

ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING APRIL 24, 2006

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Wednesday, April 19, 2006) was held on Monday, April 24, 2006 at 5:30 p.m. at the Eleanor Buck Wolf Nature Center with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

Present: Councilors Adil, Cascio, Drake, Forrest, Kirsche, Kotkin, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Fortunato and Chairperson Morin.

Present Board of Education: Michael F. McKenna, Julie Montinieri, Janis Malec, Vice Chairperson Gerri Roberts, and Chairperson Stacey Hodges.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Patrick Proctor, Superintendent of Schools; Judith Golden, Assistant Superintendent; Karen Baldwin, Human Resources Director; Susan Pinette, Director of Special Services; Gary Miller, Interim Director of Business Services; Karen Clancy, Supervisor of Financial Services; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk; and Lisa Hancock, Finance Director.

Chairperson Morin announced that the Ambulance will not be presenting their budget this evening as the agenda had indicated, but will instead be present at the April 26 budget workshop meeting.

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Councilor Cascio stated that he felt there was a nursing issue last year and this seemed to be worked out by "sharing" a nurse. He asked for an explanation of the request for another full-time nurse at the High School. Dr. Proctor stated that there is one nurse at WHS serving approximately 1,200 students and the general guideline is one full-time equivalent nurse per 400-500 students. He said that the school nurse these days is a complex position. Councilor Cascio said that he had asked last year if the school system would be up to speed with nurses with the opening of Webb School and Dr. Proctor indicated that they'd be all set. Councilor Cascio asked if the nursing issue is something new or a concern when looking down the road. Dr. Proctor said that the proposed position, which was needed last year, was deferred to this year due to the expenses related to the opening of Webb School last year. Councilor Cascio asked if there is a mandate for the percentage of students to nurses per school and also if anyone other than the school nurse can administer medications. Dr. Proctor said that only the nurse can dispense medications and as he previously stated, the general guideline is one full-time equivalent nurse per 400-500 students. Councilor Cascio stated that it is important to keep the student/nurse ratio up to date, especially with so many students requiring medication these days.

Chairperson Hodges stated that she has witnessed first-hand a line out the door of the nurse's office of students waiting to receive their medications. She said that medical needs of students today are very different than they've been in the past.

Councilor Forrest asked if there have been any updates in the figures of the Board of Education budget since it was originally proposed and Dr. Proctor indicated that there is nothing substantial. Dr. Proctor said that eight retirements are anticipated for the 2006-2007 year. Councilor Forrest asked for additional information on the hiring of additional custodial staff to defer overtime costs. Dr. Proctor said that the overtime costs will be reduced by approximately \$28,000 which is the cost of one of the proposed custodians.

Councilor Kotkin said that he has received information stating that the Blue Cross insurance increase for this year is anticipated to be 4.9% vs the initial 7%, and he stated that this should be taken into consideration when finalizing the budget. Dr. Proctor said that there needs to be a conversation on how health insurance costs are budgeted. He said that the percentage stated is less significant in budgeting than the prior thirty months of claims experience are. He said that some health insurance dollars need to be set aside in reserve funds to prepare for any catastrophic event that could occur.

Ms. Hancock explained that Anthem has projected an increase of 4.9% over last year's costs which could figure very differently in the 2006-2007 budget for the Board of Education and the Town. Mr. Miller explained that the biggest impact of the 4.9% increase will be on the renewal and it is important to look at how the allocation rates are calculated since the employee contributions are based on these.

Councilor Adil stated that often times Town Staff will provide information on how a proposed position can pay for itself, and he indicated that the Board of Education's Residency Officer position seems to have accomplished this. Councilor Adil asked if more savings would be realized if additional staff was added to this effort. Dr. Proctor stated that it is difficult to calculate the savings and central registration is helping to avoid a lot of costs. He said that those in the system who are caught are "de-enrolled". Dr. Proctor stated that he does not see the need for an additional Residency Officer. Councilor Adil asked Dr. Proctor if he anticipates the need for an additional School Resource Officer in the future and Dr. Proctor stated that he would defer this question to the Police Department; however he stated that the position has proven its value to the community and to the High School over and over again. He said that he would advocate maintaining the position even if Federal funding ceases.

