ms. Foran was very concerned with the cost in legal bills for the Board of Education due to the Ethics complaint. She suggested they review what Windsor does for credit retrieval or as an alternate way of teaching students who may learn from another teaching method. The Board of Education should spend money on the PLATO system, not on legal bills, to offer children another way to learn. It is an online course and students can take classes for credit or for learning enhancement. They prepare with the PLATO system and then take mid year tests and final exams with their classmates. They have demonstrated its effectiveness in communities where they put it in practice. She thinks it would be money better spent for an education budget. Her exhibit is attachment #4 in the addendum.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 8:38 p.m., Deputy Mayor Console moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Manousos. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk

*Approved by vote of Council  
May 3, 2010*