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## **ADJOURNED BUDGET MEETING APRIL 27, 2004**

An Adjourned Meeting of the Town Council (adjourned from Monday, April 26, 2004) was held on Tuesday, April 27, 2004 at 5:30 p.m. in the Conference Room of the Town Hall with Chairperson Russell A. Morin presiding.

**Present:** Councilors Adil, Cascio, Czernicki, Forrest, Fortunato, Hemmann, Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Karangekis, and Chairperson Morin.

**Also present:** Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager; Dolores Sassano, Town Clerk; and Lisa Hancock, Finance Director.

### **OVERVIEW**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the charge backs do not make sense as they make more work for the staff than is necessary; therefore they were eliminated from each department and put into the respective department budgets. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien suggested that if the Council has a general direction in which they would like to move, they should make this known to Town Department Heads so that they can know more specifically what to cut from their budgets.

Councilor Cascio said that this was done years ago with the Board of Education Budget in order to give them a sense of direction for their budget. He said that this can be done with Department Heads for the Town budget as they, the Finance Director, and the Town Manager know in what direction they would like to see the budget heading.

Chairperson Morin said that this is a good idea, especially since the Council is a new group.

### **REVENUES (SECTION B)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she asked each Department Head to provide ideas for revenue enhancements. She said that the Town's tax collection rate is at 98.7% which is excellent. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien then reviewed the revenue summary which includes: Property Taxes, Licenses and Permits, Fines and Penalties, Interest on Investments, State Grants in Lieu of Taxes, Other State Grants, Charges for Services, Other Revenues, School Revenue, Operating Transfers In, and Fund Balance. She said that Interest on Investments is expected to increase as interest rates slowly increase. The State Grants in Lieu of Taxes reimbursements are expected to decrease because of the decrease in the State budget. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that Charges for Services is expected to decrease because the Town conveyance tax is scheduled to decrease as of June 30. The Town is trying to get the State to continue the higher conveyance tax for another year. Currently, only distressed communities will be allowed the extension, and this does not include Wethersfield. Finance Director Lisa Hancock mentioned the State will be capping the special education grants and this will have an impact on revenues of approximately 30% less than previously received by municipalities. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she is very concerned about keeping the Fund Balance amounts up. She said that the Bond Rating Agencies would like to see the Town's rate stay between 5% and 10%. The projection of \$500,000 will maintain the Town at its current rate of 6.3%-6.4%.

Councilor Forrest asked why the proposed revenue for property taxes appears as \$56,121,432 on page A-2 and as \$56,103,915 on page B-1. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that Finance Director Lisa Hancock said that page B-3 shows the \$54,716,415 with Prior Year Property Taxes, Interest and Liens, and Motor Vehicle Supplement added to it which comes to the total of \$56,103,915. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien also said that due to assessment appeals, \$3 million has been deducted from the Grand List as an estimated reduction and that this figure could change.

Councilor Adil asked if the Town expresses interest in certain State funded programs over others so that State Legislators are aware of the Town's desires for funding. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is done.

Councilor Czernicki asked what the dollar amount of the Fund Balance would be if the Town was to have a fund balance of 5.5%. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the dollar amount would increase approximately \$100,000-\$125,000 and that she will provide more exact information on this.

Councilor Fortunato said that the Board of Education is currently running a deficit budget because of Special Education placements that were not anticipated.

Chairperson Morin asked the Town Manager to review the reduction in the Veterans Exemptions. The Town Manager said that the State will be reducing the Town's reimbursements for the Veterans Exemptions.

Councilor Czernicki asked about the large decrease in recording fees for the Town Clerk. Town Clerk Dolores Sassano said that because of low interest rates, the 2003-2004 fees were very high due to refinancing of property. The figure for Conveyance Tax drops significantly for 2004-2005 because of the proposed decrease in the conveyance tax. Councilor Czernicki asked why the Community Center revenues are dropping as it seems that the building is being rented out more frequently. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will clarify this. Councilor Czernicki asked about the Youth Services Counseling fees and the Town Manager said that this is done on a sliding scale. Councilor Czernicki was very concerned over the drop in the Dial-A-Ride Membership Fee item. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the memberships are actually decreasing. Councilor Czernicki commented on Dr. Proctor's presentation last night of the ECS (Equalized Cost Sharing) loss of funds. She said that the number has gone up each year, although it is not nearly as high as it should be because of the cap. Councilor Adil said that the funding amount is not keeping pace with the increase in students.

Councilor Adil asked if the \$68,800 for the Nature Center is based on full funding. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that is based on budget proposal #2 and not #1.

Councilor Cascio verified that the Assistant for the Nature Center is only during the summer. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is correct because of all of the extra programs during the summer.

Councilor Fortunato asked what the Rent revenue is from. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she is unsure of the source, but that she will find out.

Councilor Cascio mentioned the idea of a \$1 participation fee to use the Library. Councilor Fortunato said that according to the Library Director, Laurel Goodgion, the Library is prohibited from charging a participation fee. Councilor Czernicki said that Ms. Goodgion had said to the Council last year that the function of the Library is for the free borrowing of books. Councilor Czernicki said that the current Library goes far beyond the borrowing of books and she wonders if a small fee could be imposed for program participation as there are expenses involved with these programs. Councilor Fortunato suggested that alternative programs be provided for a fee for the students who hang around the Library after school is dismissed.

Councilor Cascio left the meeting for the evening at this time (6:30 p.m.).

Councilor Czernicki asked if there could be a central clearinghouse developed for financial aid that would insure confidentiality as the applications move from Department to Department. Finance Director Lisa Hancock said that she could look at this to develop a policy of confidentiality. Councilor Fortunato said that this would seem to streamline the application process as well.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING - 181 (C-35 to C-39) AND 182 (C-40 to C-42)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the EDIC's full wish list proposal is not included in proposed budget #2.

Town Planner Peter Gillespie explained that originally \$30,000 was requested for the Grants Administrator and Secretarial position, but it was agreed that \$15,000 would be sufficient at this time.

Numerous Councilors showed concern for the Contractual fees being so high at \$35,882 and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will investigate this.

Councilor Fortunato said that she recalls the Secretary II position having some grant responsibilities. She asked how much she will be doing with the grants. Mr. Gillespie said that he will be relying on the Grants Administrator for much of the grant work. Councilor Fortunato suggested that there may be savings to the Town realized if the Grants Administrator were considered contractual and self-employed. Councilor Fortunato asked where the Grants Administrator is concentrating her time. Mr. Gillespie said that it is spread over all of the Departments in Town. One of her priorities is to seek funding for Economic Development and the increase of her hours could be discussed at a future Council meeting. Councilor Fortunato said that the increase of her hours should be built into the budget. Councilor Forrest asked what the duties are of the EDIC Commission Clerk. Mr. Gillespie said that she attends the EDIC meetings and prepares the minutes of the meetings. Councilor Forrest asked if this is something that the Secretary II could do. Mr. Gillespie said that the rates for the positions differ, but this is something he could look into.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there will be a \$10,000 surplus from the 2003-2004 EDIC budget and she suggested to Mr. Gillespie that this be used for the new Tourism Brochure. Mr. Gillespie said that the Tourism Commission is requesting a budget of \$18,950 which does not appear in the EDIC budget. Mr. Gillespie provided for Council a breakdown of this request.

Councilor Fortunato asked how close the Tourism Commission will come to their marketing goals with this budgeted amount. Mr. Gillespie said that they will end up \$5,000 to \$6,000 short. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that there are possible grants to receive as well.

Councilor Forrest asked for a more itemized breakdown of the entire budget document and Town Manager Bonnie Therrien agreed that the present format is too general for her liking as well and that she will provide Councilors with more specifics.

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien stated that the Planning & Zoning Commission is now combined with the Planning Department and that the Historic District Commission is combined with the Building Inspection Department.

Mr. Gillespie said that the Secretary II position has been moved from the Planning Department to the Building Department budget.

## **GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

### **TOWN COUNCIL - 010 (C-6 to C-7)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the majority of the Town Council budget is under Contractual which is for the auditor. Also under Contractual is the Contributions to Other Agencies which have been significantly cut. She said that the largest increase is for CMED for the specialized dispatchers.

Chairperson Morin asked what the risks are of pulling out of the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM). Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Town can now join the Council of Small Towns (COST) at a cost of \$1,027 compared to CCM's cost of nearly \$17,000.

Councilor Czernicki asked if the Town Manager will remain a member of CCM. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she will not as the membership is for the Town, not the person. She feels comfortable with being a member of COST.

Councilor Fortunato said that she would like to see an amount remain in the item for Safe Graduation.

Councilor Czernicki asked the Town Manager if she has informed the different groups of their reduced funds in the budget. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she has not yet.

### **ASSESSOR - 064 (C-28 to C-29)**

Town Assessor Jan Neumuth said that there is not much room for change in the Assessor's budget. She did put in \$4,000 for outside audits of personal property and the Town Manager increased this to \$10,000. She said that the

audits cost approximately \$500 per account and that they have always paid for themselves in the past.

Councilor Fortunato asked if non-profit organizations are exempt from this audit. Ms. Neumuth said that they are because they file the proper tax-exempt application forms. Councilor Fortunato asked if the audit amounts were increased even further, if this would allow for more audits. Ms. Neumuth said that she would have to check with the Audit Company. Councilor Fortunato brought up the suggestion for a phase-in for the revaluation. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that it would be an administrative nightmare.

### **TAX COLLECTION - 063 (C-26 to C-27)**

Tax Collector Nancy DiGirolamo stated that nothing has changed in her budget.

Councilor Czernicki asked Ms. DiGirolamo if the majority of the delinquencies are elderly citizens. Ms. DiGirolamo said that this is true.

Chairperson Morin asked if there is a program for those who are having trouble paying their taxes. Ms. DiGirolamo said that there is a process through Social Services. Ms. DiGirolamo said that she is down to two hundred delinquent tax payers at this time and that the collection rate of 98.7% was achieved as of the end of March, 2004.

Councilor Forrest asked why the Personal Services line item has increased by \$7,000. Ms. DiGirolamo said that this is due to staff step advancements within their contract. Also, the part-timers were given an increase their hourly rate from \$9 to \$12.

### **DATA SERVICES - 062 (C-23 to C-25)**

Data Services Coordinator Paul Dudley appeared with Brian Clement, Chairperson of the Information & Technology Committee. Mr. Dudley handed out spreadsheets detailing the line items of his budget and displaying the overall trends in data services. Mr. Dudley said that the largest increases in his budget account for Personal Services and Contractual. The Contractual represents maintenance contracts for the new servers and the internet infrastructure.

Councilor Fortunato asked about Data Services in terms of Shared Services. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that MUNIS (a financial software package) was introduced to the Town with plans to also implement it on the Board of Education side as well. The original \$30,000 cost for this has now become \$100,000 so Shared Services is considering looking at all new software. The Town Manager said that Town Staff has asked her not to change over from MUNIS as they really like the software. Finance Director Lisa Hancock said that this is a very powerful package and she would like to work on implementing it with the Board of Education. Councilor Fortunato asked if the cost for the combined MUNIS will be in the Board of Education budget or the Town's. Mr. Dudley said that it was planned that the cost would be shared. It is very fortunate that Finance Director Lisa Hancock has experience with MUNIS on both the Town and Board of Education side from when she worked in Colchester.

Mr. Clement commented that he is amazed by the age of the equipment at the Town Hall. He said that the Town's technology has not been funded properly for a number of years. It is very difficult for the limited Data Services staff to tend to day-to-day operations and also look to the future and long-range planning for the Town. On the Board of Education side, the number one priority is phone system training.

Chairperson Morin asked if the Board of Education's request for the position of Technology Supervisor would be the person to address any issues with the school system's computer systems. Mr. Clement said that this is what the Board is envisioning. Mr. Clement said that the Town of Wethersfield needs an overall Technology Vision which includes all Town and Board of Education departments.

Councilor Fortunato asked Mr. Clement if the Committee's recommendation will come to the Council in time to be included in the 2004-2005 budget. Mr. Clement said that he is unsure, but they will certainly try. He said that there needs to be an evaluation to see what works best for everyone's needs.

Councilor Adil asked Mr. Dudley if the web page for Wethersfield could be tweaked and updated to provide more

easily accessed information about all aspects of Town. Mr. Dudley said that the web page could use some reworking.

Councilor Forrest asked Mr. Dudley if the proposed Data Services budget provides for any improvements in the Department. Mr. Dudley said that what is proposed is a maintenance budget and he is trying to achieve an adequate amount of support for the staff. Mr. Dudley pointed out that PC requests are included in the budget of each individual department.

#### **REGISTRARS OF VOTERS - 050 (C-17 to C-18)**

Registrars Pamela Rapacz and Mary-Ann McFarland came forward to represent the Registrars of Voters. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the elections coming up for 2004-2005 include the Presidential and a State Primary and that any referendum is not included in the proposed budget. The Town Manager said that 2004-2005 is the year for the Registrars to receive a salary increase. Their salaries will remain at this amount for four years. Ms. Rapacz said that it is less expensive to do a referendum with a regular election or primary. She also said that should there be a referendum in Wethersfield, it has been suggested that the number of voting sites be reduced in order to save money.

Councilor Forrest asked if it is possible to reduce the number of polling places in Town permanently. Ms. Rapacz said that her office has proposed this a number of times and that she is in favor of it.

#### **TOWN CLERK - 040 (C-15 to C-16)**

Town Clerk Dolores Sassano said that her Department is dictated by State Statutes. The Town Clerk's Office issues various licenses, records land records, records vitals, acts as Clerk to the Council, and keeps accurate records of the Town, among other services. The Town Clerk's Office is responsible for all legal notices of elections, supplies required for the elections, and all absentee ballots. She said that the increase in the conveyance tax had a substantial affect on the revenue generated for the Town.

Councilor Adil asked what will happen to the storage currently at the Moeller Home if the Nature Center moves into the building. Ms. Sassano said that the records and documents in storage will be moved to the area of the Town Hall previously occupied by the Police Department. Councilor Adil asked if any thought has been given to imaging the stored documents. Ms. Sassano said that laser fiche has been discussed. She said that State Statutes require some documents to be actual paper records.

#### **TREASURER - 060 (C-19)**

#### **FINANCE - 061 (C-20 to C-22)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that proposal #1 does not include the .31 position of Administrative Analyst. She said that everything else in this budget stays relatively steady. She said that the contractual amount includes the licensing for the MUNIS system. The credit is for the work that the Finance Department does on the pension fund.

#### **TOWN ATTORNEY - 030 (C-14)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the budget includes funds for any court cases for assessment appeals due to the revaluation.

#### **HUMAN RESOURCES - 024 (C-11 to C-13)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the part-time position has been moved over to the Town Manager's budget. The Contractual amount is for tuition reimbursements, town-wide training, EAP, employee recognition programs and the labor attorney. The Town Manager said that she will be going out for an RFP for the EAP provider as she feels that the cost of the current provider is high. She said that the budget has been reduced by the amounts budgeted for the labor attorney, recruitment, and training.

#### **TOWN MANAGER - 020 (C-8 to C-10)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that she has added to this budget the Assistant part-time position. She said that this position was originally a part-time Human Resource Director, but she asked the Council to change the position to an Assistant to the Town Manager as she will be able to utilize the position better in this capacity. She said that the budgeted amount for the position is \$39,000 as a part-timer which is one-half of the salary paid to the Human Resource Director.

### **CENTRAL SERVICES - 067 (C-30 to C-31)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this account includes the phone system, copier, data processing, and postage. She said that the amount is off approximately \$70,000 for the telephone services. Fire Marshall Gary Santoro said that the Police and Town Hall telephone maintenance contracts are new to the budget because the new Police Facility and Town Hall are now tied together with a 24-hour service to monitor these two systems. Also added to this budget this year are the Nextel service charges. Mr. Santoro said that all of the cellular phones, with the exception of a few, have been done away with.

Chairperson Morin asked how many people have phones. Mr. Santoro said some of the Department heads and some of the Police personnel have phones. In total there are approximately 20 staff members with phones.

Mr. Santoro said that the fee for the Police Mobile Data Terminals (MDT's) has gone up. The anticipated increase will be approximately \$2,500.

Councilor Czernicki asked if this fee will increase each year. Mr. Santoro said that he does not expect that it will. He said that the current increase is to update the system across the board. Councilor Czernicki asked if the Town knew that this required updating would occur when signing up for the system. Mr. Santoro said that it is all dictated by CRCOG.

Chairperson Morin asked if it would make sense to have everyone on Nextel, instead of cells and beepers, as a cost-saving measure. Mr. Santoro said that he and the Town Manager have discussed considering this.

Mr. Santoro said that because of the removal of radio circuits, the budgets for the Police & Fire Departments this year will show savings which will offset the shortfall in the 2004-2005 telephone budget.

### **TOWN WIDE RADIO SYSTEM - 068 (C-32 to C-33)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this new division maintains the new 800 MHz System for Public Safety communications. Town Engineer Mike Turner said that the budget includes subscriptions, conferences and training, consultant fees, support services, repairs & maintenance, general office supplies and reference materials. He said that revenues will be received through the leasing of tower space and the property taxes assessed from the leases.

### **PROBATE COURT - 095 (C-34)**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this budget is Wethersfield's share of what is split with two other communities. She said that this amount is dictated by State Statutes.

### **COUNCIL ACTION**

Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that the Artificial Surface Football Committee met and decided to request funds to hire an outside party to help them compare the proposals.

Councilor Forrest moved "**TO TRANSFER \$2,000 FROM THE CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT TO ACCOUNT #T1950822 - 5441 IN ORDER TO HIRE DMA/DIGERONIMO-MIKULA ASSOCIATES AS AN ADVISOR TO THE ARTIFICIAL SURFACE FOOTBALL COMMITTEE**", seconded by Councilor Adil.

Councilor Czernicki asked if DMA will be looking at the pre-drainage work to be done. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that they will be looking at the pre-drainage work as well as the grass and the surfaces.

Councilor Montinieri clarified that the consultant will not be looking at the track. Town Manager Bonnie Therrien said that this is correct; he will only be looking at the football field. She said that she will change this wording for the future.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

At 9:30 p.m., Councilor Adil moved "**TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

At 9:40 p.m., Councilor Czernicki moved "**TO ENTER BACK INTO THE REGULAR MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Forrest. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

At 9:41 p.m., Councilor Czernicki moved "**TO ADJOURN TO THE BUDGET WORKSHOP SESSION ON APRIL 29, 2004 AT 5:30 P.M. IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM OF THE TOWN HALL**" seconded by Montinieri. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson, voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores Sassano  
Town Clerk