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SPECIAL MEETING
APRIL 27, 2009

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, April 27, 2009 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Present from Council: Cascio, Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin, Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Finance Director; RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant to the Town Manager; and Amy Bello, Assistant Town Clerk

LIBRARY

Paul Courchaine, Vice Chairperson of the Library Board and Chairperson of the Library Finance Committee, said that the Library budget has increased 53 percent since 2004, 52.8 percent of which was an increase in salaries. He explained how the Library currently serves the Town. There were 59,836 items checked out in February and March in 2009, a 15.3 percent increase. The average daily loans increased by 11.5 percent. The Library Board has sets its priorities as: Be open seven days a week, have materials that our customers need and want, and up-to-date computer access. The fiscal year proposed budget is a 5 percent decrease in a year when the square footage of the Library has increased by 45 percent. The Library Board achieved the 5 percent reduction by eliminating the Assistant Library Director, leaving the 2 vacant positions unfilled, reducing the program budget by 64 percent, eliminating 5 databases, reducing the technology support by 12 percent, and reducing the general administrative expenses by 17 percent. The Town Manager reviewed the Library Board's proposed budget and cut an additional \$70,000 from it. He said that the Library Board feels that it will be able to live with the Town Manager's cuts to the budget and still achieve its goals.

Councilor Roberts asked what positions were not being filled and what data bases were being eliminated.

Laurel Goodgion, Library Director, said that a part-time Library Assistant and part-time book shelver position would not be filled. The World Book Encyclopedia, Epsco Host, Next Read, Book Letters and the on-line Book Club would represent the eliminated data bases.

Councilor Kotkin said that he appreciated the work that the Library Board did to achieve this budget. He asked why there was an asterisk next to personnel costs.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the union contract will be reopened this year so that the salaries are not a fixed number at this time. She said that she and the Library Director will do the negotiating on the contract.

Councilor Forrest said that he echoes Councilor Kotkin's comments. He asked what fully funded meant. Is it a State guideline?

Paul Courchaine said that it is not a State guideline but is what the Library Board would request in a normal operating year.

Claire Meade, Library Board Member, said it is the number that the Library Board started from in coming up with this budget.

Councilor Console said that the IT budget is being cut by 50 percent. He asked how that would be accomplished.

Bonnie Therrien said that she is allowing the Library to purchase some of the computers out of this year's budget. These are the computers for the public to use.

Councilor Kotkin asked how the health care compared to other unions in Town.

Bonnie Therrien said that it is a very rich plan. Its prescription plan is the richest around.

Councilor Kotkin said that if during negotiations the Town could get the benefits inline with other Town unions it would offset some of the salary increases. He said that it was the Town Council's expectation that the Library would not spend its entire budget this year. The Finance Director projected a \$62,000 under run. He asked if that was still the case.

Laurel Goodgion said that some of the money will be spent on the purchase of the computers this year.

Paul Courchaine said that there will not be much of a give back this year.

Claire Meade said that the Library may need all of the money this year.

Bonnie Therrien said that it is very important that she and the Finance Director know how much the Library will return.

Councilor Walsh asked what programs would be cut with the 64 percent reduction to the program budget.

Paul Courchaine said that the Library Board is focused on maintaining the children's programs.

Laurel Goodgion said that some of that money is used for guest speakers and supplies.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that he is very impressed with how far this budget has come. He appreciates the remarkable work that the Library Board has done.

Laurel Goodgion said that the Library usage has really increased. The Library has nine meeting rooms that are now being booked. There were 120 meetings in March. She introduced Library Board members Paul Courchaine, Polly Moon, Claire Meade, Ralph Horowitz, and Jen Miglus.

Chairperson Adil said that he too appreciates the tremendous work of the Library Board.

Claire Meade said that it was very helpful to meet with the Town Council Budget Sub-committee several times throughout the year. It was a positive experience and provided good communication.

Councilor Cascio said that the Library Board and its Finance Sub-committee took this process very seriously. They understand the needs of the community and provided a very responsible budget.

Polly Moon recognized the four Library staff members that were at the meeting: Elaine Zieller, Joan Guthier, Pam Kelly, and Regina Aleksandravicius.

Bonnie Therrien said that on May 13th the Chamber of Commerce will honor Liz Kirkpatrick as Wethersfield's employee of the year.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Kathy Bagley, Director of Parks and Recreation, said that there are four budgets related to the Park and Recreation Department. The first budget is the main Park and Recreation budget. It shows a zero percent increase. To do this, the Willard Pool will close one week early on August 21st. School starts on August 31st. If the weather is really warm, residents will be looking for the pool to be open. It will save the Town about \$5,700. The Greenfield Park playground program will be eliminated. It has not had many kids use it for years. Many of the Park and Recreation programs are self-sustaining. The Dance and Drama Program and Cove Boat Launch are two big examples. There are many smaller programs, too. Mill Woods swimming area will close earlier on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings because the usage is low those nights. The skate light at the Spring Street pond has been disconnected. The Town was paying for it, even when it was not being used.

Chairperson Adil asked about the impact of reducing swimming instructors.

Kathy Bagley said that each class has a lifeguard and there are lifeguards watching the pools, too. She said that certain class times are not as desirable and some of the classes will be eliminated.

Councilor Forrest asked if she considered closing one pool another week earlier and keep the other pool open until right before school starts.

Kathy Bagley said that the Town runs four two week sessions of swimming lessons so that is not possible. It would interfere with the final week of lessons.

Councilor Forrest said that the Secretary I position has been reduced to 20 hours. Does that position receive benefits?

Bonnie Therrien said that is one of the 25 hour a week positions that has been reduced to 20 hours a week. The position does have benefits. It is a union position.

Kathy Bagley said that this is the position that she has been requesting be increased to 30 hours a week. She said that the office will manage with only 20 hours a week but it is critical to have these hours.

Councilor Forrest asked if other Towns have therapeutic recreation programs and can it be regionalized.

Kathy Bagley said that other Towns have some form of therapeutic recreation. Towns have been discussing the idea of regionalization.

Councilor Cascio asked if the pool pass fee will change because of the reduction in hours.

Kathy Bagley said that she is proposing an increase to the pool pass from \$50 to \$55 for the season.

Councilor Kotkin asked what the overtime expense was for the person who works at Cottone Field during events.

Kathy Bagley said that the cost is between \$10,000 and \$12,000 for Physical Services overtime. The leagues are not billed for this expense. She said that when booking leagues, she tries to be economical and book back to back games.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the escalation in energy costs.

Bonnie Therrien said that all energy costs will be discussed during the night that the Board of Education meets to discuss its budget.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the water charge at Mill Woods.

Kathy Bagley said that the Town and the MDC could never get an explanation of the charges. A compromise was reached for the fees. The increase represents the addition of the irrigation to the Little League field and Men's softball field.

Councilor Roberts asked about the removal of the holiday custodians.

Kathy Bagley said that the Town now gives the Board of Education \$20,000 a year to cover all costs associated with using the schools. She said that the next budget is the Community Center budget. It, too, is a zero percent increase. The part-time position at the Community Center is reduced to 20 hours a week.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the 2 part-time positions could be combined to one full-time employee.

Kathy Bagley said that the Department would lose hours and the hours that the two employees work are the same.

Bonnie Therrien said that the next budget is the Nature Center. Six years ago the Nature Center was on the Town's priority list. The Nature Center was supposed to become self-sustaining within five years. The Park and Recreation Director asked for an additional year to work to make the Nature Center self-sustaining. The budget proposal shows the Town paying electricity on the building only. She said that the reductions in this budget are the doing of the Town Manager and not the Director of Park and Recreation.

Kathy Bagley handed out a report on the Nature Center budget. She said that the request by the Department was for a contribution from the Town of \$71,987. The proposed budget by the Town Manager shows a \$5,000 Town contribution. The Revised Request from the Department is for a Town contribution of \$29,918 to pay for all of the utilities associated with the building. It was felt that since the Town owns the building, it should pay all of the utilities. \$30,000 will have to come out of the escrow accounts to help offset the rest.

Councilor Roberts said that it appeared that the speakers at the Public Hearing are okay with the Town giving the Nature Center one year to become self-sustaining.

Kathy Bagley said that the Friends of the Nature Center is willing to work with the Town to achieve that. They were just so worried that the Town would pull all the funding that they are happy to have the year. She said that they would just like the Town to pay all of the utilities this year.

Councilor Forrest asked about the Nature Center Director's position.

Kathy Bagley said that the salary will be paid out of the revenues, but will come from the Town's payroll department. The money will run through the escrow account next year. The Director will still fall under the Park and Recreation Department.

Bonnie Therrien said that this will run like the other escrow accounts. Revenue money will come into the escrow account and expenses will be paid out of the account.

Councilor Kotkin asked how much money is in the escrow account.

Kathy Bagley said that the account has about \$58,000 in it. Some of that money is obligated for expenses for the last quarter of this year. The use of the escrow money is a one time shot to give the Friends of the Nature Center a chance to become self-sustaining.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Park and Recreation Department is the only Department that has an Assistant Director position. He asked if this position could be combined with the Nature Center Director position.

Kathy Bagley said the Assistant Director does a lot of programming, accounts payable and receivable, budgeting, escrow account management, and maintenance of the pool facilities. The Assistant Director is also not trained in environmental education. The Assistant Director does many

of duties of a finance administrative analyst. She said that the Department is stretched pretty thin. To eliminate staff would require eliminating programs.

Chairperson Adil said that the Department runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Someone is on-call when there is an emergency.

Councilor Hemmann asked if the Nature Center programs are self-sustaining. She asked about the fee structure for programs.

Kathy Bagley said that the summer camp pays for itself. School vacation day programs are also self-sustaining. She said that next year, the Nature Center will be offering a member price and non-member price for their programs.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri asked about the sentiment from the staff of the Nature Center.

Kathy Bagley said that they are being very creative and supportive and are going to work hard to make it self-sustaining in one year.

Councilor Roberts said that there was always a plan for the Nature Center to become self-sustaining within 5 years. She said that they need to make it work this year.

Kathy Bagley said that the next budget is the Park Facilities budget. She said that there will be a reduction in the portolet budget and an increase in the water for the pools due to cost increases. The reduction to the Spring Street parking lot lighting is shown in the Manager's column of the budget.

Councilor Forrest asked if the Director has looked at solar panels as a way to operate the lights on the Broad Street Green.

Kathy Bagley said that she was not familiar with solar energy, but it may be possible.

Chairperson Adil asked the Director what she would like added back to the budget besides the utilities for the Nature Center.

Kathy Bagley said that she would like to be able to add back the week for the pool.

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT HEALTH DISTRICT

Paul Hutcheon, Director of the Central CT Health District, said that the Health District Board adopted its budget and has kept the cost at \$4.06 per capita. The population number for Wethersfield has gone down so the cost to the Town has gone down slightly. There are 20 health districts in the State and the Central CT Health District is the 2nd less expensive. The Health District will transfer \$84,000 from the reserve budget to balance the budget. The budget is based on the assumption that the State is reducing the per capita grant to Health Districts by 40 percent. Some of that funding may be bumped back up. Some fees were added this year and some minor

fees were increased. There was also a reduction in the expenses. The part-time secretary position has been reduced, the salon inspector position has been eliminated and the sanitarian will perform those inspections, the medical insurance plan is being switched to the Town of Wethersfield new plans for a cost savings, and the visiting nurse program is being eliminated.

Councilor Hemmann asked if the visiting nurses program could be covered by medicare.

Paul Hutcheon said that the visits may fall into the not medically necessary category. Many people use the visit in between medical visits. There are about 500 people who currently use the service and they are repeat users.

Chairperson Adil said that the Health District did a great job on the Heritage Trail Day. It was a wonderful way to promote health.

WETHERSFIELD VOLUNTEER AMBULANCE

Lisa Hancock, Finance Director, said that \$37,000 for a salary study was inadvertently entered into this budget and needs to be removed.

Bonnie Therrien said that there is stipend money for 10 volunteers in this budget.

Phil Lombardo, President of the Volunteer Ambulance Association, said that he appreciates the Town's continued support for the Volunteer Ambulance Association. The Association had staffing issues but is now at 67 percent. He said that he held 2 EMT training classes and has had people come in off the street interested in volunteering. There are 27 active members and 6 inactive members in the Association.

Chairperson Adil asked what hours the Volunteer Ambulance Association operated.

Phil Lombardo said that the hours are Monday through Friday from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. and Saturday, Sunday and holidays for 24 hours. Aetna is the contracted back up service. He said that they work well with them. He said that he also works well with the Police and Fire Department in Town.

Councilor Cascio asked if there college aged youth interested in becoming EMT's.

Phil Lombardo said that he actually has a lot of interest from High School students. He said that this is a great way to see if the medical field is the right field for you. To be an EMT, you have to be 16 years old and to be an MRT you have to be 14 years old.

Councilor Forrest asked if the \$10,000 would be sufficient for stipends this year.

Phil Lombardo said that \$10,000 is needed this year and more will be needed for the 2010 budget.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Public Safety Committee has been working on a report and will get back to Council shortly. There may be a need to look at merging the Fire and Ambulance Departments.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Jim Cetran, Police Chief, said that the laptops were taken out of next year's budget. He is hoping that the JAG grant that the Town has applied for will pay for them. Money was taken from the national conference. He said that he does not attend that conference but usually uses some of that money to cover the cost of attending other conference for officers. He said that he understands that it is a tough year and can live with the items that have been cut. He asked that the Town Council not issue fee waivers for police services though.

Councilor Roberts asked about the crossing guard account.

Jim Cetran said that there are no raises for crossing guards. He said that the Honor Guard Trip to Washington DC was also cut from the budget. The Honor Guard does everything on its own time and this trip is a nice way to thank them.

Councilor Kotkin asked about the removal of the ammunition and taser cartridge funds.

Jim Cetran said that those items will be purchased this year. Ammunition is very hard to get and an order can take up to 9 months for delivery. He said that the Department currently shares tasers. Ideally, he would like one for each patrol officer. He said that the National Night Out and Citizen's Police Academy have also been removed from the budget.

Councilor Kotkin said that the Town applied for a grant to pay for three officers. He asked if this would reduce the overtime.

Jim Cetran said that this grant has to show that the officers are being used for community policing, one for each shift to address quality of life complaints. These positions will free up the patrol officers. Some money will be saved by not filling an officer not working that shift with overtime.

Bonnie Therrien said that at a recent CRCOG meeting there was a discussion on a regional animal shelter in Berlin. There is room for Wethersfield to join. It is a beautiful, brand new facility.

Councilor Kotkin asked if it was a no kill facility.

Bonnie Therrien said that it is a no kill facility and accepts cats, too.

The Town Council took a five minute break.

REPRESENTATIVE FROM WEBSTER BANK – FUND BALANCE

Chrissy Caruolo, Vice President of Government Finance Group, Webster Bank, handed out an up to date debt management plan. It continues to change weekly depending on the market. The plan includes the proposed open space financing. The goal was to add in the financing with the least amount of impact to the mill rate.

Lisa Hancock said that the Board of Education consultant is finishing his analysis for the grant funding for the Silas Deane Middle School, Webb Elementary School and the Stillman Building. It could have an impact on the bonding money.

Chrissy Caruolo said that the summary page shows the debt going out in February and added debt. The principal and interest is included with the most up to date grand list. It calculates the mill rate dedicated to debt service and the cost to the average homeowner. She said that on page three the change includes the interest rates. She said that there are not a lot of bond sales in Connecticut. This past week there were a few bond sales. The rate was 3.5 percent. The rate may not stay that way. The plans have a cushion built into them.

Chris Martin from Webster Bank said that Connecticut is a high wealth State and therefore, there is a little premium for Connecticut bonds.

Councilor Kotkin said that the plan assumes that the Town will have a full interest payment in June and December. He asked if a plan can be structured to have a plan with only one payment this year.

Chrissy Caruolo said that the assumption is that the Town will make a payment in June and another in six months.

Chris Martin said that the Town can move it out one month to July, but there may be cash flow issues.

Lisa Hancock said that it will depend on the referendum. She said that cash flow is an issue. A balloon payment is due in June. The other concern is the audit report in June. She said that the July payment is an interest only payment with a principal payment next year. If the Town paid a principal payment this year, it would save \$200,000 over the life of the loan. It would have a significant impact on the budget.

Deputy Mayor Montinieri said that there is \$90,000 savings in the budget now. He said that in July a payment will be made for a savings of \$145,000.

Lisa Hancock said that it would be a \$235,000 impact to the budget.

Councilor Kotkin said that the rate assumption is above the prevailing rates.

Chrissy Caruolo said that it is, but the Town is losing investment income, too.

Chris said that there is not a lot of liquidity in the short term market.

Councilor Forrest said that the 3 ½ percent interest payment is attached to the bond rating.

Chrissy Caruolo said that the Town has a good rating and will not require bond insurance.

Councilor Forrest asked what the profile would look like to get to the next rating.

Chris Martin said that there is a debt factor and economic factors.

Bonnie Therrien said that the Town is worse off financially now than last year.

Councilor Forrest asked if it is possible to refinance the Town's current bonds.

Chris Martin said that there is not a lot that is callable.

Chrissy Caruolo said that during the last ten years, most bonds have callable features. It would only add up to about \$500,000. Many of the bonds were refunded to low rates back in 2004.

Chris Martin said that there are very few bonds about 4 percent. Keeping the Double A rating should be a priority of the Town.

Councilor Forrest asked how much the bond sale for the Wilkus Property would be.

Bonnie Therrien said that \$2,733,00 would be bonded.

Councilor Kotkin asked what the S&P rating is for the Town and if the Town should get a Moody's rating.

Lisa Hancock said that it is a Double A rating with Standards and Poors. She did not incorporate the costs associated with a Moody's rating.

Councilor Hemmann said that the debt numbers in the budget book are different from page three in the handout.

Lisa Hancock said that the budget book doesn't include the additional debt.

Councilor Hemmann asked if the handout includes the total debt.

Lisa Hancock said that the principal portion is in the handout. It is \$28,000,000. The interest is \$8,000,000 and there is another \$10,000,000.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the Town issues the bonds in June can it schedule payments on January 1st and July 1st.

Chris Martin said that it could be done but then the 20 year bond becomes a 19 ½ years bond. The final payment has to be made within the 20 years.

Bonnie Therrien said that Board of Assessment Appeals has finished and the Board is complaining that the revaluation was not a good one and many changes were made to the grand list. She said that she anticipated about \$2,000,000 in Board appeals and \$6,000,000 in court appeals. The Board reduced the grand list by \$6,635,000 for Board appeals. She said that the number of appeals gets higher every year.

Councilor Roberts asked if the reduction was so great because of the extra members on the Board.

Bonnie Therrien said that she did not believe it was associated with the new members to the Board. The Board met as a group to make the decisions on the appeals.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:17 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved **“TO GO INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS UNION NEGOTIATIONS AND PERSONNEL MATERS – TOWN MANAGER SEARCH”** seconded by Councilor Hemmann. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0. No motions were made and no votes were taken during executive session.

At 8:32 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **“TO LEAVE EXECUTIVE SESSION”** seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:33 p.m., Deputy Mayor Montinieri moved **"TO ADJOURN THE MEETING"** seconded by Councilor Walsh. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Amy Bello
Assistant Town Clerk