

MARCH 21, 2006 SPECIAL MEETING

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special joint meeting with the Board of Education on March 21, 2006 at 6:30 p.m. in the Board of Education Lower Level Meeting Room, 127 Hartford Avenue.

Present: Councilors Adil, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato, Chairperson Morin, Board of Education members DeAngelo, McKenna, Malic, Montinieri, Rodriguez, Tristan Stanziale, Vice-Chairperson Roberts and Chairperson Hodges.

Absent: Councilor Cascio and Board of Education member Penny Stanziale.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Patrick Proctor, Superintendent of Schools; Judith Golden, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Susan Pinette, Director of Special Services; Karen Baldwin, Director of Human Resources; Gary Miller, Interim Business Manager; Karen Clancy, Supervisor of Financial Services; Thomas Moore, Wethersfield High School Principal; Moe McCarthy, Supervisor of Maintenance & Operations, Gary Miller, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Councilor Adil.

Chairperson Morin introduced Superintendent of Schools Patrick Proctor who stated that the Board of Education has worked incredibly hard to bring the proposed Education Budget to the Council. He said that they feel the budget is sensitive to the needs of the community and addresses the needs and opportunities of the children of the Wethersfield Public Schools. Dr. Proctor thanked the members of the Board of Education, as well as the Central Office staff who worked closely with him in bringing this budget forward. He said that with some major projects behind them, this budget year the Board of Education can move forward with respect to a more in-depth focus on the core of their work with teachers and children in the Wethersfield schools, with the predominant theme being Wethersfield High School. He said that Wethersfield High School is a fine school, a flagship school that should be a model school for the region and the proposed budget will provide for this. Dr. Proctor proceeded with the following PowerPoint presentation outlining the Wethersfield Public Schools 2006-2007 Recommended Education Budget:



[2006-2007 Recommended Education Budget](#) [112 KB PDF*]

Councilor Forrest questioned if the .4 FTE of the leadership assignments will be paid at each teacher's individual salary rate and Dr. Proctor said that it will be the same salary rate; however their role will be .6 FTE teaching and .4 FTE leadership activities and the percentage of time they work in a leadership role is what needs to be filled with new personnel. Dr. Proctor said that the teachers in these leadership positions will not be doing administrative work, but will continue to perform duties within their bargaining unit. Councilor Forrest clarified that two teaching positions will then need to be hired to keep up with the time these teachers will give up from classroom teaching. Dr. Proctor said that the Town will be paying for additional leadership support and the cost for this will not lower class size, but this is all about academic improvement.

Councilor Adil asked why classrooms are being wired for technology rather than going with wireless technology. Dr. Golden replied that she is not comfortable in terms of security with going wireless and due to the configuration of the buildings, it is not wise to move in that direction at this time. Councilor Adil asked if this will reduce the need for labs

and Dr. Golden said that it will not.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the leadership positions will be viewed at all as any type of boss or supervisor over other teachers. Dr. Proctor said that they cannot serve in that type of position as they are not certified to do so; they will be viewed as leaders who will lead by example and are professional models. Councilor Kotkin asked if the leadership positions will be rotational. Dr. Proctor said that they will be competitive positions which will be periodically reviewed.

Councilor Walsh asked if the lease arrangement for the roll-down plan of the computers at WHS is built into the budget each year. Dr. Proctor said that this is considered to be a recurring cost and that each 3-4 years, at the end of a computer's life cycle, it will be sent down to the elementary level. Councilor Walsh asked if Silas Deane Middle School is part of the plan and Dr. Proctor said that it is.

Councilor Kirsche commented that it appears that 40% teaching capacity will be lost by teachers of five subjects and he asked how five subjects will be replaced by two teachers. Dr. Proctor said that part-time teachers will be hired or teachers with a combination of certifications. Dr. Proctor clarified that no teaching capacity will be lost, but will rather be replaced.

Councilor Drake commented that the idea of teacher leaders is a good idea; however as teachers get raises and advance to the top step, isn't there implied responsibility in this already? Dr. Proctor answered that the more experience a teacher has increases their probability of being considered for a leadership position and being that there are a large percentage of teachers at the top step, filling these five leadership positions will be very competitive. Councilor Drake asked why the inner main entrance doors to WHS are being moved back. Mr. McCarthy answered that the security monitoring desk at the main entrance is currently past the doors and it is planned that the security "lobby" will be outside the main entrance doors instead.

Councilor Kotkin asked what factors are driving the substantial increase projected for student enrollment at WHS for 2006-2007. Mr. Moore explained that three quarters of the increase will be freshmen entering the school and the other one quarter is across the board as new students moving into Town during the summer. He said that in the last five years, total enrollment at WHS has quickly increased from the 900's to the 1200's.

Councilor Adil asked if the salary amounts quoted include benefits or not. Dr. Proctor said that the amounts in the presentation do not include benefits, but are salary amounts only. He said that benefits are now being budgeted in terms of claims experience; therefore it is difficult to determine what the benefit allocation will be for a position.

Councilor Drake asked where in the budget the benefits appear and Dr. Proctor said that the amount appears as a projection based on the anticipated liability in the "current services" section of the budget, since the benefit amount is no longer attached to individual teachers.