Councilor Cascio asked what initiatives the Board of Education has proposed with regard to the Building/Facilities Maintenance Plan being worked on by Moe McCarthy and Mike Turner. Councilor Cascio stated that the Town employs only one painter and asked if the Board of Education has considered additional staff to assist with maintenance. Dr. Proctor answered that the Town and the Board of Education could both use additional resources with respect to painting and the Board of Education does have a systematic maintenance program. Councilor Cascio stated his concern over initiatives being put on the back burner and also concern that the Board of Education realizes that building maintenance is a priority.

Councilor Cascio stated that a number of years ago there was a plan to eliminate the Department Head positions in order to align the positions with teaching instead, and he asked Dr. Proctor to provide an explanation of why the Board is proposing that this be reversed. Dr. Proctor stated that Department Leaders of the 1990's were full-time teachers with department chair responsibilities. He said that the proposed positions have authentic leadership responsibilities that cannot be combined with the responsibilities of full-time teaching. He said that the proposed positions will provide building-based school leaders to work side by side with teachers on curriculum, instruction, and modeling lessons, etc. to move the High School forward academically. Councilor Cascio verified that the Board is proposing five positions at a cost of \$118,000 and Dr. Proctor stated that it is five part-time positions (40%) from present staff for an equivalent of two full-time positions. He said that the budgeted amount is to pay for the replacement personnel who will come in to teach the 40% time the Department Leaders would have been teaching. Councilor Cascio voiced his concern that he does not want to see these positions become like the "Department Chairperson" positions in the past that required secretarial support.

Chairperson Morin asked if the replacement personnel for the 40% will receive benefits. Dr. Proctor said that they will not receive benefits as part-time personnel.

Councilor Kirsche spoke of his concern over the smaller pool for recruiting quality teachers who will only want to work 40%. Dr. Proctor stated that the work schedule could be patched together with other duties, as well as making use of retired teachers; therefore he said that he does not have a concern for this. Councilor Kirsche asked if the positions will be permanent or rotational and Dr. Proctor said that they will be rotational; the system for which has yet to be determined. Councilor Kirsche asked if the requested certified position for curriculum specialist math/science K-8 is a leadership position or someone who is not teaching and will be strictly developing curriculum. Dr. Proctor stated that this is a similar leadership position which is full-time focusing on curriculum development. He said that this position replaces a full-time administrative position due to retirement. Councilor Kirsche asked for an explanation of the proposed 51/2 non-certified paraprofessional positions. Dr. Proctor answered that these are to serve preschool, kindergarten, and first grade children who are severely handicapped and require one to one support and intervention. Councilor Kirsche asked if the demand could change each year based on the number of students needing this support and Dr. Proctor said that it certainly could depending not only on the number of students, but on the categorization of needs.

Councilor Walsh asked Dr. Proctor to elaborate on the impact that the High School Department Leader positions will

have on the elementary and middle schools. Dr. Proctor said that this will be a whole K-12 leadership realignment initiative focused at the High School with implications across the board. He said that the initiative will allow the K-12 supervisors to focus more attention on the K-12 continuum because a substantial amount of their time will be freed up away from just High School chair responsibilities in order to focus more time on the K-8 level, especially on the articulation between grade levels.

Councilor Kotkin commented on the Capital side of the budget which includes entrance design and air conditioning at the High School, and asked for an explanation of the cafeteria HVAC unit at Emerson School and the asbestos abatement at Highcrest School. Councilor Kotkin said that he does not see mention of the window replacement at Webb and questioned whether this will be completed or not. Dr. Proctor stated that the Building Committee is currently wrestling with the window issue and the decision will have long-term implications on the Capital Budget if the work is not covered in the project budget. He said that the window replacement is not currently part of the Capital plan. Dr. Proctor explained that the HVAC system at Emerson School simply needs replacing since it is on its last leg and has been pieced together long enough. Dr. Proctor explained that the asbestos issue at Highcrest School has come to a point that something needs to be done about it, although this is not a huge project since the asbestos is not in major areas of the building. Councilor Kotkin questioned whether the line item for electricity reflects the additional cost should the air conditioning be installed this summer and Dr. Proctor said that the anticipated increase is included.

Councilor Cascio asked if all needs are being met with regard to cafeteria furniture and Dr. Proctor stated that the cafeterias at Highcrest School and Charles Wright School are addressed in the proposed budget. Councilor Cascio asked if the furniture purchased can be used at any school and Dr. Proctor stated that if the furniture is design-specific, it is used at a particular school and if it is generic, it can be used at any school. Councilor Cascio said that he'd like to see the same furniture used in each school so that it can be shared if necessary. Councilor Cascio asked if there is funding in the budget for the Board of Education's partnership to join the class action suit for the Coalition for Justice and Dr. Proctor said that there is not.

Chairperson Morin asked Dr. Proctor if his staff has recently reviewed or plans to make any improvements to the WHS track. Dr. Proctor stated that the Athletic Director is reviewing this currently and analyzing the cost of improvements. Chairperson Morin echoed the comments of the April 19 budget workshop when Councilors stated that they'd like to see the Board of Education working even more with the Town's Social & Youth Services Department so as not to duplicate services between the two. Dr. Proctor stated that he will be happy to look at this and assess the current collaborative efforts.

Councilor Forrest asked if the time freed up for the current administrators to work on K-8 could be channeled toward the math/science curriculum in lieu of the proposed curriculum specialist position. Dr. Proctor stated that they can help work with and support the curriculum specialist, but would not replace the position since it deals with specific subject content, namely math and science.

Councilor Drake asked if the State gives the pupil tuition back to the Town and Dr. Proctor answered that the State does not. He said that the lion's share of tuition costs are for special education placements out of the district at an average cost of \$40,000-\$50,000 per placement, with the State, by mandate, paying costs over \$48,000, although the State has only been paying approximately 65% of the excess costs. Councilor Drake asked who picks up the tab if the State is not fulfilling their obligation and Dr. Proctor said that the Town pays the remainder of the special education mandate. He said that the budget has built into it four contingencies for placements at \$42,000 each and transportation at \$18,000 each that have not yet been realized, just in case they should come along.

After a brief break, Town Manager Bonnie Therrien distributed a copy of the Town of Wethersfield Vehicle Aging Report listing vehicle number, year, make, model, class, department purchase date, in service date, purchase price and life miles to the Councilors. She also provided a hand out of responses to questions from the April 19, 2006 budget workshop meeting.

The Town Manager stated that Town staff has determined a Town fee for Fire Department responses due to accidents and she questioned whether the Council would be interested in imposing this.

Councilor Forrest asked what detriment there would be to imposing this fee and the Town Manager said that tax

money is being used to report to these calls.

Councilor Drake said that he would support this being done on Interstate 91. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Berlin Turnpike and Silas Deane Highway come into play as well.

Chairperson Morin asked if imposing this will open the Town up to additional problems.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will check with the Town Attorney and also look at what other Towns are doing.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato said that she has concerns over whether there would be limitations on State-owned roads. She also questioned what would happen if two towns show up to the same call.

Councilor Kotkin noted that there is a huge increase in the pension fund contribution for 2005-2006 and Ms. Hancock said that this is the actuarial amount and is based on a number of factors including the previous contributions, anticipated contributions, income earned, past market impact and a process called smoothing. Councilor Kotkin asked if the Town is currently fully funded and was told by Ms. Hancock that it is. He asked if the Town is over funded and Ms. Hancock said that it is slightly over funded.

Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked Ms. Hancock to provide an explanation of the elimination of property tax on machinery and what impact may occur. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien explained that this passed through the Senate today and Ms. Hancock stated that this will not have an impact on the 2006-2007 budget. She said that the proposed phase-in will have an impact on taxes because the exemption will increase the needs in other areas where taxes won't be collected. She said that a major concern is that the funding will turn into an unfunded mandate and it is being recommended that there be an amendment included in the bill that will allow Towns to bill out the portion not funded by the State. Deputy Mayor Fortunato asked Ms. Hancock to explain why the Town needs to be putting money aside in the insurance fund when the Town has had good experience. Ms. Hancock answered that it is recommended that a one and a half month's reserve be held since there could be a year when a number of serious claims occur and monies would need to be transferred from fund balance.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:14 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP ON APRIL 26, 2006 AT 5:30 P.M. AT THE ELEANOR BUCK WOLF NATURE CENTER**", seconded by Councilor Kotkin. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by vote of Council 5/15/2006