

## **PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED BUDGET MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2005**

A Public Hearing on the 2005-2006 Town Budget was held on Monday, April 18, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. in the Wethersfield High School Auditorium with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

**Present:** Councilors Adil, Czernicki, Forrest, Fortunato, Hemmann, Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Karangekis (7:30) and Chairperson Morin.

**Absent:** Councilor Cascio.

**Present from the Board of Education:** Matt DeAngelo, Stacey M. Hodges, Michael F. McKenna, Raul Rodriguez, Martin Walsh and Chairperson Gerri Roberts.

**Absent:** Claire A. Carney, Janet G. Pilczak, and Penny Stanziale.

Also present: Bonnie L. Therrien, Town Manager; Patrick Proctor, Superintendent of Schools; and Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk.

### **OPENING REMARKS**

Chairperson Morin called the public hearing to order and all stood for the pledge of allegiance led by Councilor Adil. He stated that presentations will be given this evening for the proposed budgets of both the Board of Education and the Town of Wethersfield. Chairperson Morin stated that those signed up to speak this evening will be called in order and will each be given ten minutes to speak. After all have had the opportunity to speak once, a second opportunity will be granted to those who have already spoken. The time limit for the second comment opportunity will be limited to no more than twenty minutes. Chairperson Morin asked the Chairperson of the Board of Education, Gerri Roberts, to begin with her presentation of the Board of Education budget.

### **PRESENTATION OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET**

Chairperson Roberts said that after the presentation she and the Board members are present to listen to public comments. Chairperson Morin introduced Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Patrick Proctor who stated that the development of the budget was a challenge and is defined by the core budget and the newly renovated Webb School. He said that everything in the Board of Education budget either directly or indirectly focuses on Wethersfield's children's needs and opportunities through the vision of the Wethersfield Board of Education. Dr. Proctor provided the following PowerPoint presentation:



[Dr. Proctor's slide presentation is offered here for [download in Adobe PDF\\* format](#) (67 KB).]

### **PRESENTATION OF THE TOWN BUDGET**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien stated that this budget was even tougher than last year's to prepare and explained that many of the factors affecting this budget will not be going away in the next four or five years. She said that one of the

major problems in the State of Connecticut is the over-reliance on the property tax and until this is changed, the property tax is the only payment for resident services. The Town Manager said that the proposed budget totals \$63,788,376 which will equate to an 8.79% increase and a new mill rate of 30.70%. She said that this is an average tax increase to the Wethersfield property owner of \$387 per year and those speaking tonight before the Council and Board of Education need to consider if they are willing to pay this extra amount for services currently provided by the Town and Board of Education. She said if residents are not willing to pay this amount they need to suggest where cuts can be made in what services. The Town Manager said that 62% of the proposed budget is for the Board of Education with the remainder on the Town side. She said that the Town cannot continue to use the Fund Balance to offset the tax rate and that bonds will be sold to bond rating agencies and investors in June so keeping the fund balance level is crucial. She said that bond-rating agencies are looking for Towns to have 6%-10% for their Town Balance and should the proposed budget be adopted, Wethersfield's rate will be 5.1%. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there has been a loss of \$52,000 for State Aid and a loss of \$22,000 for telecommunication equipment because the laws changed on the State level of reimbursement. She said that there has been a negligible Grant List growth, although this growth will increase in time with development along the Silas Deane Highway. She said that Wethersfield is way behind in its capital and its investments in infrastructure; therefore new debt is coming on the books to remedy this. The Town Manager said that total fixed costs without utilities and health benefits are over \$1 million. She said that she needs to start setting money aside for a Town-wide radio system reserve as the backbone of the current system will need to be replaced by 2010 and also for the 2008 revaluation. The Town Manager said that her proposed budget includes the elimination of funding for outside groups and also the elimination of two positions in the Social Services Department. She said that the budget includes a four-day furlough for all employees except for police patrol and dispatch and there are no funds for an Assistant Town Attorney. The Town Manager said that two part-time Library positions for the Children's Department are included in the budget with the expansion of the Library to the lower lever of the Town Hall, as well as funding for a shared initiative with the Board of Education for a Munis financial software system. She said that although this is a tough budget year, capital items that are sorely needed in Wethersfield could not be eliminated. These items include funding for the Silas Deane Highway renovation, a drainage and flood study, basketball and tennis court resurfacing, a new gym floor at the Community Center, asbestos removal at Hanmer School, vehicle purchasing, and some technology upgrades. The Town Manager stated that she foresees additional unfunded mandates from both the State and Federal government. She said that property taxes will increase unless some services are cut and the Town needs to grow the Grand List along with increasing user fees. The Town Manager urged the public to contact their State Legislators to push for a reform in the way that the Towns and governments are paid for by means of only property taxes. She said that she is working with the unions for smaller pay raises and larger co-pays and also working with neighboring towns on various collaborative efforts. The Town Manager listed some of the Revenue Enhancements such as an outside vendor for personal property audits, economic tourism activities, and a Revenue Committee to review all Town fees and services. The Town Manager reviewed some of the changes in the budget document breakout and the new Munis system will make the budget document much more user-friendly than it currently is. She urged the public to attend the budget workshops and contact Council members with feedback on the budget. She stated that one mill will be worth \$1.972 million, making 1/10 of a mill equal to \$197,236. The Town Manager said that a lot of progress has been made in the past two years and there is a long way to go. She said that residents need to ask themselves how much they're willing to pay to make Wethersfield the community it was.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Matt Daskal, 24 Griswold Road, thanked the Board of Education and the Council for their continued efforts during the budget time and throughout the year. Mr. Daskal commented on the importance of the Social & Youth Services positions, especially relating to the ROPE program. He said that the positions are valuable and he would not like to see them cut.

Lawrence Daskal, 24 Griswold Road, thanked the Council and the Board of Education for all of their work throughout the year. Mr. Daskal spoke in support of continued funding for the Wethersfield Youth and Social Services. He pointed out that Youth Services are not duplicated by services provided by the Intercommunity Mental Health Group which does not serve young people. He said that the services provided by the Youth Services Department are vital and he read from a letter he wrote in 2000 to compliment the Department.

Sharon DeGoia Daskal, 24 Griswold Road, spoke in support of continued funding to the Social and Youth Services

Department stating that there is not another service to fill in for the cut positions. She said that the ROPE program is invaluable and gives youth the opportunity to have positive relationships with Town employees. Ms. Daskal said that funding needs to be provided for prevention.

Charlie Forsdick, 18 Monticello Drive, stated that he has had the privilege to serve on many committees supporting economic development in Wethersfield. Mr. Forsdick, as chairperson of the Tourism Commission, urged the Council to make the necessary investment in Wethersfield's future by encouraging tourism and bringing tourism dollars to Town. He said that for every \$1 invested in tourism, \$40-\$45 flows back into the local economy. He urged the Council to provide support and funding for tourism, and to jump on the bandwagon of Hartford's new Convention Center by tapping into the tourism resources it will provide.

Ruth George, 335 Hartford Avenue, requested that the Council restore the Parks & Recreation summer program at Stillman/Standish Park since there is not anything provided for children at that age on that side of the Silas Deane Highway. She said that Mikey's Place has revitalized the Park and more people are visiting the Park. Ms. George said that she has petition signatures supporting the new program location and urged the Council to consider the request.

Jane Sjorman, 769 Maple Street, spoke in support of the Library, stating that she is a volunteer at the Library and worked to pass the referendum for the Library renovation. She said that the Library touches everyone in Town through its free services and materials. Ms. Sjorman said that the Library is an asset to Wethersfield and she urged the Council to support the Library budget.

John Miller, 45 Highland Street, complimented both the Superintendent of Schools and the Town Manager in their presentations that tell it like it is. Mr. Miller said that he has a hopeless feeling about the budget and stated that the Town has dug its own hole. Mr. Miller stated that the Town needs to develop Putnam Park II and there needs to be 100% support and cooperation to do so. He said that cutting services is not an option in Wethersfield and the Council cannot let the Town go downhill. Mr. Miller commented that he expected to see more funding for drainage activity and he urged caution in removing the cap on the ECS.

Mark Mahder, 424 Wolcott Hill Road, Acting Chief of Wethersfield Fire Department, urged the Council and citizens of Town to continue to support the Wethersfield Fire Department and its volunteers. He said that for over 200 years the Department has been available to answer the calls of those needing them and the current membership stands at approximately 100 firefighters who need to be outfitted with the necessary knowledge and equipment needed to keep them safe and get the job done. Mr. Mahder said that the training requirements have grown each year and education is offered to any firefighter wishing to take training. He said that the Department held the line with a 0% budget increase in 2002-03 and 2003-04 and suffered a large cut in 2004-05. Mr. Mahder said that the Department has an urgent need for administrative, storage and apparatus floor space and a desperate need for an addition to Company #1 on Main Street. He said that the 2005-06 requested budget for the Fire Department includes an increase of 4.5% which restores the training and equipment budget to the required level and increased the heating oil, natural gas, and electricity accounts. Mr. Mahder said that the Town Manager's difficult decisions have cut the Fire Department's budget to an amount slightly below last year's budget. He urged the Council and taxpayers to make the budget cut replacement of the 1975 Snorkel a priority in next year's budget. Mr. Mahder said that making the Fire Department all volunteer saves the taxpayers millions of dollars compared to the cost of a paid Department. He said that the Town cannot afford to extinguish the passion to be a volunteer firefighter by continually cutting funding to the volunteer Fire Department.

Betty Rosania, 88 Desmond Drive, commented that the Council must act as a whole, continuing what they have nobly begun as being part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Ms. Rosania stated that she supports the Town Manager's fee increases in that only core services should be supported by everyone. Ms. Rosania suggested that since Town employees are being requested to take four furlough days, perhaps Board of Education employees should volunteer a few furlough days as well or forfeit a couple of holidays. She also suggested that the Police Department volunteer to give back their earned days for one year. Ms. Rosania commented on expanding the Library hours and the preservation of open space. She said that Wethersfield needs to seek to be known as the Business Friendly Town in the Capitol Region. Ms. Rosania spoke of the account she set up for volunteer efforts in Town and announced donations she is contributing to various Town organizations.

Carol Kober-Narsis, 34 Griswold Road, spoke in support of the Board of Education budget and urged the Council not to make any further cuts. Ms. Kober-Narsis also spoke in support of the Home/School liaison position at the Silas Deane Middle School saying that she would like to see the position reinstated. She also spoke in support of the Youth Services position stating that the ROPE program is a great leadership program and important to keep.

Rocco Orsini, 95 Broad Street, spoke on behalf of the Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. saying that the organization represents a good quality Town that is affordable to all and that the organization respects the opinions of all. Mr. Orsini commented that all of the discussion of economic development in Wethersfield has succeeded in increasing the Grand List only minimally. Mr. Orsini said that last year between the spending increase and the revaluation, Wethersfield taxes increased 20% and this year's budget projects an increase of another 9% and the Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. feels that the Town is overreliant on the property tax and should instead rely more on State funding. Mr. Orsini said that an 8% increase in the Board of Education budget over two years is unreasonable for a Town with very little population growth. He said that the only place to really affect reductions in the Town budget is through the cost of Labor and Fringe Benefits.

Jim Clynch, 903 Ridge Road, thanked Councilor Adil and Councilor Fortunato for their efforts to increase the tax exemption for Veterans in Wethersfield. He also thanked the Council for restoring the budget for the Memorial Day Parade Committee. Mr. Clynch spoke in support of the proposed budget stating that it is well thought out in consideration of all residents of Wethersfield.

Joe Hammer, 65 Broad Street, spoke in support of full funding of the proposed Board of Education budget as well as funding of the general Town budget in order to maintain and improve Town services and the education system. Mr. Hammer said that the Town needs to keep moving forward and he thanked the Board of Education and Town Council for their continued efforts in maintaining a proper balance for the Town.

Deb Hammer, 65 Broad Street, spoke in support of the proposed Board of Education budget saying that Wethersfield needs to do what it takes to make Wethersfield schools the best they can be. Ms. Hammer spoke in support of the ROPE program which has many wonderful benefits and urged the Council to retain the Youth Services position.

Jean Greenough, 283 Goff Road, spoke in opposition of the proposed cutting of the two Youth Services positions stating that the Youth Services staff teaches young people to be self-reliant, self-responsible, strong and respectful. She urged the Council not to cut the positions.

Regina Cravero, 51 Wildwood Road, spoke in support of the proposed Town budget and particularly the Board of Education budget.

John Thibeault, 898 Cloverdale Circle, thanked the Council and Board of Education members for their countless hours spent to make Wethersfield a better place to live. He said that he is concerned that the cutting of budgets and programs may make Wethersfield a Town in which people do not want to stay. Mr. Thibeault stated that the opinions of the Wethersfield Taxpayers Association, Inc. do not represent him, his friends, his family, and hundred of people with whom he's come in contact. He said that he and they all feel that as part of raising a family in Wethersfield, one has an obligation to support the future of the Town. Mr. Thibeault said that the Board of Education and Town budgets need to be added to, and he supports his taxes being increased to do so. Lastly, Mr. Thibeault praised Chairperson Morin and other Council members who continue to support programs for the youth of Wethersfield.

Anne Riccio, 7 Hayrake Drive, spoke in support of the Board of Education and Town proposed budgets with additions to Library funding and the elimination of the position cuts in the Social & Youth Services Department. She said that the Town's infrastructure cannot be allowed to deteriorate any further and, although it is tough to raise taxes, it is essential and prudent to do so to achieve the desired results for the Town.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that government and its expenditures must be reduced. He stated that it appears that the current Council will be the one to give Wethersfield its two largest tax increases. Mr. Young commented on Northeast Utilities leaving Town and the conveyance tax and said that taxes should not be raised during recessionary times. He said that it doesn't make sense for Wethersfield's budget to go up 8%-9% when inflation has only gone up 2.7%. Mr. Young commented on the Town-wide radio system, the MDC long-range plan, union

negotiations, and Cottone Field.

Douglas Buck, 411 Hartford Avenue, requested that the Council not cut the Capital Budget section of the Town Budget, although he feels that the HVAC upgrade and Hanmer School work should be part of the Board of Education budget. Mr. Buck suggested that the Council look at ways to improve efficiencies and reduce labor costs and questioned the overloading of the Board of Education budget beyond salary costs. Mr. Buck suggested that classes of upper-class students be offered that would be taught voluntarily by community professionals and also suggested the expansion of cooperative efforts with Community Colleges.

Pauline Ucich, 646 Nott Street, thanked the Board of Education and Council members for their time and energy to serve the residents of Wethersfield. Ms. Usage spoke in support of the Library budget and urged the Council not to make any cuts to it.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, commented on the state of the budget being worse than it has been and said that the Town needs to redirect spending. Mr. Ruhe stated that the Youth Services layoff addresses Wethersfield's most vulnerable citizens and commented on the Grand List and Cottone Field. He said that the Council needs to be trusted to step up and do what is best for the Town and residents need to become more involved in all Town deliberations. Mr. Ruhe encouraged voters in Town to send a message to the Town leaders through the referendum in May, by voting yes on the lighting ordinance and he encouraged Town leaders to strongly consider the preservation of open space in Wethersfield to preserve a high quality of life level.

Phyllis Zerbini, 35 Deer Ledge Lane, thanked the Council and Board of Education members for their efforts in preparing their budgets. Ms. Zerbini spoke in support of the proposed Board of Education budget and requested that the Council fully fund the budget as presented.

John Distin, 105 Valley View Drive, spoke in support of the Youth Services ROPE program as it teaches responsibility.

Joe Distin, 105 Valley View Drive, spoke in support of the Youth Services ROPE program in its promotion of responsibility, leadership and teamwork. Mr. Distin said that he has volunteered on a number of community programs through the Social & Youth Services Department.

Yolanda Preyser, 160 Clearfield Road, urged the Council and Board of Education to work together to maintain the Home/School Liaison position and urged the Council to adopt the Board of Education budget as presented. Ms. Preyser commented on education spending items that she believes were unwisely deferred to future years, including middle school textbooks. She urged the Council to spend the \$87,000 on essential textbooks required for academic success.

Cindy Jacobs Rimirez, 71 Sunrise Terrace, thanked the Board of Education and Council members for the many hours they spent putting together the budget. She urged the Council to adopt a fully funded Board of Education budget. Ms. Rimirez addressed the decrease in Wethersfield's per pupil expenditures and expressed her concern over the image of the Town. She said that the budget increase reflects the State's budget reality. Ms. Rimirez said that she believes that Wethersfield residents get a good value from their local taxes and she suggested that rather than cut positions and services from the budget, the Town re-examine the fee schedules to see where preferences lie.

Woodrow Warren, 9 Nutmeg Circle, stated that he is very proud of the association he and his family have had with others in Town and said that we have to live up to promises made regarding no child left behind and find ways to make it work. He said that we should have austerity and share resources.

Mike DiCioccio, 20 Timber Trail, thanked the Council and Board of Education members for their hard work in preparing their budgets and commented that he'd like to see the mill rate kept below 30 without significantly reducing services. Mr. DiCioccio expressed his concern over consolidation of classes at Webb School saying that he does not want to see the students academically shortchanged. He urged the Council to make cuts in the technology segment of the Board of Education budget in order to fund an additional teacher at the Webb School. Mr. DiCioccio suggested that the Board of Education look at ways to purchase items such as textbooks at a lower cost.

Tracy McDougall, 45 Nott Street, spoke in support of the Library budget and fully funding the curriculum portion of the Board of Education budget.

Judy Niedzielski, 149 Straddle Hill, spoke in support of the proposed budget stating that she doesn't mind her taxes being raised and she urged the Council to keep the momentum going into next year.

Susan Fennelly, 57 Country Club Road, thanked the Council and Board of Education members for the time they dedicate to the Town. As a teacher, Ms. Fennelly said that reasonable class size makes a tremendous amount of difference in how children are treated and serviced.

Ed Tevald, 894 Ridge Road, commented that he found the Town Manager's remarks to be very negative and depressing. Mr. Tevald said that it was indicated that, for a number of reasons, the budget will continue to increase, and his income is not increasing. Mr. Tevald questioned the Town Manager's statement that Wethersfield's services compare well with surrounding Towns as he has found otherwise and commented that if taxes are going to increase then services should increase as well.

Rocco Orsini, 95 Broad Street, continued his comments on the biggest drivers of the cost of government being labor and fringe benefits and that Wethersfield's Town labor in the 2005-06 budget will increase by 6% after losing two positions and four days of furlough. He said that this labor cost increase and the fringe benefit increase is well above the national average. Mr. Orsini said that labor is a controllable cost since the Town does our own union negotiating and we are not bargaining hard enough. He said that a lot has been done for the Town's infrastructure and sufficient monies are being spent on capital. Mr. Orsini commented on the investments in the new radio system which still isn't working properly and also commented on Cottone Field. Mr. Orsini said that future tax increases must be kept at levels that are affordable to all.

No one else wished to speak and the Chairperson declared the public comments segment closed.

Chairperson Morin thanked all who attended to share their opinions and also thanked the Board of Education for their efforts.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

At 10:41 a.m., Deputy Mayor Karangekis moved "**TO ADJOURN THE PUBLIC HEARING TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION ON APRIL 26, 2004 AT 5:30 P.M. IN THE TOWN HALL MEETING ROOM OF THE TOWN HALL**" seconded by Councilor Adil. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk

---

\*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:

