

**BUDGET MEETING MINUTES
TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID MEETING
6th FLOOR COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND ZOOM**

April 4, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.

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Katherine Stargardter

Members Present: Katherine Stargardter, Chair; Jacob Marie, Vice Chair; Jennifer Buckler, Chris Moran, Alexander Noonan, Joseph Sce, Colleen Yudichak

Members Absent: none.

Also Present: Brian Foley, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Mike Wilkinson, Director, Administrative Services (Zoom), Scott Lappen, Director, Public Works

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:02P.M.
2. Pledge of Allegiance - Recited
3. Moment of Silence - Observed
4. Consideration of the Town Council's Proposed FY 2024-2025 Budget
Ms. Stargardter commented that after hearing community input and reviewing the numbers, she would like to see the mill rate get to 3%.

Mr. Marie commented that he would like to see a spending increase of about 3%, not a mill rate increase of 3%. Ms. Hancock noted that this would be about a 4.14% spending increase overall. Ms. Stargardter commented that this is one way of calculation.

Mr. Moran commented that it is important to think about the mill rate while being mindful of the overall budget increase but the impact on taxpayers is what will be felt the most. He agrees with the 3% range. It would fund the town but not hurt people's wallets too much.

Mr. Sce agreed that the 3% ballpark seems like a good number. He reviewed the mill rate increases over the years and while they have varied, there have not been multiple years of 3-5% increases. The town does not have the appetite for it. If they go with a 3% increase, while close to 10% over three years seems like a lot, considering what needs to be funded, it seems like a reasonable number.

Ms. Buckler commented that it seems that the mill rate has been the concern and 3% is a good compromise. She wishes they could take everyone's situation into consideration but overall, 3% is a good area to land.

Ms. Yudichak agreed that after listening to everyone, 3% is a good number but she would not mind a number a little higher. She would like to hear what people would like to see in the budget before deciding.

Mr. Marie commented that he would like to see it a little lower than 3%. Historically, from a percentage standpoint, looking at the increases that have passed, the average has been lower, and he has concerns about the budget passing referendum and would not want to see a budget go out multiple times. He could support 3% but how they get there is important. He does not want to make a large withdrawal from the funds as this could put the town in a bad position in regard to its rating. The bond rating is being reviewed this year. Thus, he would like to see a town budget of \$14,114,908 with a reduction of \$50K and

add funding for a sergeant, \$5K for EMT stipends, \$500 for senior programming as well as a discussion about a public works laborer position. For the BOE, he would like to see a budget of \$44,320,148, a \$750K decrease from the Town Manager's proposed budget. There would be no change to Debt Service or Capital as proposed by the Town Manager. Mr. Marie would like to increase the use of the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund (MTSF) to \$178K, an increase of \$100K from what was proposed. This works out to a 3.3% tax increase.

Mr. Noonan commented that he would like to provide more support to the seniors and include something additional for public safety and EMS.

Mr. Moran asked Mr. Marie if his numbers included additional money for the Senior Center. Mr. Marie confirmed that he included \$500 for programming. He did not include funding for the part-time assistant position. Mr. Moran commented that he would like to consider additional funding for the position. The programs have grown exponentially over the last few years.

Ms. Yudichak noted that she requested numerous scenarios from Ms. Hancock and would not mind moving the \$650K to the debt side as proposed by the Town Manager. Ms. Yudichak explained that she asked Ms. Hancock for six scenarios. She highlighted 5.17% which includes using \$178K from the MTSF, an additional \$100K from fund balance, increasing the hours of a Senior Center employee (\$14,924), \$5K for ambulance stipends, and \$500 for programming at the Senior Center. The BOE budget would be reduced by \$250K.

Ms. Stargardter requested the following information: change in Town Government, \$14,139,832, 4.41%; BOE, \$44,821,148, 4.26%; debt service, \$5,376,489, 14.39%; capital improvement, \$397,395, 24.4%.

Ms. Stargardter asked for clarification on the use of fund balance. Ms. Yudichak explained that it was originally \$78K and she is speaking of increasing it by another \$100K. For all of the scenarios, she is speaking of using \$178K from the MTSF. Ms. Stargardter asked if this is without fund balance and just funds from the MTSF. Ms. Yudichak commented that they would use an additional \$100K from fund balance.

Mr. Moran called a point of information and asked if all of the Councilors received the options being discussed. Ms. Stargardter noted that when a request is made by a Councilor, the Council's Rules & Procedures require all Councilors to receive the information through the Chair and Vice Chair.

Ms. Stargardter asked the Town Manager to provide the information provided to Ms. Yudichak to all of the Councilors. Per Rules & Procedure, all e-mails from any Councilor should be copied to the Chair and Vice Chair as well as the replies. Mr. Foley noted that last year they provided different scenarios for Councilors but will provide the information.

The Council stood in recess as of 7:24PM.

The Council returned to session at 8:13PM.

Ms. Stargardter referred to the file received from Ms. Hancock. She noted that the numbers for the grand list for revenues are different than those on the spreadsheet shared with Councilors when the Town Manager's proposed budget was sent. She referenced page 66 of the Budget Book and the scenario Ms. Hancock e-mailed to the Council (file: 2025 Colleen 1 Reduce BOE 250K). When Ms. Stargardter plugs in the Town operating budget, BOE operating budget, debt service, and capital improvement, the total expenditure is \$64,734,864. The total revenue line is the same but there is a difference at the top of the page. Ms. Hancock explained that what is in the Budget Book would have been a 5.2% tax increase. They received better information from the Assessor due to the Board of Assessment Appeals having completed

its work. The numbers used in the Budget Book were on the higher side but with firmer numbers, there was a better impact on the mill rate than what was originally presented. With the new adjustments, the Town Manager's proposed tax increase is 5.04%. She was going to share this with the Council this evening and used this new basis for scenarios prepared for Ms. Yudichak and Mr. Marie.

The Council stood in recess as of 8:18PM.

The Council returned to session at 8:41PM.

Ms. Stargardter noted that since not everyone had the same information on the budget, she asked Ms. Hancock to review any changes applicable to the budget.

Ms. Hancock noted that caveat that she did not want to interrupt the Council's thought process this evening. When the Council wanted to run scenarios, she was going to explain the grand list calculation would change. She tried to put forward the best in all scenarios that would be discussed in the future and apologized for any confusion. Ms. Stargardter noted that rules and procedures are in place to allow for every Councilor to have the same information. Unfortunately, this did not happen. They need to get to a place where all Councilors have the same information, and it can be shared with the public.

Ms. Hancock referenced page 66 of the Budget Book. The net grand list number is \$1,193,011,629, the same starting point. There are two programs, the elderly program and Ordinance 60. Those numbers changed based on application information shared by the Assessor. The total is \$7,455,900. In the Budget Book, it was \$7,755,900. The number for New Construction remained the same at \$1,500,000. In the Budget Book, they estimated a \$140,000 reduction to the grand list for Crumbling Foundations, but they did not receive any requests, so it was reduced to \$0. In regard to Corrections and Assessment Appeals, in the Budget Book it was \$5,508,000. This included motor vehicle changes, but they broke out the changes for motor vehicles. In turn, Corrections and Assessment Appeals is now \$1,008,000. Of the \$5,508,000, \$4,000,000 has to do with motor vehicles. It was split so the motor vehicles now show under the respective tax calculation and the remainder stayed under real estate. The second to the last line on the page which was \$194,891,060 is now \$190,891,060, a reduction of \$4M. In turn, this will change revenue numbers based on the mill rates and the mill rate calculated for the different scenarios.

Ms. Hancock explained that the new subtotal for Net Taxable Grand List after adjustments, (originally \$1,181,107,729) is now \$1,186,047,729. Net Adjusted Collectible Grand List at 99.0% is \$1,174,187,252 (previously \$1,169,296,652).

Ms. Stargardter noted that this brings the Town Manager's proposed budget to 5.05%. Ms. Hancock noted that she calculated 5.04%.

Ms. Stargardter noted that ten additional files were shared with the Council this evening along with a detailed e-mail. Some Councilors had this information available when considering the budget but not all did. It is disappointing.

Mr. Moran asked when the numbers were available. Ms. Hancock responded that she had them on Tuesday.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the public did not have the information for the Public Hearing held on Tuesday. Ms. Hancock explained that during a budget process, councils deliberate based on what they would like for revenues and/or expenditures. Often, a mill rate is not calculated until the budget is completed albeit this town has shown a mill rate throughout the process; however, the mill rate may change after the budget is adopted if there is new revenue information. She had better information and did her best to do what would help the Council.

Ms. Stargardter commented that she is not comfortable setting a budget this evening. She spent a significant amount of time reviewing the numbers. They received a lot of public input, much of which is about the impact of a tax increase to the residents. Many times at the Public Hearing they heard concerns about a tax rate change. To know that the work the Councilors did in advance of the meeting was not on a level playing field is disingenuous. If she had different information and did not share it, others would likely share the same feeling. Additionally, she is uncomfortable that they will now discuss different numbers than those available at the public hearing. She is not comfortable with this in the legislative body of her town.

Ms. Stargardter asked Mr. Foley about the timeline in regard to the budget process.

Mr. Sce called a point of information and commented that he understands that the Chair is not comfortable, and asked what if the rest of the Council is comfortable. The numbers are budget numbers – the starting numbers and the ending numbers. None of them are exact and they can change. The revised revenue numbers are not significant. They can still move forward discussing expenses. They know revenue will change a little bit. He asked why they need to stop tonight.

Ms. Stargardter explained that she asked for the timeline.

Mr. Sce asked if the Chair is not comfortable, if the Council could still move forward. Ms. Stargardter noted that she is free to express her discomfort and has not made a motion to go in any direction. She only asked about the timeline. No other decisions have been made or proposed at this time. They are awaiting information about the timeline.

Mr. Noonan motioned to continue the meeting.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the meeting is ongoing. They are awaiting an answer to her question.

Mr. Moran called a point of information. He asked if, as far as they know, if only Mr. Marie and Ms. Yudichak received the information on Tuesday and not the town. Ms. Hancock noted that this is correct.

Mr. Sce called a point of information. He asked what the Council was waiting on.

Ms. Stargardter noted that they are waiting on the timeline she requested regarding the budget process.

Mr. Foley explained that the nuance is getting the absentee ballots printed in time. The information would be needed by the morning of April 11th. Thus, the Town Clerk would need the information no later than April 10th.

Ms. Stargardter motioned to hold a Special Meeting on Monday, April 8, 2024, to set the Town Council budget.

Mr. Moran seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Marie commented that given what Ms. Hancock stated it is a relatively modest change to the rate and not entirely out of the ordinary in terms of municipal budgeting and will put pressure on town staff. He would like to have a proposal that receives the majority of the votes this evening and is not in favor of holding a Special Meeting. Mr. Moran commented that he does not feel comfortable because they did not all have the same information. Amongst other things, what is most important to residents is the impact on their pockets. The public also did not have the same information. Ms. Buckler agreed with Mr. Moran. She commented that individuals are downplaying what happened – there is information that was provided on Tuesday to two Councilors but not to the Chair, other Councilors, or the public. No matter how small the impact, it is a transparency issue. As Councilors they all have the right to have the

information when it becomes available, and the public should have had it as well because it was available prior to the public hearing. They are being told that Ms. Hancock wanted to present the information to the Councilors but was told by the Town Manager not to give it to anyone who did not ask for it. Ms. Buckler commented that she is uncomfortable with this and moving forward without a chance to consider the information. This calls for a Special Meeting. Ms. Stargardter commented that without being transparent to the public and the entire Council, making a decision this evening is the wrong thing to do.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Buckler, Moran, Stargardter

Opposed: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Marie

Abstentions: none

Motion failed.

5. Approval of Budget Resolution

Ms. Stargardter motioned to pass the Town Manager's Budget as presented.

Ms. Buckler seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

The Chair called the roll.

The Chair was in question.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Buckler, Moran, Stargardter

Opposed: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Marie

Abstentions: none

Motion failed.

Ms. Stargardter motioned to pass the Town Manager's budget in terms of appropriations for Town Government, Board of Education, Debt Services, and General Fund for Capital less non-tax services using the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund of \$200,000 and the remainder from Unassigned Fund Balance to bring them to a mill rate of 3.0%.

Mr. Moran seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Noonan requested clarification of the motion. Ms. Stargardter reviewed the motion. Mr. Noonan asked if they would ask for specifics including the Senior Center and arbitrate for additional public safety such as a sergeant. Ms. Stargardter explained that the motion is to approve the Town Manager's budget for spending. Whatever is in that budget, in terms of these items is the motion. Mr. Marie confirmed that they would make up the difference with unassigned fund balance to reach a 3.0% mill rate increase. He asked Ms. Hancock for the amount. Ms. Hancock noted that she would need to run the scenario. It would likely be a significant change to unassigned fund balance. Ms. Stargardter noted that she cannot identify the number at this time due to the lack of transparency. Mr. Marie commented that he assumes that such a large withdrawal would not be advisable based upon the goal of maintaining a healthy fund balance. Ms. Hancock noted that this is correct. She would not advise this, but it is the Council's decision. Ms. Stargardter noted that prior to the change in the numbers, the unassigned fund balance was over 14.25%. The policy is to keep it between 10-15%. Mr. Moran asked if Ms. Hancock is not recommending it because she does not have all of the information. Ms. Hancock responded that if she knows what the Council would like to do, she can do the calculations. Her concern is the bond rating and believes it is important to keep the fund balance secure at this time. A significant amount of debt will be issued over

the next few years. It is imperative to keep the AAA bond rating, or they will spend over \$500K or so. Mr. Moran noted that he agrees with keeping the AAA bond rating but with the numbers, they would still be over 14%. Ms. Hancock responded that her concern is that if they dip into fund balance it will weaken the town's status with the rating agencies. This week, a rating agency came out with new criteria. Tolland has carried a AAA rating due to its strong fund balance, policies, and strong financial management. One of the rating agencies reached out to her yesterday and stated that they are changing their criteria, and that Tolland will be reviewed. One item they look at is the fund balance. Ms. Hancock is concerned that if they dip into the fund balance too drastically, they will lose the AAA rating under the new criteria. Mr. Moran asked if the new criteria is different than the 10-15%. Ms. Hancock explained that the town has an internal fund balance policy of 10-15%. An overall basis of 10-17% is usually an acceptable guideline; however, in a community such as Tolland they do not have a commercial base like other AAA communities. What has helped Tolland keep its AAA rating are its significant reserves. The new criteria have not been released but she spoke with the agency yesterday and shared an e-mail with the Council from the bond financial advisor that discusses this. Until the town gets through the new rating process, she is nervous about using any significant amount of fund balance because it could potentially impact the rating. If the rating is reduced, she believes the S&P rating will follow. Ms. Stargardter asked if a loss in services would impact the bond rating. Ms. Hancock responded that they have never discussed this. Ms. Stargardter asked if increasing home values impact the bond rating. Ms. Hancock responded that they do. Ms. Stargardter asked how closely the rating agencies hold the quality of education in a town as it relates to home price values. Ms. Hancock explained that they do not look at the quality of education. They look at the educational levels and education budgets. Ms. Stargardter asked if they would look at the fact that over the past ten years, they have increased the education budget by under 1.15% and are discussing major cuts this year. Ms. Hancock responded that as far as she knows, they do not look at this. Ms. Hancock offered to have the bond advisor join the meeting. Ms. Stargardter responded that this would be excellent if they could have the meeting at a time when all of the information was available to the Council, but they do not.

Ms. Buckler asked where the information is from regarding the change in the criteria for the bond rating. Ms. Hancock explained that she does not have it yet, but the rating agency wants to meet with her fairly soon to review the town information. There is a chance the town could be downgraded. Ms. Buckler asked where the information is from that the town could be downgraded. Ms. Hancock responded that it is from information she received through a discussion she had yesterday with the rating agency. The rating agency sent her an e-mail that stated that the criteria are changing, and the e-mail was only sent to those who could be affected. When she read it, she felt it was important to call them since the only way the town can go is down. When she spoke with the agency, the response was that she was right. The only way the town can go is down. Ms. Buckler confirmed that the e-mail only went to municipalities that could be affected. Ms. Hancock explained that the e-mail stated that Tolland was one of the communities identified as one that could have an adjustment based on the new criteria. The new criteria was not identified, but they want to have a meeting to review the fund balance and other items under the criteria to determine if the town will retain the AAA rating or be downgraded. Ms. Buckler asked if it could be an audit. Ms. Hancock explained that it would be a rating review, not necessarily an audit per se. Ms. Buckler commented that the agency could just be looking at the town. Ms. Hancock responded that they are looking at the town and a number of other communities which could potentially be downgraded. Her concern is that if they do anything drastic, it could impact their decision. This is her opinion, having worked with rating agencies. The Council can decide what it wants to do. Ms. Buckler explained that she is concerned they may be crying wolf. The town has had lower fund balances and maintained the AAA rating and currently there is no indication that the criteria is changing. Ms. Hancock explained that there is an indication that the criteria is changing but they have not yet told her what it is. Her understanding is

that the weight on the financial management may not be as strong as in the past and the fund balances are what has helped. She saw the financial advisor today and asked him to be available this evening in case the Council has any questions, and she can have him join the meeting. Ms. Buckler explained that her concern is that because there is nothing yet concrete, that this is merely Ms. Hancock's opinion. Ms. Hancock is just guessing, and they do not know if going forward there will be a drastic change. They do not want to go below the guidelines or get close to the bottom end, but she feels Ms. Hancock is trying to sway the Council by scaring them into thinking that they could lose the AAA rating. She cannot say how or why but not to do it. Ms. Hancock responded that she received a document from the financial advisor this evening that identifies information behind the reasoning of not using fund balance. Ms. Stargardter read the e-mail aloud. In the e-mail, it referenced a proposal to reduce the fund balance by approximately \$2.6M. Ms. Stargardter noted that the proposal on the floor does not reduce fund balance by more than \$2.6M. Ms. Hancock explained that she does not know the number until she calculates what the Council would like to do. Ms. Stargardter commented that Ms. Hancock is giving advice without knowing the actual numbers and this is troubling. Ms. Hancock explained that she would need to see the actual numbers. Her advice is to not devastate the fund balance. If the Council decides to use fund balance, that is its prerogative. Given the uncertainty of the new rating process, she cannot say what will happen. If the Council decides to use \$500K from fund balance and there is no impact, it is fantastic, but she cannot say what will happen. She would feel more comfortable if they could keep it stabilized but the Council is the policy maker. She is only stating how she feels.

Mr. Noonan commented that it sounds like if one knows a long winter is coming and does not know how it will be, he is not burning all his wood right now.

Mr. Sce asked if the bond rating drops due to taking money from the unassigned fund balance, how long it would take to recover. Ms. Hancock explained that it could take years. Mr. Sce confirmed that they would be jeopardizing the town's interest rate for the next several years on bonds that are issued. The \$500K savings could turn into a \$1M expense given the interest over 20 years.

Mr. Marie asked if they use a large withdrawal from fund balance etc. if they are creating a hole for next year. Ms. Hancock responded that they would. She added that the ECS money has been on hold but from today's meeting she understands that this will affect the FY205/26 budget. Ms. Stargardter called a point or order noting that this is a guess on financial information that is unknown. Mr. Marie commented that he is thinking of the future and with the rating agency coming there is uncertainty. The fund balance is high, but he does not want to take a chance in a critical year. If they want to explore using the fund balance, it is something they need to discuss.

Mr. Moran asked who received the information about the ratings agencies before this evening. Ms. Hancock responded that it went to Mr. Sce and the Town Manager. Mr. Moran explained that his frustration is that the ground is changing, and they are learning new information and considerations this evening. Time is spent considering the budget and it is frustrating to have new information now. They should have all had the same information going into tonight.

Ms. Stargardter referenced the e-mail from the financial advisor. She explained that the motion on the floor does not reduce the fund balance by more than \$2.6M. She asked if the same cautions apply when they do not meet the criteria. Ms. Hancock responded that they do because at this point, she is concerned, as is the financial advisor, that they need to be cautious with any significant change to fund balance. Ms. Stargardter asked why she is advising differently than the financial advisor. Ms. Hancock responded that she is not. He is on the same page. Ms. Stargardter noted that the financial advisor is concerned about reducing the fund balance by \$2.6M. Ms. Hancock noted a second e-mail from the financial advisor where he agreed in regard to being uncomfortable using any fund balance at this time. Ms. Stargardter expressed her substantial frustration that the information was not provided to everyone on Council until after the meeting started. It is disrespectful to the Council and the public. Ms. Hancock

read the e-mail aloud. Ms. Stargardter noted that within the e-mail the advisor states that a decrease of fund balance by \$2.6M would reduce the fund balance percent to about 12.9%. The motion is for a fund balance of over 14.25%. The policy is for between 10-15%. She asked what the year-to-year impact would be if the bond rating were to drop, which she does not wish to happen. Ms. Hancock referred to the analysis and stated that it is over \$500K. Ms. Stargardter commented that the year-to-year impact of \$500K amortized over 20 years is approximately \$25K/year. Use of fund balance, taxpayers funds, to pass a level service budget on the town side and a budget with service reductions the BOE is willing to accept, knowing there are a number of revenue sources about to come on the books, including the cannabis shop that provides a 3% sales tax to the town, a new apartment complex along with property taxes on vehicles and personal property, at least one new business, and the opportunity to talk about stabilizing the BOE budget to continue to provide the services new homeowners are looking for and support the value of homes is not anywhere close to the percentage the financial advisor is warning about. It seems like the right thing to do.

Ms. Yudichak confirmed that the financial advisor could join the meeting to address questions.

Mr. Moran commented that the only department making any cuts is the BOE. The town is always in the lowest quartile of per pupil spending and is lagging behind in terms of numbers. He expressed frustration that any further cuts to the BOE would be in addition to those already made. The BOE budget was voted on and then supported in a bipartisan fashion. The BOE is not at a level services budget and cutting more is concerning.

Mr. Noonan asked Mr. Moran to elaborate. Mr. Moran explained that in the Town Manager's budget, there are no additions or reductions in services on the town side but there are reductions to the BOE side. The Council would not be making the first pass of cuts to the BOE budget. In the BOE budget the Council is looking at there are five position reductions and nineteen program reductions. Anything more would be deeper cuts and shortsighted for the town. If they continue down this road, it will be too late to reverse course. It will impact property values and is not good for students. While it is important to maintain a AAA bond rating and stay in the top end of the range, it is imperative to provide at least the services currently before the Council for students, the town, and property values. He does not want to see any more cuts.

Ms. Buckler commented on a chart sent in an e-mail from Dr. Willett to parents. As it stands, five positions are being reduced. She has been focused on the BOE because it is the only piece receiving reductions. In one scenario, the 4%, they would have 16.5 position reductions if UISF is not removed. They are not looking at such reductions in other proposed budgets. It is wonderful they have been able to maintain in other areas but any further cuts to the BOE would mean more reductions.

Mr. Sce commented that he understands why others agreed on the 3% as the intent was to use the unassigned fund balance, which is a horrible financial decision. He was on the BOE 10-11 years ago and what is being discussed and presented tonight is almost identical to those discussions. Schools were rated in the top 10, positions were being cut, and the schools were deteriorating. Every year it was the same conversation, yet according to the budget history they held 2-3% every year. The Superintendent says how great the schools are and how well students are doing. He talks about the SAT scores, graduation, and where students are going. Mr. Sce asked with "sky is falling" and "disaster is happening" all these years, how students are doing so well. The same thing happens every year. Mr. Moran asked if they are still in the top 10. Mr. Sce responded that when he was on the BOE, they were never near the top 10. On the Niche rating scale, Tolland ranks 59th. Coventry, with a lower budget, is ranked 49th. Mr. Sce asked how a school system that spends less per pupil ranks higher. Tolland has a good school system, and it has been for many years. They are not talking about annihilating the school system, but they need to be reasonable and prudent with the tax increase.

Ms. Buckler noted that a question was posed to Dr. Willett during the joint meeting if it was just a game and that he would find the money and not cut positions. He responded that it is not. He tried to make it as best as he could down to teaching classes himself. This would be unheard of in the districts she is from. Someone else noted that other districts are adding programs. A blanket statement that the schools are phenomenal and doing well is subjective. It is not true on all levels. Teachers and staff are great, dealing the best they can with what they have to work with. Over sixteen people at the Public Hearing and numerous e-mails expressed concern about the BOE budget. The Superintendent has added concerns as well. Historically, programs have been cut.

Mr. Marie noted that he served on the BOE for four years. Often, they hear that things will be very bad, but he has not seen the cuts or reductions be as devastating as they said they would be. A budget is an estimate. The numbers follow and often there are savings. From a Council perspective, this is only part of the story. The other part is that the proposed increase is very high especially when compared to what passes at referendum. If they use unassigned fund balance to pay for it, they are digging a hole for next year. The budget would be hard enough to pass as is and he asked if they could imagine how hard it would be next year unless unassigned fund balance is used again which would bring them close to the 10% mark. He does not see how the plan is sustainable. It is great that the BOE Chair and Vice Chair want to work with the Council, and he has heard great ideas about bringing in revenue but at the end of the day, it is a big increase, chances of it passing are slim to none, and there is not a sustainable long-term plan to use the unassigned fund balance for it. He cannot support what has been presented.

Mr. Moran commented that they are hearing from parents who say that their students are struggling, and he feels an obligation to listen to all residents. They respect Ms. Hancock's opinion on the budget but relegate Dr. Willett's advice to something that does not mean anything. It is unfortunate that they are not thinking of the whole town.

Ms. Stargardter commented that this is the year to use more fund balance yet not trigger the financial advisor's level of concern nor one that brings them below, or even close, to the floor of the policy. Fund balance was supplemented by over \$1M last fiscal year due to work by the Finance Department. The projection is for the fund balance to increase over \$400K. They are looking at a use of funds that is financially appropriate to offset and meet the needs of the town and the BOE. Next year, more resources will be coming in than this year. While she is not predicting what will happen, she does not believe this use of fund balance puts them in a hole they cannot get out of. Continual reductions to the BOE put home values at constant risk. She is a single mom of three kids with a mortgage and a single income which is hers. She has a 4-bedroom home that was great when they were a 2-income family. At some point, she will not want to live in her home because it will be too big, and she will want to be able to sell it for at least what she bought it for. Another family will purchase the home and will want to move to town for the same reason she and others did – because the schools have been good. Ms. Stargardter explained that she attended Coventry schools and has friends who went to Tolland schools and got more than she did in terms of electives. When she sat with her high school freshman and reviewed the elective choices, there were more than she had. She wanted this for her kids and is why she is in Tolland. When she goes to sell her house, another family will be interested in it and if the schools and their offerings are not good, it will impact the value of her home. This year, they have the opportunity to reset the trajectory of the BOE spending from that of a downward one to a stable one. They have an opportunity to create stability in a budget that has not been presented in the past and using a moderate increase of fund balance seems appropriate. They will be better positioned next year when there are known revenue sources to continue on a 5-year plan of stability for the BOE. Ms. Stargardter noted that It is time to take a strong step forward and put a strong budget before the town.

The motion was reviewed as being the Town Manager's proposed budget with \$200K from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund and the rest from unassigned fund balance to bring them to a 3% mill rate increase.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Buckler, Moran, Stargardter

Opposed: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Marie

Abstentions: none

Motion failed.

Mr. Marie motioned to amend the Town Manager's budget with the following categories: Town Government, \$14,114,908; BOE, \$44,320,148; Debt Service, \$5,376,489; Capital, \$397,395 and increase the use of the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund from \$78,000 to \$100,000.

Mr. Sce seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Moran commented that the motion brings the BOE down just shy of \$1M. It may not be their fault that they are in this hole, but it is their responsibility to right the ship and create stability. They are asking for a percentage increase to make up for years of underfunding and while it cannot be done all in one year, they need to think of the long-term future of the town. The current motion does not right the ship or create stability for the BOE and students.

Mr. Marie noted that it is about a \$750K decrease from what was proposed for the BOE in the Town Manager's budget. It is an increase from the current year's budget. A budget that either cannot pass referendum or puts them in a bad place with funds does not help education either.

Mr. Moran noted that \$750K is approximately the salary and benefits of ten positions. They are talking about impacting real people and students.

Mr. Sce called a point of clarification. They are talking about positions, not people. There is not a definitive reduction of physical staff.

Mr. Moran assumes the Superintendent will try to limit the number who will lose their jobs, but students will be impacted when class sizes increase, or programs are reduced.

Ms. Sce noted that they do not know that class sizes will increase. Mr. Moran responded that they will be based on information from the public.

Ms. Buckler commented that she grew up in South Windsor with great schools. At the time, Tolland's district was up and coming. When it was her time to raise her family, Tolland was a consideration as well as South Windsor but due to the demand for homes, they could not get into the town because of the schools. There is a direct correlation between home prices and schools. The other night, the speaker who talked of the district where she works that is adding programs is an employee of the South Windsor school district. Ms. Buckler noted that she loves being in Tolland, a smaller town without as much growth. When she moved to town, she was happy with the schools but is concerned that if they are cutting programs and not properly funding the schools, eventually there will be an impact. Families who can afford to move to better districts will do so. She does not want to see this happen but does not want her kids to miss out on opportunities they could have in another town. Ms. Buckler explained that she has a mortgage and student debt. She cannot afford private schools, tutoring, or to pay to make up for programs that are lost. She is grateful for the opportunities her kids have in the school system but fears losing the opportunities and not being able to supplement them. She would rather properly fund the schools. An increase in taxes would cost less for her than to pay for a tutor or make up for extracurricular activities. Ms. Buckler has a student in special education and does not know what she would do if she had to supplement their education. Financially, this makes more sense for her.

Ms. Yudichak asked about the overall tax increase in the motion.

Mr. Marie estimated it to be 3.3%. He noted that he would like to add a sergeant, public works laborer, \$5K for EMT stipends, and \$500 for senior programming.

Mr. Marie motioned to amend the motion to add funds on the town side to cover a sergeant, a public works laborer, \$5,000 for EMT stipends, and \$500 for senior programming.

Mr. Sce seconded the motion.

Discussion:

It was clarified that that the motion is to reduce the Town Manager's proposed budget by \$750K for the BOE which has UISF removed.

Mr. Moran confirmed that \$14,114,908 is lower than the Town Manager's proposed budget. He asked if Mr. Marie is proposing specific cuts. Mr. Marie explained that he would ask the Town Manager and his staff to find the reductions to meet the number minus the items he has specifically requested. Mr. Foley confirmed that Mr. Marie wants to add the items noted and cut the town budget to \$14,114,908.

Ms. Yudichak asked about the overall dollar figure given the requests. Mr. Marie noted that the Town Manager's proposal was \$14,144,408 and Mr. Marie's proposal is a net cut of \$35K. This includes money for the sergeant, a stipend for EMTs, and senior programming so the request would be for the funds for a public works laborer. Ms. Stargardter explained that the motion is to change the town total spending to \$114,114,908 and within that amount, include a sergeant, a public works laborer, \$5K for EMT stipends, and \$500 for senior programming and ask the Town Manager and staff to make other changes to bring it to that amount.

Mr. Sce noted that the difference is \$29.5K.

Mr. Moran asked if this factors in the cuts that will be needed for the four additional items noted. Ms. Stargardter explained that the motion is for the town to make it work within the parameters of the motion. Cuts will need to be made elsewhere in the town-side budget to reduce it by \$29.5K and to include the additions in the motion. The cost of the items noted in the motion would be offset by other reductions.

Ms. Buckler commented that Mr. Marie is asking the town to reduce items it is requesting and asking for items the town is not requesting.

Ms. Stargardter requested an estimate of the cost for the four items noted in the motion.

Mr. Foley noted the following: sergeant, \$15,000; public works laborer, \$61,705 including benefits; \$5,000 EMT stipends; \$500 Senior Center programming. The additions total \$82,205. With the \$29.5K, the total impact is \$111,705.

Ms. Yudichak noted that she would not want to lose staff for the additional items. Mr. Foley responded that they would.

Mr. Sce confirmed that the \$300K from unassigned fund balance is not being removed from the Town Manager's proposed budget and \$178K (originally \$78K) is being added from the MTSF. He noted that 3.3% is an expense increase without considering the adjustments to revenue so it would be a little lower. Mr. Sce noted that this is still not as low as he hoped but they cannot cut too much, and it has to pass referendum. He believes it is a reasonable ask.

Ms. Stargardter asked Mr. Marie about the \$5K EMT stipend and does not recall this being discussed during previous budget discussions. Mr. Marie noted that they are suffering from a volunteer crisis and if they can put more toward what EMTs receive it may help. Ms. Foley noted that the increase to stipends was for volunteer firefighters in the amount of \$2.5K. It was through consensus with the Public Safety Director. Ambulance Salaries increased \$7K due to union contracts. Chief Littell noted that they have had a difficult time hiring staff as it is a competitive market.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the Superintendent estimated that one position is \$72-\$75K. The motion is a reduction of ten positions and thus ten fewer adults in front of students. She reminded the Council about Dr. Willett's concern regarding early education class sizes. The BOE discussed the class size impact if more positions were reduced and many high school class sizes exceed what is recommended. With the reductions in the Town Manager's proposed budget, the class sizes at THS would increase. The BOE discussed more impacts than would be in the budget it passed including removing co-teaching, TEAMS in grade 6, and the impact on the interventionists. Ms. Stargardter is concerned about the 30% increase in the intervention numbers in early education mentioned by Dr. Willett. This could lead to increased special education costs as students advance. Removing seven additional positions with a \$750K reduction would have a substantial impact. She is opposed to this.

Mr. Moran commented that the motion is based on information neither the Council nor the public received, and it is frustrating. He is unsure why they are committing \$5K to public safety when a public safety study is underway. They should first see what the study says. Additionally, the proposal does not include making the administrative position at the Senior Center full-time from part-time which seemed to be a priority. He supports this.

Ms. Buckler commented that it does not seem to make sense to ask for additions on the town side that were not requested and suggest reducing items that were requested. A lieutenant did a presentation, but nothing was indicated that a sergeant was necessary, but Mr. Marie wants to cut from areas where there will be an impact. If the motion did not make cuts to the BOE and included having a sergeant, it may make more sense, but she cannot understand the logic for requesting items there is not a basis for. The Council will get insight from the public safety study and she does not believe there is a basis for adding money there. It is concerning to suggest additions when cutting from public education. They benefit daily from education through i.e. doctors etc.

Mr. Sce commented that the police budget was cut by almost \$70K. It did not increase like the other departments. Mr. Moran called a point of information. He noted that it was not a cut but a result of having more junior troopers. Mr. Sce explained that the budget was reduced. The request is to reduce the reduction. Additionally, no one is saying they do not need education.

Mr. Marie noted that the Council has no authority on where the BOE makes reductions. The Council is the policy maker of the town, and he believes the additions make sense. Mr. Marie requested to make a directive through the Council to direct the Town Manager in regard to what he would like to see changed in the budget.

Mr. Moran motioned to amend the motion to add \$100,000 from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund to bring the total to \$200,000 from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund.

Ms. Buckler seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Moran explained that the additional \$100K would cause there to be less of a reduction to the BOE. Ms. Stargardter clarified that Mr. Moran was asking to increase the BOE budget by \$100K with an increase in funding from the MTSF. Mr. Moran noted that this is correct.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the motion was to increase the BOE budget by \$100K and increase the revenue from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund. This would not change the impact on the mill rate. It only increases spending and revenue by the same number.

Ms. Buckler continued to second with this clarification.

Discussion:

Mr. Marie asked Ms. Hancock for her thoughts on this. Ms. Hancock responded that she does not have any thoughts on this. It is a Council decision, and it knows how she feels. She advised that the Council remember that next year it will either need more revenues or use money from fund balance.

Mr. Sce asked Ms. Hancock about the impact on the MTSF. Ms. Hancock noted that up to \$300K may be taken each year. The current balance is \$362K. If the funds are not used for a one-time expense, the money will be needed next year.

Ms. Stargardter clarified that the current motion, with amendments, is for \$200K total from the MTSF and \$300K from fund balance.

Mr. Sce confirmed that \$500K would be needed to cover next year.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that that the Town Manager's proposed budget recommended using \$300K from the unassigned fund balance. In FY24, \$200K was budgeted to be used. She asked if fund balance is used in the budget most years. Ms. Hancock responded it is used in some years. Ms. Stargardter noted that they have used it for the past three years toward the operating budget. She confirmed that the estimated balance for the MTSF at the end of this fiscal year is \$770,140 and is comfortable using \$200K from the fund. During the original discussions, the Finance Director recommended using \$78K over four years. Mr. Stargardter noted that \$200K can be used over three years and close to another \$200K could be used in the fourth year assuming no additional funds are received into the fund over the next four years. Thus, a multi-year plan of funds is available without asking for additional money from taxpayers.

Mr. Moran noted that trash services increased approximately \$200K. Ms. Stargardter explained that the following year will be flat. Mr. Moran noted that some of the money could be used to step into the trash increase. Public Works will no longer need to rent a grader so there will be \$25K in savings.

Mr. Marie clarified that the amendment changes his proposal from \$100K to \$200K and not \$178K to \$278K.

Ms. Yudichak confirmed that \$29K still needs to be found for the town side. Mr. Foley noted that \$111K is needed, \$82K in addition to the \$29.5K funding decreases. Ms. Yudichak commented that they could lose a public safety person or someone in Town Hall with this proposal.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the vote before the Council is on the amendment to the motion.

The original motion was moved and seconded. A clarification was made, and the clarification was seconded. An amendment to the motion is now on the floor.

The motion before the Council is to amend Mr. Marie's motion to change the BOE decrease from \$750K to \$650K and change the revenue from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund from \$100K to \$200K.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Buckler, Moran, Noonan, Sce, Marie, Stargardter

Opposed: Yudichak

Abstentions: none

Motion passed 6-1.

Ms. Stargardter reviewed the amended motion.

The motion before the Council is a \$650K reduction of the Town Manager's budget to the BOE, a \$29.5K reduction from the town government budget with specific additions that need to be accommodated within the reduced funding, and a total of \$200K from the MTSF. It was noted that \$650K is \$651K. The total for the BOE would be \$44,420,148 which is a \$651K reduction from the Town Manager's budget. Ms. Yudichak commented that she cannot support Mr. Marie's proposal. It risks losing dedicated staff which would be nonsensical especially since they have Troop C and the sergeant being recommended would only oversee three troopers rather than the traditional six. She would like to cut the EMT stipends

to \$2.5K. A study is being done and she questioned how they would hire someone if that is the recommendation. The \$2.5K would be in the professional line and not specific for EMTs. The \$500 should be easy for the Senior Center programming. Ms. Yudichak would like to add a staff position to the town side but does not believe this is the right time and cited the request for a public works laborer. She is comfortable with a 3.5%-3.8% budget going to referendum. Ms. Yudichak would like: \$2.5K to the Professional line for Ambulance Services; \$500 for the Senior Center. She would like to change the reduction of \$651K to the BOE to \$400K. Ms. Stargardter noted that this would result in a mill rate increase of 3.8%. The Town Manager's proposed mill rate increase was 5.0%. The original mill rate increase proposed by Mr. Marie was approximately 3.22%. Ms. Yudichak noted that she would remove the sergeant and the public works laborer. Ms. Stargardter explained that these were internal changes and would not impact the bottom line.

***Ms. Yudichak motioned to amend the motion to remove the addition of the sergeant, remove the addition of a public works laborer, reduce the EMT stipend from \$5,000 to \$2,500, and leave the increase for Senior Center programming at \$500; all of this in the Town Government Total Expenditure of \$14,114,908 and to amend the reduction in Board of Education to a \$400,000 reduction, or \$44,671,148 for a total mill rate of 38.75 or a 3.80% mill rate increase.
Mr. Marie seconded the motion.***

Discussion:

Mr. Noonan asked if money was available after the retirement of a trooper this fiscal year. At the presentation, Lieutenant Hayward explained that they had the money to pay a sergeant due to the retirement of a trooper. Mr. Noonan recalled that \$80K was available for public safety. Ms. Stargardter explained that Administrative Trooper Eklund retired during the current fiscal year. The temporary replacement has a lower bill so there are savings in the current fiscal year in the public safety line. Ms. Hancock believes it is between \$50K-\$70K. Mr. Noonan asked if they have between \$50K-\$70K allocated toward public safety how it is not able to be included. Ms. Stargardter explained that any unexpected funds/savings go into the unassigned fund balance. Savings do not carry over into the following year on the same line. Ms. Stargardter noted that this assumes that the savings were not moved to other lines in the budget. The charter allows the Town Manager to move up to 3% of a line in the budget without Council approval. Ms. Noonan asked if a sergeant is added in this fiscal year if they would spend the money if it was saved for the end of this fiscal year. Ms. Stargardter clarified that she believes the question is if they move from an administrative trooper to a sergeant in the current fiscal year if they would still be within the total budget for the current fiscal year. She believes that the answer is yes, they would be saving money in the current fiscal year. This does not impact the budget currently before the Council. Mr. Noonan commented that he does not understand how they can say that they will be paying for it when there is a vacancy. Ms. Stargardter explained that the town currently has four resident state troopers. Mr. Noonan commented that his understanding was that Lieutenant Hayward asked for a sergeant to be on the road for the young troopers. He is ready to pass the budget, but is frustrated that Councilors are saying that society benefits from education, and he agrees, but public safety is needed. To throw this away when there are savings for it disappoints him. They can move money anywhere and this is not just about the schools. He likes that they will support the Senior Center and money is going toward public safety.

Ms. Buckler confirmed that the town currently has four resident troopers. To have a sergeant, the increase would be \$15K. She believes to have a sergeant they would need to reduce one trooper and is unsure this is necessary. There is every indication that the town is safe, and safety would not be increased if a sergeant is added. She does not see a benefit in the additional cost.

Mr. Moran asked Mr. Foley to speak to the need for a sergeant.

Mr. Foley explained that he provided the job description of a sergeant to the Council. A sergeant would remove a trooper from patrol and would be an in-house supervisor for three troopers. In his opinion, he wants four troopers on the road. The four troopers currently have a sergeant. Troop C suggested that they have a personal sergeant. The general accepted practice is to have one sergeant for six or seven officers. In any department, a sergeant overseeing three officers would be seen as overspending. Moreover, he sent the statistics to the Council and the town is safer than it was ten years ago. Mr. Foley explained that the role of a sergeant is much different. He would not want to have a supervisor and lose a patrol trooper in town. He will do as directed by the Council but does not believe it is smart. He added that the four troopers will age and as they gain seniority, will earn more. The numbers in front of the Council will contractually increase. A sergeant will cost more than the most senior trooper the town has ever had by \$15K. Mr. Foley commented that he does not know one person who would say that the town would be safer by taking a trooper off the road and having a sergeant.

Ms. Stargardter explained that they are asking for a considerable reduction in services on one side of the budget and not the other. She is not comfortable with this.

Mr. Marie commented that he would like to see a sergeant as well but understands that they need to present something at referendum, and it will only happen if there is a compromise. As far as public safety, he would like to get better data on crime.

Mr. Noonan agreed. Going forward, they need more troopers. They have two roving SROs for four schools, and this is not enough. Mr. Foley noted that while budgeted, they do not have any at this moment. Mr. Noonan commented that more public safety is needed, especially in the schools.

Mr. Foley confirmed that two SROs are in the BOE budget and has discussed this with the Superintendent. Various items are under consideration.

Ms. Stargardter clarified that SROs are part of the BOE budget and included in the budget before the Council. Cutting BOE funding will not help make the positions more attractive.

Mr. Noonan and Mr. Marie noted that this is an item they would like to explore and discuss further.

Ms. Buckler asked for more information. Mr. Foley explained that in some places, troopers are pulled off the road and used as SROs, but other options are less expensive. Ms. Buckler confirmed that the Council cannot direct the BOE how to spend its money. She too expressed the importance of public safety.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the SROs have always been under the BOE budget as far as Mr. Foley is aware and the town has spent a significant amount of money on capital improvements in regard to safety. She asked if the town could assign a trooper as an SRO and pay for it. Mr. Foley noted that he would need to consult with the BOE.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Buckler, Moran, Yudichak, Marie, Stargardter

Opposed: Noonan, Sce,

Abstentions: none

Motion passed 5-2.

Discussion:

Ms. Buckler commented that she would like to see consideration of additional funding to offset cuts to the BOE and utilize the unassigned fund balance to do so.

Mr. Marie noted that he would like to vote on the motion as amended.

Mr. Moran commented that the BOE budget has more cuts than he would like to see.

Ms. Stargardter motioned to amend the motion to reduce the Town Government side by an additional \$200,000 for a total town reduction of \$229,500 and move the \$200,000 to the Board of Education side for a total Board of Education reduction to \$200,000 from the Town Manager's Proposed Budget and use an additional \$300,000 from fund balance for a mill rate increase of 3.11%.

Ms. Buckler seconded the motion.

Discussion:

[Note: Mr. Sce left the meeting at 12:05AM and noted that he would return via Zoom.]

Ms. Stargardter noted that the amendment would be a 2.75% budget increase on the town side.

Ms. Yudichak asked Mr. Foley how many staff members would be the \$229.5K. Mr. Foley responded that he would need to review it and discuss it with Ms. Hancock. Ms. Yudichak commented that it is an eye-for-an-eye. They are willing to skim back because they want more for the BOE. She asked if others are ok with 3-4 people being laid off. Ms. Stargardter commented that she is not ok with it, but it is already happening on the BOE side. Ms. Yudichak noted for the record that it is an eye-for-an-eye.

Mr. Marie commented that he is absolutely against using any more fund balance than has already been suggested and is a hard "no".

Ms. Yudichak called a recess.

Mr. Marie seconded.

Discussion: Mr. Noonan noted that he has to be at work in five hours.

Motion passed unanimously.

The Council recessed at 12:08AM.

[Mr. Sce returned to the meeting via Zoom at 12:14AM.]

The Council meeting resumed at 12:29AM.

Ms. Stargardter withdrew her motion.

Ms. Buckler agreed with the motion withdrawal.

Mr. Marie motioned to call the question.

Ms. Yudichak seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Moran, Buckler, Marie

Opposed: Stargardter

Abstention: none

Motion passed 6-1.

Ms. Stargardter reviewed the amended motion.

CATEGORY	TOWN MANAGER PROPOSED AMOUNT	TOWN COUNCIL AMOUNT
<i>Town Government</i>	\$14,144,408	\$14,114,908
<i>Board of Education</i>	\$45,071,148	\$44,671,148
<i>Debt Service</i>	\$ 5,376,489	\$ 5,376,489
<i>Capital</i>	\$ 397,395	\$ 397,395
TOTAL	\$64,989,440	\$64,559,940

This includes making a change within the Town Government line directing the Town Manager to add \$2,500 for an EMT stipend and \$500. for Senior Center programming within this budget. In addition, the general fund balance as applied will include, as the Town Manager proposed, \$300,000 from fund balance and \$200,000 from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund.

