

# **SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA**

## **TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL HICKS MEMORIAL MUNICIPAL CENTER 6<sup>th</sup> FLOOR COUNCIL ROOM MARCH 26, 2019 – 6:00 P.M.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** William Eccles, Chair; David Skoczulek, Vice-Chair; Brenda Falusi; Tammy Nuccio; John Reagan; Paul Reynolds and Christine Vincent

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Steven Werbner, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records; Walter Willett, Superintendent

1. **Call to Order:** William Eccles called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** Recited.
3. **Moment of Silence:** None.
4. **Public Participation (2 minute limit)**

**Colleen Yudichak of 12 Blueberry Hill Road (Chair of the BOE):** The BOE just finished a BOE special meeting. They came up with a compromise that she read into the record.

*The items above (course reimbursement degree, athletic officials, postage/advertising printing, tuition and textbooks) can be supported by the Board of Education, recognizing the difficult circumstance Tolland faces.*

*Reducing the Board of Education's budget by \$968,000 is unprecedented. However, in the spirit of finding a balance, the Board worked under a short time frame to reach a position of compromise, which would equate to a 1.8% increase, representing an increase from the 2018-2019 budget of \$715,499.*

*Going beyond these reductions would require profound and long-lasting reductions in the quality of education for our town. We believe that this will be an investment in our children's future.*

**Kate Vallo of 80 Tolland Green:** Please support the compromise a proposed by the BOE.

**Fisher Thompson of 533 Buff Cap Road (Student Rep to BOE):** He has dedicated his time to civil service of his constituency, the students of the school district. This BOE has been very receptive to everything he has had to say, because they care. As a student, he senses that is what is lacking from the budgetary decision is care. Care for a quality education and care for a bright and beautiful future for the students, the children and the young adults of this town, not numbers on a page. He fully supports adding funding back to the BOE, specifically the 1.8% proposed by the BOE.

**Drew Doyle of 8 Lakeview Drive Ext:** He is a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at TMS. His opinion is that the funds should not be cut. The elementary classes are already too big, and the teachers are not able to help the children that need help. Already in his school, students are not able to print important assignments in school if they are unable to print them at home. They need to ask friends to print them for them.

**Rebecca Risley of 103 Mountain Spring Road:** She did send an e-mail, but she reiterated some points here. If they do continue to chip away at the school system year after year, it's indirect counter to the long term planning that this Board has been working on. If they keep chipping away, they will not be able to dig themselves out of the hole and maintain the thriving robust schools system. There are many cuts that simply cannot happen to our schools. Raising class size is a negative impact. They do need a curriculum director. Preventative measures are always the most logical and cost effective way to treat a problem, rather than the price of treating a serious problem once it get further down the road. So, with those SRBI/RTI staff, it cuts out the early intervention that helps our students. She urges them to put forth the 1.8%.

**Katherine Hendrickson of 192 Goose Lane:** She asks that they put forward the BOE's budget as originally proposed. The RTI and early intervention services are important. It is like preventative medicine, in terms of the long-term costs to those children, our society and our town. Please incorporate the BOE's request. Don't cut it ahead of time, because you are afraid people won't vote for it.

**Liz Costa of 54 Josiah Lane:** She supports the BOE's budget that they worked on together in the last hour. However, she actually also supports their original budget. Allow the original budget to go to referendum.

**Shay Belair of 185 Kozley Road:** She is a teacher in the district, and also a parent of two children in the district. She supports everything that that BOE has done, and their due diligence. She fully supports what they just put together.

**Mike Thompson of 533 Buff Cap Road:** He supports the budget. They deserve the 1.8%. We need it. Please support it.

**Sam Adlerstein of 164 Pine Hill Road (BOE member):** He supports the 1.8% that they just came up. He believes it finds the balance. He asked that they support it. If they do choose to reduce the budget, lower than what the BOE just came up with, he is comfortable saying that they will not have the school district that they have had in the past. This could have a multi-year effect. He said he felt rushed in what they just did. He suggested that if they are feeling rushed and not ready, maybe they could delay this decision tonight. He would be willing to meet with them to review the BOE budget and justify it.

**George Eldridge of Fish & Game Road:** He doesn't feel he is getting a true story as to what is happening with our schools, or what is happening with the new school. He doesn't understand how we've lost 700 students, and they think they need another new school. If you want the tax payers to get behind you, you have to be more transparent.

**Karen Moran of 50 Merlot Way (Vice-Chair of BOE):** Regarding teacher contracts: the teachers across the board are not getting the 3%+ increase. They work on a step program. The majority is not getting that increase. It is explained in the contracts. If we go deeper reductions than 1.8%, we will not be servicing kids that need to be serviced early on in their education.

**Amanda Doyle of 8 Lakeview Drive Ext:** It is important to support the BOE budget for preventative measures. We don't want schools that are just good enough.

**Andrew Bush of 20 Forest Lane:** He asks that they support the schools to the maximum extent as possible. He would be happy to pay for more than 1.8%. Strong schools are one thing that draws people to this town, and keeps them here.

**Adam Bender of 103 Goose Lane:** As an educator, a parent and someone who moved to this town for the schools, he thinks it is dangerous to cut even below inflation. People are not coming here for low taxes; they are coming here for the schools. We need strong schools, and it's important to support that.

**Christina Plourd of 101 Metcalf Road (BOE member):** She abstained from voting on the 1.8% that was just presented to the Council. From her personal calculations, she came up with a 1.2% increase. She appreciates anything they can do. She realizes times are hard, and taxes are high.

**Ben Stanford of 39 Elna Drive:** The Council and BOE have a thankless job. He knows, he used to have it. He thanked them for their time and commitment. It is in your hands. You were elected to lead the town and make decisions that are best for our town.

## **5. Consideration of the Town Council's Proposed FY 2019-2020 Budget**

Mr. Eccles began by saying they were at a 5%+ increase. That is not something he could send to a referendum, although he couldn't send a 0% either. He would like the schools to have everything they want and/or need, but putting out a 5%+ increase it signals that the leadership of the town has an appetite for an unpredictable tax climate. If you are looking for businesses to move into the town, that is not a way to do it. We have to remain stable; we have to stay the course. Wild fluctuations in our taxes are not the way to accomplish that. In his opinion, staying the course means not going over 3%. He realizes that means cuts to the town and BOE's budgets, and requires more use of the fund balance. The business climate in this state; and in this town especially, has been very difficult. Doing anything that says we are going to raise taxes above 5% is difficult for a business to see, and want to come to this town for. Predictability is the key for him, and predictability is under 3% in his opinion. He is willing to have his mind changed in this discussion.

John Reagan said he thinks the troubles they are facing now will double next year, and the year after. He thinks they need to start holding back with this budget. He is willing to go to 3%. We don't have the resources to support the BOE's budget. He has heard from many other residents who agree that they can't support 5%+. He supports a budget under 3%.

Brenda Falusi started off by reviewing some numbers regarding housing in Tolland that were provided by a consultant to the PZC for the POCD. If we want to have families here, we need to support the school system. We need to keep the investments sound. A lot of people move to the town for the schools. She spoke of a 504 meeting that she attended at the school this a.m. for her own daughter, and the services used by her kids at the schools. We do know that the impact of this increase is a lot, but we can't keep kicking this down the road. She supports sending the original budget to the voters for them to make a choice. It impacts everyone differently. She reminded that more than half of this tax increase was driven by the state, which is punishing the town. If the residents want to make a difference, they need to push back at the state level.

Christine Vincent she thanked everyone who wrote compelling e-mails on both sides, pro and con. Her question is “how do we create a culture of stability in our town, in a climate of continued fiscal instability?” She doesn’t have an answer to that question. She wishes she could support the schools 100%, but she is trying to look at the best interests of everyone in town. She agrees with Mr. Eccles on his point about being a business owner and coming into this town with a 5%+ increase. What is going to happen next year and the year after? She will support 3%.

Paul Reynolds said we are in difficult times with things above our control. They are sitting here with a 2% tax increase through no fault of their own. As a Town Council, they need to look forward and create some stability in terms of how they manage the town. They know that things are going to get worse. The education cuts are going to go down, the teachers pensions are going to go up. They have the needs of the schools, bonding, fire stations, fire trucks, etc. that need to be looked at beyond the BOE. They need to consider the town as a whole. He is in the 2.5% - 3% range. We need to make this town look more attractive, and tax increases is not going to do it. We need to start making tough decisions now.

Mr. Eccles said this is more than just a one year view. It is long term. He spoke of the school bond and the Vernon water treatment plant upgrade that will be coming up. He does believe that the SRBI/RTI is a good investment, and he would like to find a way to maintain that investment.

Mr. Reagan reminded that there is a lot of information on-line. He encourages the residents to look at it. He commented that he has kids in school too, and wants to support them, but if we continue to add to the mill rate, it will just get worse and worse.

Tammy Nuccio said this is a tough budget year, and it is not going to get better. She commented that she looks at every number. A lot of people want to stay in Tolland, people with kids, people without kids, and retirees. They need to try to balance. Just because they don’t agree on the original number, doesn’t mean they don’t agree with what one side has to say over the other. They need to look at everyone in town. She does support SRBI, and spoke about it. She will not support a budget higher than 3%. It is sustainability that they need to think about. Next year, Tolland will lose even more. They cannot responsibly look at one year, and say we just need to get through this year. It has got to be long-term planning. This is not an easy decision. It is not something that any of them are sitting here flippantly and arbitrarily pulling out of the sky.

David Skoczulek commented on the number e-mails, texts and phone calls that have been received and read. He said none of this has been taken lightly. This is hard. He will have kids in the system soon, but he wants to be as bi-partisan as possible, and as independent as possible. He will support 3.25 – 3.5%. He appreciates all the work that has been done.

Mr. Eccles said the BOE has done an admirable job. He appreciates that the BOE met at 5:00 today, and worked their way through a revised budget. It doesn’t sound like the Council is going to meet them all the way, but he appreciates that they did give it a try.

Ms. Falusi said she is really disappointed that a vote is going to be made without knowing the impact to all the schools. A number has been picked, and they haven’t had a chance to find out what the impact will be to the BOE. To make this vote is irresponsible to her.

The BOE members offered to continue to go over things with the Council. Mr. Reynolds said they are working on a tight schedule. They have had meetings along the way. He thinks the BOE has realized that people on the Council were looking for more in terms of a lower increase, and now at the meeting they are getting something to discuss. He thinks that he is in a position to

make a decision tonight. Reagan, Nuccio, Vincent, Skoczulek and Eccles agreed to move forward.

**6. Approval of Budget Resolution**

Paul Reynolds motioned to accept the following resolution:

**WHEREAS**, the Town Council has reviewed the Town Manager’s proposed budget and has made certain modifications to estimated revenues and expenditures, the details of which will be properly incorporated into the total budgetary document by the Town Manager and Director of Finance and Records;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, by the Tolland Town Council that it hereby adopts a FY 2019-20 Town Operating and Capital Budget in the amount of \$56,652,646 to be appropriated as follows:

CATEGORY	AMOUNT
Town Government	\$12,126,082
Board of Education	\$39,855,516
Debt Service	\$ 4,550,000
Capital	\$ 121,048
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$56,652,646</b>

Said appropriations shall require an increase of .96 mills for a mill rate of 35.96.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Town Manager, pursuant to the requirements of the Town Charter, is authorized to advertise this budgetary outlay as part of the April 22, 2019, Annual Budget Presentation Meeting in the Library Program Room at 7:00 p.m.

Seconded by Tammy Nuccio.

Further discussion occurred on the numbers, taking into account the BOE’s most recent compromise of 1.8%. Mr. Werbner said the BOE’s 1.8% request would be a 3.86% tax increase, 1.35 mill increase. Some Council members thought that was still too high. Mr. Werbner reviewed the different scenarios. The Council members each reiterated where they stood with regard to the percentage of an increase. (Nuccio: 3%, Reagan 3%, Falusi 3.86%, Vincent 3%, Reynolds 2.9%, Eccles 3% and Skoczulek abstained.)

It was suggested that monies be added in to change it to a 3% increase. Agenda items 6 and 7 would be tabled until the next meeting, which was commencing immediately following this meeting. It was determined that Mr. Werbner and staff would allocate all additional monies to the BOE, and recalculate the new numbers in between meetings.

**Paul Reynolds withdrew his motion.**

**Paul Reynolds motioned to table agenda item number 6 until the meeting immediately following this meeting; Seconded by Christine Vincent. All were in favor. None opposed. Brenda Falusi abstained.**

7. **Approval of a resolution authorizing the form of the ballot for the May 7, 2019 budget referendum and any subsequent budget referendum; the time and place for the budget referendum; authorizing the Town Manager or his designee to place the required legal notices in the local newspapers; and authorizing the preparation and printing of an explanatory text and the mailing of same to local residents and in addition sent out via the Town's Tolland Notification system and included with absentee ballots in accordance with the provisions of CT General Statutes 9-369b explaining the budget referendum question.**

**Paul Reynolds motioned to table agenda item number 7 until the meeting immediately following this meeting; Seconded by Tammy Nuccio. All were in favor. None opposed. Brenda Falusi abstained.**

8. **Adjournment:** David Skoczulek moved to adjourn the meeting; Seconded by Tammy Nuccio at 6:58 p.m. All were in favor.

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William N. Eccles  
Town Council Chair

**Michelle A. Finnegan  
Town Council Clerk**