Councilor Forrest asked if the health benefits would be the same or less if the new certified staff positions were removed and Dr. Proctor stated that these positions will have no affect on the health benefits projection and therefore the amount would remain the same. Councilor Forrest asked at what point the health benefits amount would be affected. Dr. Proctor recognized that Councilor Forrest was addressing the district-wide increase of 6.8 positions and stated that this will affect the fixed cost component of the health costs, and the rest of the component is a projection of claims. Councilor Forrest asked if the requested new certified staff position of Curriculum Specialist (K-8) is the same concept as the before-mentioned teacher leader. Dr. Proctor said that it is the same concept, as the position will deal with similar responsibilities; however this position will have no teaching assignments. Councilor Forrest commented that in moving forward, he would like information provided as to the benefits amount associated with the requested 6.8 new certified staff positions.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato commented that in reading the narrative, it appears that these positions were part of the negotiation process with the teachers' union and asked Dr. Proctor if this is correct. Dr. Proctor said that the Board of Education is currently in talks with the Wethersfield Federation of Teachers and this plan has been presented to them. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if these positions were part of the negotiating package. Dr. Proctor said that they were not part of the formal negotiations process; however the positions have been discussed with the WFT with their

support since this will provide opportunities for their members. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked if the WFT is now expecting that these positions will be included in the budget and Dr. Proctor stated that indeed they are. Dr. Proctor said that these positions were proposed to the WFT by the Board of Education in terms of what they'd like to introduce. Deputy Mayor Fortunato stated that this indicates that these positions were therefore part of the negotiation process. Dr. Proctor said that in opening the contract negotiations, these positions were not articulated to the WFT.

Dr. Baldwin clarified that the contract negotiations with WFT began in September, 2004, and these new positions were not proposed until this year with the Board of Education taking the initiative to provide the resources necessary for WHS. She said that the Board of Education is moving forward with impact bargaining and has approved these positions. Dr. Baldwin said that the WFT is making an effort to work with the Board and recognizes the value added with these positions. Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that this is the first time in her ten years of experience that reference has been made to the bargaining process and she asked when the formal bargaining negotiations will begin. Dr. Baldwin said that this will begin within the next several weeks.

Ms. Roberts asked Deputy Mayor Fortunato if she is referring to formal contract negotiations or formal negotiations as they relate to the duties of the proposed positions. Deputy Mayor Fortunato answered that she is referring to formal contract negotiations because this is how she read it when reading about the positions. She said that she sees this as a promise that was made and she is trying to decipher if the promise was made as part of official contract negotiating. Ms. Roberts said that the answer is no.

Councilor Drake pointed out that the separate amounts shown for proposed new certified and non-certified staff positions do not coincide with the amount shown for new district-wide staff. Dr. Proctor said that the district-wide staff amount does not include the WHS initiative. Councilor Drake said that a lot more staff is actually being added than is indicated. Dr. Proctor said that he prefers to look at the WHS initiative as a recurring separate part of the Board's budget.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the Silas Deane Middle School currently has the LCD projectors in their classrooms and was told that they do. Councilor Kotkin asked if these projectors are used all the time. Dr. Golden answered that the LCD projectors are constantly being used to project lessons onto white boards in the classroom. She said that many grants to invest in professional development were received for the Middle School. Councilor Kotkin asked if grants are available for some of the 2006-2007 proposed technology. Dr. Golden said that the school system was recently awarded \$67,000 for infrastructure, but it remains to be seen if the funding will be released. She said that Wethersfield is not eligible for grant funding for hardware or software.

Councilor Forrest asked if the cost of benefits is the same for both non-certified and certified staff positions and was told by Dr. Proctor that they are generally the same. Councilor Forrest questioned why the overtime account is increasing by 4% if the hiring of a floating custodian is being proposed to reduce overtime. Mr. Miller answered that the Board has been over budget in overtime for the past couple of years and the budgeted overtime amount reflects the benefit of the proposed positions. Dr. Proctor clarified that the addition of the proposed positions would allow for the maintenance of overtime at only 4%; otherwise the overtime costs would be higher.

Councilor Kotkin asked if the electric and heat energy lock-in rates are through June, 2006 or if they continue longer in duration. Mr. Miller answered that Wethersfield is in a consortium with sixty other Connecticut towns for electricity rates and the dates for the lock-in dates for both electricity and heat energy vary. Councilor Kotkin asked if the heating prices are based on the current rates or a projected lower rate. Mr. Miller stated that the rates quoted in the budget are actually twenty cents higher than the current rate for diesel fuel and heating oil. He said that electricity has increased approximately 30% over the amount budgeted, but by negotiating the heating side of energy costs, this has been able to be contained to an amount only slightly above that budgeted for total energy costs. Councilor Kotkin congratulated Mr. Miller on this.

Councilor Kirsche asked Dr. Proctor if he expects that the increase in enrollment at the High School will eventually decrease. Dr. Proctor said that the increase has been coming for quite some time and he expects even higher increases before a downturn occurs.

Councilor Drake asked if the 2005-06 adopted budget amount of \$40,078,174 is what was approved for last year or if it

includes the additional \$145,000 appropriation. Dr. Proctor said that the \$40,078,174 is a combined amount which includes the \$145,000 appropriation. Councilor Drake asked if the \$40,078,174 includes the \$425,000 over-budget amount that the Board of Education gave back to the Town. Dr. Proctor answered that it includes the \$425,000 amount and that the original budgeted amount is \$40,078,174 minus the additional \$145,000 appropriation.

Chairperson Morin stated that he appreciates the due diligence the Board of Education has shown in the preparation of this budget. He said that the Council will be dealing with many challenges during their budget workshops which will begin on April 10. He encouraged the Council members to carefully review the Board of Education budget and submit any questions they have to the Board of Education so that the questions can be addressed during budget deliberations. Chairperson Morin announced that the public hearing on the budget will be held on April 17.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:10 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Deputy Mayor Fortunato. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council 4/3/2006

*This linked file is in Adobe's Portable Document Format. To view it you will need Adobe Reader installed on your computer. It is available for free download at:

