

## ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION MEETING MINUTES

### TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL ZOOM REMOTE MEETING April 19, 2021 – 7:00 P.M.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tammy Nuccio, Chair; Steve Jones, Vice Chair; Lou Luba, John Reagan, Kurt Schenher

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Brenda Falusi

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michael Rosen, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records/Treasurer; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; Bev Bellody, Director, Human Services; John Littell, Fire Chief/Director of Public Safety

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Nuccio called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance** - recited

3. **Moment of Silence** - observed

4. **Annual Budget Presentation**

4.1 Pursuant to C9-9 of the Town of Tolland Charter, the Town Council shall arrange for an annual budget presentation. The annual budget presentation is intended to provide information and encourage public discussion.

Ms. Nuccio reviewed the following:

Town of Tolland 2021-2022 Annual Budget Presentation

- Budget Goals
- Meet Community Needs
- Town Services
- Approved Fiscal Year 21-22 Budget (Expense Review)
- General Fund Information
- General Unassigned Fund Usage
- Debt Plan
- Stay the Course
- Beyond the Budget

5. **Public Participation**

Katie Murray, 8 Lisa Lane, commented that she is looking for some top line points on why the budget should be supported. *Ms. Nuccio responded that the budget addresses the community's needs, it maintains the needs of the Board of Education's adopted budget, it takes into account money that is left at the end of this year to help reduce the expenses for next year, and it does not cut any services.* Ms. Murray asked who assessed the needs of the community that the budget meets. *Ms. Nuccio responded that it would have been the Board of Education that put forward its budget, the Town Manager who put forth his budget, and the Town Council that reviewed both.* Ms. Murray asked to see a copy of the community needs assessment. *Ms. Nuccio responded that Ms. Murray can review the meetings and minutes to see what the Council did and the needs.* Ms. Murray explained that she is looking for a document that would be a needs assessment of the community. *Ms. Nuccio responded that this does not exist in a document form and noted that one would need review the meetings, discussions, and minutes.* Ms. Murray asked if the needs of the community are only assessed during Town Council meetings regarding the budget. *Ms. Nuccio responded that there were Board of Education meetings as well but they tend to do all of the business in public.* Ms. Murray commented that her point was that a volunteer group of Town Councilors for whom she has a lot of respect and gratitude, are able to evaluate the needs of a community of approximately 15,000 people in 15 or 20 meetings. *Ms. Nuccio responded that she believes they do a good job of this but is unsure if Ms. Murray is looking for something specific. She added that as far as she knows no one has ever created a document for how they do the budget and she is unsure of what is being asked.* Ms. Murray responded that she is questioning the statement that the budget addresses the community needs if the needs cannot be articulated. *Ms. Nuccio responded that if Ms. Murray would like they can have this conversation offline. She added that the Board of Education had community meetings and multiple meetings reviewing their budget*

and the Town Manager meets with his staff. All of this is presented to the Town Council which has the charter-driven responsibility to review the information and come up with the budget. This is what the Council did. Ms. Murray responded that she appreciates the offer of an offline meeting but respectfully declined as she wants the conversation to be in a public venue. She commented that she is questioning that the budget addresses the community needs. She asked what the needs are and if they are not articulated then how the Chair can claim to meet the needs of the community without knowing what they are. Ms. Nuccio responded that they are adding a grant position which facilitates community needs because it frees up the Human Resources Director and others so they can do more work for the community. They are also looking at the addition of speech and language supports, a part time teacher for English language learners, applied benefit analysis and intervention specialists, the continuation of a school counselor, a new social worker, the changing of an existing employee to chief personnel officer to assist the Superintendent, and an assistant to the latter position. Ms. Murray thanked Ms. Nuccio for reiterating this. She asked if there are needs in the community that are not met by this budget. Ms. Nuccio responded that there may be some individual needs but she believes overall the community needs are being met by the budget that has been put forth. She believes the budget as put forward by the Town Council meets the needs as expressed by the Board of Education, the Town Manager, and all of the other departments as they saw fit for consideration. The Town Council has met this with the budget it has put forward. Ms. Murray inquired about where the meeting is in regard to the agenda. Ms. Nuccio confirmed that the meeting is now under Public Participation. Ms. Murray asked about Ms. Nuccio's split role. She commented that the Legislature is in session, there is a vote taking place, Ms. Nuccio has not voted, and she is also chairing this Council meeting. She asked Ms. Nuccio how she could do both things and give the town the appropriate representation. Ms. Nuccio responded that this evening's meeting is a special meeting about the budget and not about her holding 2 offices. She added that at another time, if Ms. Murray would like to ask the question, they can sit down and discuss it and that it is no different than any other town with a split person on the town council and in the legislature. Ms. Nuccio added that the fact that it is targeted at her says more about what Ms. Murray is asking than her. She noted that she has not voted and will cast her vote after and that this is not relevant to the conversation about the budget. Ms. Murray commented that tonight's agenda says there is public participation and does not limit it to the budget. As an elector in the community, she welcomes the opportunity for public participation. Ms. Nuccio asked Mr. Rosen if it was correct that as a special meeting that public participation is limited to the items on the agenda. Mr. Rosen commented that it is a special meeting but public participation is just listed on the agenda. It is not a public hearing and the chair always has the right to hear from the public as it sees fit. The chair may choose to answer questions that are not budget related. Ms. Nuccio commented that she is keeping it to the budget. Ms. Murray asked about the bulk pickup portion of the budget. Ms. Nuccio explained that it takes place in the fall; it is the same as it has been for several years, and is still included. Ms. Murray asked if it was correct that there were more bulk pickups in the past. Ms. Nuccio responded that there have not been in the recent past. Ms. Murray asked if it is possible for residents to have bulk items picked up at times other than in October. Ms. Nuccio responded that one can call and request a pickup from Willimantic Waste for \$32. Ms. Murray asked about the conditions of the roads in town. Her road was resurfaced last year but in her neighborhood there are a number of roads that are in deteriorating condition. She asked if road repair is included in the budget. Ms. Nuccio responded that questions about the roads can be sent to the Town Manager who will forward them to the DPW. Ms. Murray asked if the budget addresses the maintenance of the roads so they do not have to pay more to resurface if roads are not properly maintained and if the budget addresses appropriate maintenance for all of the roads in town. Ms. Nuccio responded that it does. It is noted in the capital plan and online there is a plan for road resurfacing and a schedule. Ms. Murray asked about services for seniors and asked where she could find information on the services the budget covers for seniors. Ms. Nuccio responded that there is a section that can be reviewed in the budget. Ms. Murray asked if the only services for seniors are in regard to the senior center. Ms. Nuccio responded that the senior center coordinates the services or one can speak to Ms. Bellody in human relations. She asked if they were going to review every department. Ms. Murray commented that she appreciates the meeting and knows it is required by the Town Charter. One of the most beneficial parts is public input and she appreciates this opportunity. She added that since they were unable to articulate the needs of the community she has questions about some of the items that she thinks are needs for the community in regard to the budget. Mr. Luba made a point of order. He explained that even though this is a public hearing and Town Council meeting where the budget is being presented, generally there is a 2 minute limit on public participation and at this point they are well over this. He believes this is something that needs to be addressed. This is public participation and public participation is generally limited to 2 minutes. Ms. Murray commented that the agenda does not specify this – it only specifies that this is an opportunity for public input. Ms. Nuccio commented that the budget has been completed as has any opportunity for multiple public hearings to discuss what is or is not in the budget, or wanted to be in the budget. If the budget fails, there will be another opportunity to discuss what can or cannot be included. This is only a presentation of the budget as it is. Ms. Murray commented that this meeting is required by the Charter and she appreciates that the Council

members are willing to listen to public input at this time and thanks them for the opportunity. Ms. Murray commented that one item Dr. Willett talks about, that she as a parent finds important, is the social/emotional health of children and in the past year there have been increased concerns about the social/emotional health of the children. The original budget was unanimously approved by the Board of Education and rejected by the Council in its wisdom and while the budget does not directly cut anything, it tightens the belt of the Board of Education. She asked if the focus on social/emotional health of the children will receive the same level of focus as it would if the Council had, in its wisdom, accepted the original budget. *Ms. Nuccio responded that it expands the belt of their budget by 2% and it includes all of the positions that were requested with the numbers in the budget. Further, it includes all the programs that were requested based on the usage of the \$1M left at the end of this year to pre-purchase items. If there is a need that is not being met, Ms. Nuccio encouraged that it be brought to the Board of Education which has cognizance over how its budget is spent.* Ms. Murray asked how much of the budget is dedicated to pre-payments. *Ms. Nuccio responded that Ms. Murray can contact the Finance Department. The Council does not have purview over the day-to-day spending of either board. Ms. Nuccio encouraged Ms. Murray to send an e-mail to the Town Manager who can forward it to the Finance Department which can provide a list of what is being planned.* Ms. Murray asked, from a policy perspective, how the Council is planning for accounting for prepayment in future budgets. *Ms. Nuccio explained that the Council does not handle the day to day budget.* Ms. Murray explained that when items are prepaid, such as this year's budget prepaying for items for next year, this reduces the costs next year but eventually they will have a year they cannot prepay for items. From a policy perspective, how does the Council plan on handling the policy of prepayment and what will be done once it catches up. *Ms. Nuccio responded that it will be handled when it comes up but the intent is to prepay with money has already been taken from people from a tax perspective. When it catches up, it would become an item in the budget for consideration to be added back.*

Sophia Johnson, 48 Crystal Lake Road, commented on her appreciation for the astute management of the recent budget. She explained that when she came to town she went to the library and then the Town Manager's office to try to obtain a paper copy of the budget. She understood it was \$0.50 per page so she found a digital copy and reviewed it before the first budget hearings – budget workshops – where the budget is presented. She understands that it is the Council members' duty to review the budget and, in consideration of not overinflating expenditures or keeping things tight so residents do not have a high tax increase, adjustments are made that will not compromise services. Ms. Johnson commented that in regard to recovery after the winter and public works, the roads were immaculate and well done. The roads were salted and snow was removed quickly. She has been driving a lot in Tolland and does not recall encountering terrible roads. She is unsure if there is somewhere that people can e-mail about bad roads or if any grants were allocated from the state or through a community development type of organization that would allow for funds to fix a minimum amount of roads per year. Ms. Johnson commented that she has not encountered a bad road in Connecticut and the state seems to be on top of the infrastructure with regard to roads. She compared this to New York. She wants decent roads and snow removal and is pleased with where they are at. Further, hearing that they will not lose money that would compromise services has her rest assured that the needs will be met. She added that in terms of the budget process, the only thing done differently where she is from was that there were budget workshops where people could participate when each budget was presented. At the first workshop, Mr. Rosen went through the items line by line and people did not have an opportunity to scrutinize line by line unless they did so at the end and had jotted things down or gotten a copy of the budget. Ms. Johnson commented that without seeing an impact on quality of life, she would only be able to give her opinion next year after this fiscal budget ends with regard to what may have impacted her needs as a resident. She has one student in the schools and has questions but will ask those of the district. Ms. Johnson commented that she was unable to find the slides from the budget workshops and tried to find the budget presentation to review later. She added that she realizes that all of the Council meetings are televised. For those restricted by Zoom, she recommended that perhaps a blast be put on the town's Facebook page to let people know they can get access on YouTube and through the television so they can be engaged and review the budget before voting. She noted that Nassau County is one of the highest taxed counties in America and coming from a place where she was paying \$15K a year to a town just under \$7K a year, she understands that with the way board of education budgets work, especially in Nassau County, that the scrutinizing of the budget is important so they do not have an excess reserve and are using the money. Ms. Johnson commented that she is pleased and grateful for the direction things are going in and appreciates the scrutiny of the budget which shows that taxes are kept at a minimum. Where she came from they had 5 years of 0% tax increase and even seeing a 2% tax increase she is still happy.

Colleen Yudichak, 12 Blueberry Hill, thanked the departments, Councilors, and Board of Education for their hard work in putting together the budget. Since this part of the process is over, she asked how the Councilors will support the budget outside of the "Zoom Chamber". *Ms. Nuccio responded that she tries to put out as much information as she*

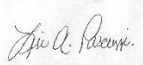
*can so people can make an educated decision on the budget. She believes it is up to each individual to make the decision based on their personal needs. If people have questions on how the budget arrived where it is, she will continue to answer questions.*

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, commented that she is concerned about the plethora of prepayments this year and last year. She asked that Ms. Nuccio or Ms. Hancock create a list of all of the prepayments that have been done at the town level and that Dr. Willett create a list of those at the Board of Education level. She believes the town needs to know this to create a FY22/23 budget that is representative of the needs. Ms. Costa asked to hear by Councilor if they will go out and support the budget. *Ms. Nuccio responded that this is not a meeting for all of the Councilors to speak and she would rather not do a round table. The meeting is only the Chair's presentation. As far as prepayments, she asked that Ms. Costa send an e-mail to Dr. Willett and Mr. Rosen and they will get the list for her.* Ms. Costa commented that Ms. Nuccio could ask Mr. Rosen. *Ms. Nuccio responded that she could but an e-mail sent to both parties would be easier and could include Dr. Willett.* Ms. Costa responded that she is asking Ms. Nuccio, as the Chair, to create a list as part of the budget process so people know what was prepaid. She added that she is asking in a public forum so the public can know. Just her receiving a list does not help the entire town. *Ms. Nuccio asked if she would like it presented in a meeting.* Ms. Costa responded that she would like what was prepaid to be included in the details of the budget. *Ms. Nuccio explained that the budget and budget books are complete – they cannot add to them and they do not yet have the entire list. It will depend on the money that is left and what items can be purchased. She added that the Board of Education reviewed this in its last meeting and it will be updated over the next couple of months. On the town side, it will be dependent on the money that it is not spent. There is not a stagnant list as of today. It will morph and change until the end of the fiscal year. She will speak with Mr. Rosen about gathering the information on the town side and the Board of Education will have meetings regarding its side.*

6. **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,



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Lisa Pascuzzi  
Town Council Clerk

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Town Council Chair