The motion reads:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Tolland Town Council that it hereby adopts a FY 2024-25 Town Operating and Capital Budget in the amount of \$64,559,940 to be appropriated as follows:

CATEGORY	TOWN MANAGER PROPOSED AMOUNT	TOWN COUNCIL AMOUNT
<i>Town Government</i>	\$14,144,408	\$14,114,908
<i>Board of Education</i>	\$45,071,148	\$44,671,148
<i>Debt Service</i>	\$ 5,376,489	\$ 5,376,489
<i>Capital</i>	\$ 397,395	\$ 397,395
TOTAL	\$64,989,440	\$64,559,940

Said appropriations shall require an increase of 1.41 mills for a mill rate of 38.74 for a 3.78% increase. 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 17, 2024, Annual Budget Presentation Meeting held hybrid at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Hancock confirmed that the fund balance use is \$300,000 and the use of the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund is \$200,000.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed the BOE amount and noted that it is a 3.91% increase over last year.

Ms. Hancock confirmed the numbers as follows:

Town Operating \$14,114,908; BOE, \$44,671,148; Debt Service, \$5,376,489; Capital, \$397,395
Total: 64,559,940; Mill Rate, 38.74; Tax Increase, 3.78%; Total Mill Increase, 1.41 mills; Overall expenditure budget, 4.89% increase for \$3,800,583.

Ms. Hancock forwarded the information to the Council.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Noonan, Yudichak, Marie

Opposed: Sce, Moran, Buckler, Stargardter

Abstentions: none

Motion failed (3-7).

Ms. Yudichak motioned to add a sergeant back in, reduce the Board of Education budget by an additional \$50,000, leave \$2,500 to the Ambulance category, \$500. to the Senior Center, use \$200,000 from the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund, and use \$300,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Mr. Marie motioned to call a question on the motion.

Ms. Yudichak seconded the motion.

Ms. Stargardter noted that she is troubled by calling a question without any discussion.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Moran, Marie,

Opposed: Buckler, Stargardter

Abstentions: none

Motion passed (5-2).

Ms. Stargardter reviewed the motion before the Council.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Tolland Town Council that it hereby adopts a FY 2024-25 Town Operating and Capital Budget in the amount of \$64,559,940 to be appropriated as follows:

CATEGORY	TOWN MANAGER PROPOSED AMOUNT	TOWN COUNCIL AMOUNT
<i>Town Government</i>	<i>\$14,144,408</i>	<i>\$14,114,908</i>
<i>Board of Education</i>	<i>\$45,071,148</i>	<i>\$44,621,148</i>
<i>Debt Service</i>	<i>\$ 5,376,489</i>	<i>\$ 5,376,489</i>
<i>Capital</i>	<i>\$ 397,395</i>	<i>\$ 397,395</i>
TOTAL	\$64,989,440	\$64,509,940

Said appropriations shall require an increase of 1.37 mills for a mill rate of 38.70 for a 3.67% increase. 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 17, 2024, Annual Budget Presentation Meeting held hybrid at 7:00 p.m.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Noonan, Yudichak, Marie

Opposed: Sce, Moran, Buckler, Stargardter

Abstentions: none

Motion failed (3-4).

Ms. Yudichak asked Ms. Hancock how they would get to a 3.5% without any reductions to the town side. Ms. Hancock explained that if speaking strictly of expenditure reductions, they would need a reduction of \$75,000, need to find \$75,000 in revenue, or some combination to get to a 3.50% tax increase.

**Ms. Buckler recalled Ms. Yudichak’s original motion,
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Tolland Town Council that it hereby adopts a FY 2024-25
Town Operating and Capital Budget in the amount of \$64,559,940 to be appropriated as follows:**

CATEGORY	TOWN MANAGER PROPOSED AMOUNT	TOWN COUNCIL AMOUNT
Town Government	\$14,144,408	\$14,114,908
Board of Education	\$45,071,148	\$44,671,148
Debt Service	\$ 5,376,489	\$ 5,376,489
Capital	\$ 397,395	\$ 397,395
TOTAL	\$64,989,440	\$64,559,940

**Said appropriations shall require an increase of 1.41 mills for a mill rate of 38.74 for a 3.78% increase.
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 17, 2024, Annual Budget
Presentation Meeting held hybrid at 7:00 p.m.**

Mr. Moran seconded.

Discussion:

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that this does not include the sergeant but does include the \$2,500 EMT stipend and \$500. for the Senior Center within the Town Government line. Mr. Noonan asked for the vote count on the original proposed amendment made by Ms. Yudichak. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the motion failed 3-4. The following were opposed: Sce, Moran, Buckler, Stargardter. Ms. Stargardter reviewed the Total Council Amounts and mill rate information associated with this motion.

A roll call vote was taken:

In favor: Yudichak, Marie, Moran, Buckler, Noonan

Opposed: Sce, Stargardter

Abstentions: none

Motion passed (5-2).

- 6. Approval of a resolution authorizing the form of the ballot for the May 7, 2024 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.

Mr. Marie motioned,

**WHEREAS, the Tolland Town Council has adopted a proposed FY 2024-2025 Town Operating and
Capital Budget to be considered by the Tolland electorate at a May 7, 2024 budget referendum;
and**

**WHEREAS, the Council must now establish the appropriate ballot language for this referendum
and the date, time and place of said referendum;**

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Tolland Town Council the following:

1. The ballot question for the May 7th referendum shall be worded as follows:

“Shall the Town of Tolland’s proposed 2024-2025 budget of \$64,559,940, reflecting a spending increase of \$3,008,583 or 4.89% which requires an estimated tax rate of 38.74 mills for an increase of 1.41 mills or 3.78% be adopted? Yes/No.”

2. The time and place for the referendum shall be between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on May 7, 2024 at the Library Program Room.

3. The Town Manager or his designee is hereby authorized to place the required legal notices in the Journal Inquirer and other places as conditions permit, advertising the May 7, 2024 Referendum and the April 17, 2024 Hybrid Annual Budget Presentation Meeting.

4. The Town Manager or his designee is authorized to prepare and print an explanatory text and the mailing of the same to local residents; to be included with absentee ballots and documented via the Town’s Tolland Notification system in accordance with the provisions of CT General Statutes 9-369b explaining the budget referendum question.

Mr. Noonan seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Noonan, Sce, Yudichak, Moran, Buckler, Marie, Stargardter

Opposed: none

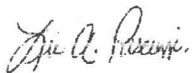
Abstentions: none

Motion passed unanimously.

7. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned without objection at 12:57AM

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair