

**REGULAR MEETING
PUBLIC HEARING ON BUDGET
APRIL 15, 2013**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a regular meeting for the Public Hearing on the Town Budget, on Monday, April 15th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Hurley, Kotkin, Manousos, McAlister, Montinieri, Deputy Mayor Console, and Chairperson Hemmann. **Absent:** Councilor Drake and Roberts.

Present from the Board of Education: Member Charles Carey, Gina DeAngelo, Tracey McDougall, Polly Moon, Elaine Steinmiller-Paradise, Martin Walsh. **Absent:** Chairperson Cascio, Vice-Chair Janis Malec, and Tristan Stanziale.

Also present: Superintendent Michael Emmett, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Human Resources Tim Howes, Director of Special Education Emily Daigle, Director of Curriculum and Instruction Sally Dastoli, Director of Technology Keith Rafaniello, Director, Maintenance & Operations Fred Bushey and Wethersfield High School Principal Tom Moore.

Town Finance Director Sue Smith, Town Engineer Mike Turner, Director of Social & Youth Services Dr. Nancy Stilwell, Department of Data Processing Paul Dudley, Assistant Town Manager RaeAnn Palmer, Town Manager Jeff Bridges and Town Clerk Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Donna Hemmann asked for a moment of silence for the family member who perished in the house fire last evening and for those who perished in the explosions in Boston. Mayor Hemmann stated that our thoughts and prayers are with the families.

Mayor Hemmann welcomed everyone here tonight to the budget hearing. Mr. Martin Walsh, Board of Education, led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

OPENING REMARKS

Chairperson Hemmann called the meeting to order and introduced Michael Emmett, Superintendent of Schools.

PRESENTATION BY THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Michael Emmett, Superintendent of Schools, presented the Board of Education's budget presentation. (see Power Point attachment #1).

PRESENTATION BY THE TOWN MANAGER

Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, presented the Town's budget. (see Power Point attachment #2).

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dr. Sue Tenorio, 28 Lincoln Rd., commented in the 12 years in Wethersfield, she has witnessed a continuing decline in the amount of resources provided to Youth and Social Services staffing and supplies. At one time, Wethersfield's Department of Youth and Social Services was viewed as one of the flagship programs in this State. It provided social, emotional and economic needs and programs for our residents. Over the 13-year period Youth and Social Services staff has shrunk from 12 to its current 5 member staff. Proposed in the 2014 budget is to eliminate the full-time Clinical Coordinator position. It is proposed to combine half of the Clinical Coordinator's position with half of the Nature Center Director's position. The remaining half of the Clinical Coordinator position would then become a full-time position of Youth Services Manager, placed in the Parks & Recreation Department. In the most recent report submitted to the State Department of Education 2010, looking at only Grade 7-12, there were 23 students who dropped out of school, a total of 232 reported disciplinary incidents--approximately 45% of them were for what are called serious causes, including assault, drug abuse, fighting, personally threatening behavior. Wethersfield does not need to move away from a director service delivery model as proposed but rather, at minimum, Wethersfield needs to retain a full-time Mental Health Clinician in our Youth and Social Services Department—a professional who has a deep understanding of the needs and strengths of our community, who through consistent and continuous presence in the community can assist teachers as well as parents to recognize and deal with signs and symptoms of mental disorders as well as an elevated risk for these conditions. Dr. Tenorio does not want Wethersfield to be pennies wise and dollars foolish in our budget but make certain that our children and families have access to local, sustainable and early intervention mental health services.

Andrea Ginter, 19 Midwell Rd., commented that last year Wethersfield made great progress by voting in the High School renovation, it was a step in the right direction. Wethersfield cannot reverse that progress with cuts in programs and personnel. The proposed budget does not include beneficial enrichments programs like Rope and Math Olympiad. She stated that Wethersfield has a big success at the High School with the Jets team winning the big prize and all those students had the benefit of Math Olympiad enrichments programs. The elementary students now, for the most part, do not have that benefit. We have to enrich their lives and educational experiences early for them to reap the benefits later on. Class sizes are already too large. Elementary school teachers are responsible for meeting the educational needs of 25 students from remediation to enrichment for highly capable students. It's a very difficult job for one teacher to do on top of all the bureaucracy and red tape administration. We are in competition with neighboring Towns. Glastonbury hands out I-pads to every freshman that comes into high school. It's becoming an issue when people look to move into other Towns. We are indeed in competition with other Towns, offering a lot of perks and a lot of beneficial enrichment opportunities. She urged the Council to thoughtfully fund the education budget.

Lauren Barbara, 281 Dale Rd., said she is thankful for everybody who voted for the full-day kindergarten. She can see the results through her child who is reading and doing math at an

earlier age. While we are not getting I-pads for every student, we are lucky to have the Smart Boards in each of our classrooms. We still need more. Our PTO is very active in trying to provide us with as much as they can, we still need more. She asks that the Council pass what's been presented and if you have more, to give it.

Tony Martino, 374 Highland St., emphasized that we need to centralize functions to save money. That is the only way we are going to get ahead. The Director of Security position is not needed given the requirements of this Director of Security. The residential security check that they are looking for should be given to one of our Police Lieutenants and/or Sergeants and let them oversee the needs, not only for the school but also for the Town facilities. He can make sure police staff is properly trained to rectify any breaches of security. As far as the residency person, if Mr. Emmett needs more help, he suggests another temporary person to help rectify that problem. Getting the ineligible kids out of the system will save us some money, keep our classes smaller and also reduce our teacher costs. The Town and the Board each have separate firms to oversee legal matters and labor matters. In January 2014, the Town will again be going out to hire a new Town attorney. Mr. Martino stated that with any RFQ requirements the firm needs to handle, not just the normal civil liability matters, he would add labor and pension issues. He suggests having that firm also handle the Board's legal issues as well as the Town and put all the money through our finance system. Munis will track Board and Town expenses separately. You will know where the money is going, by having one firm do it for both sides, you've increased their workload, decreased the law firm's administrative expenses which will probably get us a cheaper per hour rate. He suggests combining all legal expenses next year for the Board and Town. He is happy to see in the Superintendent's budget that he wants to hire a Curriculum Supervisor for math; thinks it's great to bring back a Curriculum Supervisor and they should bring one back for all the subjects over time. Also he suggests combining the Town and the Board maintenance staff. Under the direction of our Physical Services Director, by combining staff, our trade staff can do more working together and can probably cut the need to hire outside contractors to do some of our capital projects at a cheaper rate. He suggested the same for the custodians and suggested they can also help clear snow around the schools which would free up other staff to work on other things.

Bob Woodward, 456 Middletown Ave. commented that he is concerned about the increase. He is retired and the only increase that he will see this year is social security which increased 1.7% as of January. That was a very small increase. With what the taxes will do if it goes up by 2.69%, plus what some in Washington seem to want to do with Social Security, he is wondering what his social security is going to be worth in the long-run. He knows that we have needs in the Town, but has looked in the paper at other Towns and sees no or lower increases as well as a Board of Education that came in flat. He asks if there is any way, and understands the needs from the Board of Education people, to drop this increase, and while he speaks personally, he suspects that there are others who saw this increase and wonder, what is this going to do to my social security not only this year but also in the long-run.

Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St., has spent her whole life advocating for children, working with protective services and some extremely disturbed and dysfunctional children. She currently has

the privilege of serving as the Chair of the Youth Service Advisory Board. The Youth Service Bureau in her opinion provides a very important preventive service and explained that they do lots of treating and other things in government. She commented that we do no prevention work. Youth Services in her opinion is the core prevention work in this Town. Youth Services works with the Police, the schools and informally manages to keep kids out of trouble. Over the past five years, the budget has dropped almost \$340,000. The decrease this year which is essentially one position is \$71,295 and stated that is .13% of the school budget, 1% of the Police Budget, and .078% of the Town revenue. Can't we find that \$71,000 somewhere else so we can keep our Clinical Coordinator? Do we really need to spend \$90,000 on tennis courts? Do you think tennis courts would have made a difference in Newtown, or in the life of a child who is struggling with emotional problems? She is sure people like to play tennis but children are more important than tennis. She questioned the façade program for \$50,000. It is a matter of priorities. Ms. Ruhe came this evening to speak on this because our kids are our future. We are spending \$53,000,000 to educate them and we can't spend \$71,000 to have a Clinical Coordinator? Ms. Ruhe explained that it's cheaper to have a Clinical Coordinator than to have 2, 3 or 4 kids from Wethersfield going to residential treatment which costs anywhere from \$300 or \$400 a day to a \$1,000 a day and we get to pick up the educational component. Doesn't it make more sense to do prevention work? She asked Council to look long and hard to find that \$71,000. If we brought all the kids in and you can see what a difference was made by the nominal staff and the nominal programs, you would be amazed. Kids have come through those programs that were really troubled and gone on to school, gone on to higher education. We do an awful lot with very little. The Youth Employment Program we had the courage to fund when some of the grants ran out, because we could with less bureaucracy. She urged Council to restore that money or don't bother calling these services anymore because we don't have any services.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Cir., has reviewed the budget to a degree and wanted to comment on two things, the Manager's Report and the Capitol Improvement budget. Mr. Ruhe commented that a number of other people have addressed the weight of taxation; the 2.69% in the Town's side seems like a reasonable number to him, but he doesn't know. Ultimately, he has come to the conclusion that there is room in the budget. The grand list improving by 3/10 percent, touted as a benefit, but it is miniscule, it's zero. Regarding the fire engines, things appear to be moving in the direction of trying to avoid referenda where the townspeople will have a say in how much money the Town is spending. The taxpayers association forced the Town to have a referendum on lights for the football field, and it seems to him, if that's the case, if that's what you are doing, he thinks they should stop it. Don't do it and figure out a better way to do it. Under Pension regarding new police officers and the defined pensions, he senses recognition of pension problems and commented it is good they are hearing there are pension problems. On the drainage projects, he questioned how 10 projects out of 17 come in at \$25,000. Mr. Ruhe thinks Council should be working to keep the taxes sustainable; them to go after the money and urged them to look at the Board of Education budget really hard.

George Bashura, 120 Mohawk Ln. thanked the Mayor and Town Manager for putting together the vigil for the Newtown folks and thanked people for coming out. We have to look to the youth in our Town. We need to focus on the kids that don't participate in the sports and need

some type of structure, some leadership, and some guidance. Those are the ones that are going to fall behind. We take care of our kids that fall behind in school; we need to take care of our youth in Town. If you were to take away one police car and one police SUV that is about \$71,000 right there. We need to focus on our kids or these kids are going to get left behind. He commented on the lack of economic development in this Town and stated that recently we've had a little spurt of small business which is good for our strip-mall Town and he commented on the eyesore that is right down the street on the Silas Deane Highway that sits vacant. We have land and a building that can be used to put something in that place. He stated if we are going to increase our budgets across the Town and the Board of Education, we need to do something with development to help raise our tax dollars and take the burden off of the general public. Other Town's Board of Education budgets are getting by and are not increasing as much as ours. Fifty-seven percent of the budgets go to the Board of Education to keep the kids in school, let's keep it going, but we have to figure out a way to reduce the cost. No one has come to him for suggestions but that he has a list of names of other Towns; there two-page report cards--what happened to front and back being used; repeated costs, colored paper, , different things that come out of the school system, the multiple packets that get sent home for Kindergarten. All cost the Town money --we need to look at to where we can cut these costs.

Pam Harrison, 21 Wilcox St., commented in support of the mental health services available to Wethersfield children and their families. In light of the tragic events in Newtown it would be a huge step backwards by cutting mental health services to Wethersfield residents. We have two skilled counselors' currently on staff with Social and Youth Services: they provide individual family and crisis treatment to many families; they work collaboratively and proactively with the school district and are able to do it on a sliding scale so that all families can access the support that they need. Moving towards a more programmed based way of providing services minimizes the needs for direct individualized services that meet the needs of this diverse population. The Town greatly benefits from both, the services provided by Social and Youth Services as well as the Nature Center; the mental health and wellness needs of our residents cannot be overlooked or minimized. Cutting a position in Social and Youth Services would be a huge mistake and would impact many residents and their mental health needs.

David Caruk, 149 Broad St., spoke against the Youth & Social Services Department cuts and stated that the department has shrunk from a staff of 12 to a staff of 5. This organization is designed to help youth with behavioral, emotional, mental health issues and they have a full-time Clinician that you want to parcel out to private contractors. Mr. Caruk said doing that you are taking away someone who is familiar with our Town, our students, and our youth. It is a bad idea. This is not an area to make cutbacks because these youths are at the bottom and we want to bring them up and we are not going to bring them up by cutting the services.

Ryan Allard, 75 Somerset St., is an engineer in Rocky Hill. Following an accident on 91 over Old Main St. there are some barriers set up to protect from a waterway underneath there. He questioned the barriers in place for the temporary traffic situation. Also he commented about paper costs and stated they are going to start seeing a generation of parents that don't really care about paper or mail. He uses a cell phone. We are getting to the point where the Board of

Education should just email report cards, we'll get them faster. As for I-pads for kids, parents can afford to buy our own I-pad get a non-data I-pad so that they can bring it to school. He walked to this meeting and suggested an inventory of our handicapped accessibility is needed. There were two-inch lips at Silas Deane Middle School; there are two-inch lips to walk up onto to the curb which, in a situation of a handicapped child could be a problem. Also, there are very sub standard crosswalks as far as the handicapped ramps. One specifically is at Wells Rd. 175 and 99. There is a need for something that we can improve so they do not have to be in the road.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., said over recent weeks the newspaper showed downward pressure on the sale of our homes. We have unemployed, underemployed and never employed people in our Town, yet we constantly see our increases coming from our Town Council and our Board of Education. Citizens are getting squeezed all different ways. We are looking at this 2.69% tax increase which doesn't sound like a big number. There are no jobs here to begin with because the Town Council and State of Connecticut have chased companies out of here. The Town Manager wants to buy police cars, dump trucks, a fire truck and all of this is going to be financed. What happened to the right to referendum? This fire engine costs \$800,000. How can you think you can avoid not putting that out to referendum? He thinks citizens should have the right. It's an \$800,000 piece of equipment, over the \$200,000 threshold; it should go out and urges the Council to put it to referendum. About the funding for the OPEB Trust, questioned if the \$200,000 this year, \$400,000 the next year, \$800,000 the next is a correct understanding. Mr. Young noted the absence of the Housing Authority budget.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Ave. asked who represents the taxpayer because it is not the Town council. It's time we start running the Town and the Board of Education as a private company and see where there are efficiencies. The mill rate is up all the time except when we have the reassessment. The reassessment goes up; we still need money so the mill rate has to come down. How much higher is the mill rate going to go? How much can we afford? How far are these increases going to go. Also, the Town should check which stop signs are really needed before spending money to replace them.

Joel Wagner, 203 Clearfield Rd. said the children are our future. The increases in the budget are a concern. He knows everybody needs to get raises and realizes a lot the raises are less than the budget increases. Mr. Wagner commented the tax on his home doesn't equal or cover the per student cost stated at a previous meeting. He and his wife plan to stay in Town to support the school system. He also feels some electronic media in the school is merely a distraction to the students. He thinks electronic media leads to adults with limited attention spans; they have trouble maintaining a consistent long-term approach to working on a given task. The electronic media creates people that want immediate gratification and spending months on working on the same thing would really trouble them. As we are talking tonight, people aren't paying attention to what's being said at these meetings. Putting technology in the schools just extenuates that. His counsel is to put money in great teachers as the bottom line. If students succeed it will be the teachers that make the difference. He also commented in favor of funding the child services.

Martha Mayer, 133 Griswold Rd. commented in support of the proposed Library budget and that the Library is one of the big successes in this Town. Thousands of people have gone through the Wethersfield Library, many from other Towns and when they are here, they visit other businesses as well which is also good for the Town. The Library is an excellent resource for our Town. Ms. Mayer explained their budget last year was less than 2% of the Town's budget and that they are asking a little bit more this year. The Town would do well to invest in the Library.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., there is \$25,000 for stop signs and urged the Council to cut that back. The citizens are constantly taxed and taxed. He asked on the Smarter Balance testing whether this testing would help out the test scores or if the scores would be any better with the Smarter Balance testing? In the school budget he thinks the joint Shared Services should be combining Accounting and Purchasing into one group and finding ways of being efficient, something the Town has never addressed. Hiring of additional people in the budget for the Board of Education is questionable when we have a naturally shrinking population in our school system along with magnet schools taking students away as well. He spoke about binding arbitration being an albatross around our necks.

George Bashura, 120 Mohawk Ln. summarized what he heard tonight. Accountability has to come from the Town Council and Town Manager's office. Why are we having cuts to the Social Services area? Those are the areas that we need to keep funding. If we leave our kids behind the Town is going to go to hell; we need to be held more accountable for what's going on in this Town, when we do, we will find our balance.

David Caruk, 149 Broad St., agreed that if you leave the most vulnerable behind, then your Town goes downhill. Mr. Caruk commented against the Social and Youth Services cuts and stated that replacing this full-time clinical worker with private part-time contractors is a bad move and the economic benefits will not outweigh the benefits to the youth.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Cir, suggested the way to solve a problem in government is not to just throw more money at it and urged the council to do things better and smarter.

Barbara Ruhe, 79 Main St., shared a poem.

It Bids Pretty Fair by Robert Frost
The play seems out for an almost infinite run.
Don't mind a little thing like the actors fighting.
The only thing I worry about is the sun.
We'll be all right if nothing goes wrong with the lighting.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:05 p.m., Councilor Kotkin moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Hurley. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 7-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by Vote of Council
May 20, 2013