

MINUTES

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TOLLAND, CT

TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION  
HYBRID MEETING  
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February 22, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.

2024 FEB 26 AM 11:45

*Kathleen Lagan*

**Town Council**

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

**Absent:** none

**Board of Education**

**Present:** Tony Holt, Chair; Jennifer Gallichant, Vice Chair; Bill Bode, Secretary (Zoom); Renie Besaw, Katy McNulty (Zoom), Dana Philbin, Jayden Regisford, Dan Sheridan (Zoom), Brian Thompson

**Absent:** none

**Also Present:** Brian Foley, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent of Schools

1. Call to Order: Mr. Foley called the meeting to order at 7:03PM.

Mr. Foley stated that by §C9 of the Town Charter he is required to convene a meeting between the Town Council and Board of Education prior to April 11, 2024, for the purpose of discussing the Board of Education and Town budget. He thanked everyone for their efforts and input thus far.

Mr. Foley explained that that tonight they will hear negative comments from both sides, but they have an amazing town, people, and school system. Everyone benefits. He thanked everyone in attendance for their energy, intelligence, willingness, and volunteerism to follow the process. He thanked the boosters including the Tolland Education Foundation for the money raised.

Mr. Foley has had discussions with the Council and BOE Chairs as well as Dr. Willett and runs into many others at different events. He noted that he has not discussed numbers with anyone mentioned. He only tries to provide encouragement and confidence that everyone will get through the budget process together. He is unaffected by politics, social media, and anything else. His only interest is the best interest of the town. When he meets with the Financial Director, they talk about numbers, different scenarios, and what is best fiscally for the town. This is held in confidence until he goes public. Most important is the public's confidence to know everyone is doing the best they can. Mr. Foley received the BOE's budget. It was split down party lines which was a major letdown but has made his job easier. It would be hard for him to tell the Board with a 9-0 vote that he wants to change the number, but he has confidence that they can all work through this now, and next year. Last year, while the vote was not unanimous, there was consensus and confidence from the public and the referendum passed on its first try. He will guard, with the Financial Director aside of him and with all that he can, the town's AAA bond rating. There are no magic buckets of money to dip into to make this easier but there may be places they can look and pinch; however, he will not risk the financial standing and reputation of the town.

Mr. Foley reviewed the process.

- Early October, Begin Capital Improvement Plan
- December 4<sup>th</sup>, Submit Capital Improvement Plan to the Council

- February 8<sup>th</sup>, Capital Budget Public Hearing
- February 14<sup>th</sup>, Superintendent submits the Board of Education's Adopted Budget to the Town Manager
- March 13<sup>th</sup>, Town Manager submits Town Manager's Budget to the Council
- April 4<sup>th</sup>, Council finalizes the budget.

2. Board of Education Budget Presentation

Mr. Holt explained that the Board brings diversity of thought and while they may not completely agree, the perspectives and conversations are beneficial. There is respectful dialogue and compromise. The Board had opportunities to meet with Council leadership and they discussed the process, not numbers. They discussed commitments to come to the table, have discussions, and be honest. Everyone is here with the best of intentions for Tolland. Mr. Holt noted that he is looking forward to providing clarity and watching the Council's deliberations.

Dr. Willett provided an overview of the Board of Education's Adopted Budget, February 14, 2024. The budget has five position reductions, and one position did not carry over from a grant. The positions are as follows: ELA teacher, Social Studies teacher, Science teacher, PE teacher, paraeducator. A K2 teacher was not carried over from a grant. Additional budget reductions include curriculum liaisons and grade team leaders. These reductions were made to reach a percentage that the Board felt would be considered favorably by the town.

The budget has two iterations.

- 6.35%, does not consider the reduction of the principal and interest on UISF
- 4.84%, with the reduction of the principal and interest on UISF

Both iterations include an offset of insurance in the amount of \$200K.

The \$200K is the ARPA offset and a determination was made to provide a budget that takes the offset out so the Board would not be contributing \$200K thereby reducing the Board's budget.

The Board reviewed many budget iterations over multiple meetings and Dr. Willett noted his appreciation for the Board's work and efforts.

3. Recommendations and suggestions to BOE regarding consolidation of non-education services and cost savings (per State Statutes (Public Act 13-60))

Ms. Stargardter noted that Dr. Willett added BQ70 to the BOE FAQ document. BQ70 includes examples of Potential Noneducational Services that include copier agreements, fuel/oil/energy agreements, insurance, equipment purchases, and facilities expenses. He included a note regarding the Board's separation between the town government and Board decisions.

Ms. Yudichak asked if they are currently doing any consolidation. Dr. Willett responded that the Board works with the town on a number of items including ECHIP (insurance) and setting pricing for oil and diesel fuel. Mr. Foley added that the town tries to assist the Board when there is an overlap in grants. Additionally, the DPW and Public Safety work cooperatively with the district as well.

4. Questions from the public (2-minute limit) specific to the Board of Education budget with questions being directed by the Town Council Chair to the appropriate body for response

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, asked if they know how long the Child Development program that was cut last year was in Tolland. She asked if they know how a THS counselor, who has thirty five students vying for the same class with sixteen students, decides who can take the class. Those are the difficult decisions that were made last year. They cut a 50+ year-old program that benefitted the entire community and this year, as students are signing up for classes, they will need to make decisions twice by working now and then again after they wait for the budget to pass.

Cris Jimenez, 68 Anthony Road, commented that he hopes it is not lost on the Council and the Board that they are sitting in the same building of the budget they are trying to cut. Some of the Councilors and Board members benefitted from a great education in Tolland and he asked why this was ok for them but they refuse to allow this for students now.

*Ms. Gallichant commented that it is not lost on her that they are sitting in the building that as of right now would lose three people and 4-5 positions. Mr. Holt commented that while he did not attend TPS, he has a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader and two kids who have graduated from THS. None of the reductions were made lightly. The effects on students were discussed and they attempted to minimize this as much as possible. Ms. Philbin commented that she was against the THS reductions. It is a disservice to students. She wanted a more robust budget and more staff positions. She has a 4<sup>th</sup> grade student and a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student and is concerned not only about their class sizes but also those behind and ahead of them and the opportunities they will not have that previous generations had. Several members of the Board and Council had programs in TPS that students now will not have the opportunity to have. This is top of mind. Mr. Sheridan noted that he graduated from THS and moved back so his kids could attend the schools. This is why they are advocating for the largest budget in over 11 years when the average was 1.71%. The 6.35% is a step in the right direction. He apologized that it could not all be done in year 1, but they are on the right track for Dr. Willett's 5-year plan. An injection from the Council would take some of the burden off the Board's budget and in turn they would not have to start next year so aggressively high. With this, in coming years they can get everything where it needs to be. This budget is a big step in the right direction, and he supports it. He added that they cannot only focus on what has been taken away from TPS. A lot of amazing programs have been instituted. Mr. Regisford commented that at the last meeting he noted that it feels like backstabbing to cut people who are responsible for him sitting on the Board. He is not prepared to do this when it does not need to be done. They do not need to cut what is being cut. Mr. Thompson commented that he is aware that cuts would be made in the building. In education, some programs go while others stay, and changes are made to improve programs. While no one wants to see a program go, if another program can impact more students in a different area, this can be a plus as well. Going from a 1% to a 6.5% budget is a huge step. Additionally, four contracts had to be renewed and those costs must be covered. It would be a help if they received help with the energy component. Ms. Besaw commented that many hours have gone into reviewing line items and scenarios. She is confident in the budget brought forward. The shifting population in the schools that needs to be addressed at times. They compromised and she is hopeful that people can see that they brought something that is supportive of the schools. Ms. McNulty commented that she is interested in seeing the 5-year plan put in place but is disappointed that they are looking at the 6.35% when the plan started at 6.98% and was a good starting point. She is against the cutting teachers at THS. It is important to have educators in the building.*

Heather McCann, 62 Crossen Drive, commented on Mr. Foley's statements where he stated that he is unaffected by politics and social media, yet he cited the disappointment of the party line budget vote which is by design part of the process to get to a consensus. She recommended that this not be used as a deciding factor on the budgeting percentage. Ms. McCann noted that she likes having a multi-year plan. It will allow them to predict what is coming. Lastly, if want to pull themselves out of the hole, they would not ask for a 6.53% increase but a 35% increase.

Kate Vallo asked the Councilors if given that some Board members have been fighting to retain positions and services for the Board's budget, what steps, if any, the Council will take to fund the Board budget at a

level that would restore some of the positions. She understands it is not the Council's purview to discuss allocation of funds in the Board's budget, but they have been doing their due diligence to follow the Board's conversations and must understand the negative impact the cuts will have and they have the power to fund the BOE at a restorative level. She asked about the intentions of the Councilors and their hopes and dreams for the TPS.

*Ms. Stargardter responded that they have a complete town budget they need to review and have not yet seen about 30% of it. This will not be available until March 13<sup>th</sup> at which time they will dig into the numbers. There are many items to consider. She is not ready to close any doors or make any commitments at this point. There are too many unknowns. She is grateful to the Board for the work in getting the Council the proposed budget. The Council will have work to do on March 13<sup>th</sup> when it has the full budget. Mr. Noonan commented that they are here to develop a long-term plan for success. A Council goal is to have pay-as-you-go and he looks forward to reviewing what is being proposed. Mr. Moran commented that while it is the Council's job to look at the budget as a whole, adequately funding the schools is critically important and he is committed to looking at any way they can do so. There has been a lack of funding for over a decade, and they need to pay attention to this. Mr. Marie commented that it is too early to make a decision without seeing the entire budget and the impact it would have on taxpayers. That said, a strong BOE is one of the Council's goals along with others including stabilizing the mill rate. He wants to vote on a budget that best advances all of those goals. He is excited that the Board is looking to work on a long-term financial plan. Ms. Yudichak commented that four Councilors have served on a BOE. The Council cannot make a decision on a number, but Council and Board leadership have committed to discussing options. She communicated to the Chair that she is willing to listen and supports the BOE but as Councilors they need to look at all of the town. She appreciates all the work of the Board. Ms. Buckler commented that she was on a BOE in another town. When one is on the Council, they need to look at the budget of the entire town, but she appreciates the process, including this joint meeting. Mr. Sce commented that he is not ready to commit to a budget number at this point. He asked that the public be patient and understanding. They are in a position to never make everyone happy. No matter what they do, or how they vote, many members of the town will be upset. They need to review items from a realistic standpoint. Sacrifices and compromises will have to be made. His goal is to do what is in the best interests of the town to satisfy the most people possible.*

*Mr. Holt commented that throughout the leadership discussions it was noted that communication would be the key. The Council now has an opportunity to see the budget through the lens of the entire town. Collaboration does not end tonight. The Board is ready to provide whatever resources needed to help the Council. Ms. Yudichak commented that while unfortunate, a split vote, it was productive. Ms. Gallichant commented that they had a split vote on 6.35% in favor by the Republicans. Another vote took place that night at a higher number that was favored by the Democrats. Mr. Foley stated that this would help his decision, but everyone voted on 6.35% or higher. She asked that this be taken into account.*

Rebecca Risely, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented that at the last Board meeting a decision was made to eliminate three teachers which was the equivalent of about 0.5%. She would like to hear the justification from those who voted against this. It equates to a loss of staff, lost opportunities for students, and increases class sizes. Although in one respect it may look like enrollment is declining, adjustments have been made. Teachers have been reduced and classes have been consolidated. Ms. Risely commented that she has witnessed over the years the hard work that goes into passing the budget and she does her part to help. She advocates for the referendum regardless of the number but has seen Councilors and Board members not support the budgets they crafted. She asked if it would be different this year and if all members would support and advocate for the budget. She asked that they be cognizant of not using social media in certain ways. Ms. Risely asked how they will use the Tax Stabilization Fund thoughtfully for its intended purpose – to support students' educational requirements without placing an increase on residents. She asked that everyone look at BQ62 and BQ66 on the Board FAQ. This has information on what has been cut and the impact.

*Mr. Holt commented that at the time of the vote, the Board had many meetings and conversations with Dr. Willett and his staff looking at the balance of where the numbers needed to be to ensure needs were met without an excessive ask. A budget that includes no reductions to staff or programs was over 9%. They looked at scenarios in the range of 4.0% to over 9% and their impacts. When it came to the proposal that added the three positions back at 0.47%, his position was where do they stop. They spent time with Dr. Willett trying to minimize the effect on students while maximizing opportunities to recover and get on the 5-year plan. He noted that whatever the budget is, he will support it. Mr. Sheridan commented that he focused on looking historically at proposed budgets and what passed along with the corresponding faculty cuts. Last year, 3% was passed and nine faculty were proposed to be cut but only one lost their job. Another lost a stipend. This year, when looking at the three individuals who may lose a position, historically they have seen where money is fungible, and his rationale was with the stipulation that they focus FFC on ensuring that funds are used for education. They want to maintain the jobs and will continue to work with Dr. Willett. Ms. Philbin commented that she will support the budget and referendum. Regarding the 0.47%, she was against the reductions. Enrollment ebbs and flows. She has seen this as well as faculty being taken away and not coming back. This is a concern. They need to be cognizant of the 0.47% – it is not a number. Her charge is to ensure quality education that supports students, staff, and TPS. Ms. Gallichant clarified that at the end of the process last year several positions were lost and two people were to be cut but in the end it was one. In this budget, they are cutting six positions which impact education, the health of the district, and can cause a loss of programs. Ms. Stargardter asked how nine positions were lost last year but only one person. Ms. Gallichant noted that this may have been in part due to retirements where the person in the position reduced filled another position. Mr. Thompson commented that his decision was based on factors including that education standards are still being met and that the FFC could look at moving funds for the positions. Ms. Stargardter commented on the Tax Stabilization Fund. At this point, they need to look at the whole budget before committing to anything. She is aware of the balance. Ms. Yudichak commented that she will support and advocate for the budget and asked others to do so. Ms. Buckler commented that it is important to support decisions made. Regardless of one's vote, they should stand behind it whether in a meeting environment or behind a keyboard. She will be supportive of how she votes. Mr. Moran agreed that it is important to have conversations in public meetings and not on social media. He pledges to do so. Although they have not yet heard from the Financial Director, they are aware of the Tax Stabilization Fund and other revenue. He is open to consideration with the guidance of Ms. Hancock. Mr. Marie commented that they will look at the town's funds, but they need to be prudent and look at the whole picture.*

Caroline Hargraves, 28 Charles Street, asked about the 5-year plan. Specifically, what are the action steps, who will implement the steps, what are they bringing back, and what are the needs of the district that did not make it into the proposed budget because it would not pass. She asked what the 5-year plan is other than looking at numbers that eat away at the core of the educational system. The Board needs to ask these questions to build a better system. She asked that Mr. Foley have pride in the town. Tolland is not mentioned in the educational world in terms of comparisons and wanting to do better. It is because the school system never gets funded the way it needs to be.

*Mr. Holt explained that the Board asked Dr. Willett for the seed of a 5-year plan that included numbers and opportunities. What needs to be done for services throughout the five years. The Board committed to continuing this process and the budget conversation. The FFC Chair has committed to having this on the agenda and it will be touched by all of the committees and the Board's conversations. The request is to start talking and to develop a plan. Ms. Gallichant commented that she asked to see a multi-year plan that started with the 6.98%. Mr. Sheridan commented that he is unsure what is needed over the next five years but will work under Dr. Willett's direction. After implementation, the proposed average over the years is 4.16%. If they provide what is needed, they may see items returned.*

Ms. Moran, 50 Merlot Way, commented that she was disappointed to hear the meeting start with a conversation about sides. It confirms her opinion that Tolland has dug itself into a place where Tolland

cannot talk about itself as a whole. She did not want to talk about the cuts because she has been doing so for over fifteen years. The cuts over the years, and lack of a stable annual investment, have created inconsistencies for students. Student experience should be the focus. Past proposed budgets were not level services budgets. They have never started there, and this is the problem. Whether it was the previous Town Manager dictating a number behind the scenes or another situation. As a taxpayer, she is annoyed that her tax dollars have been squirreled away into different buckets rather than consistently invested in the community. Ms. Moran asked if the Town Manager and Council are also willing to work on a 5-year plan because it should be done with all community stakeholders and demographics represented. She asked Dr. Willett about the new law regarding the kindergarten cutoff and how it will affect enrollment numbers.

*Mr. Foley noted that the town has a 5-year plan. It is in the Budget Book, and he looks forward to moving forward with the Board on this. Dr Willett spoke regarding the new law regarding kindergarten. Enrollment will depend on how many students' waivers are successfully completed. Each district has to create an application process for those who become 5-years-old in September, October, November, or December. They need to go through a process to show their kindergarten readiness. Enrollment will depend on this, but they may see a slight dip this year but the following year there may be an increase and then stabilize. Ms. Gallichant asked if there is Board input in the town's 5-year plan. Mr. Foley responded that there is not, but they would be happy to have it. He has already discussed this with Mr. Holt. Historically, they estimated the Board's component. Ms. Hancock explained that they look at historical trends taking into account estimated growth in the community, the impact on tax dollars, and the capital needs of the Board and the town. Additional information will make it better. Ms. Gallichant commented that a 5-year plan has not been requested since she has been on the Board. Mr. Thompson asked what Ms. Hancock uses for an increase. Ms. Hancock noted that historically it is 2-3% for the Board. Mr. Regisford commented that whatever is passed this year will not be level services. He asked what the town's 5-year plan would look like if it includes the Board. Mr. Foley responded that they would incorporate Dr. Willett's numbers into the 5-year plan but the question is what will pass referendum and it is a guess, but they do the best they can. He likes having a roadmap, but Boards, Councils, and referendums change.*

Kate Howard-Bender, 103 Goose Lane, commented that public confidence in town is not worth anything if they cannot ensure services. To intimate that the BOE did not come to consensus based on the spit vote devalues their collaborative work. There was bipartisan and vociferous agreement about funding at a higher rate than in the past eleven years when there were not level services budgets. The BOE does not have the ability to take on debt nor the authority or power to do so but this is what happened with UISF. It came into being in 2013 so the BOE has been paying not only on utilities but also principal and interest on a loan for ten years. The principal and loan interest has cost just over \$650K annually which has been unavailable to spend on students' needs. Over the past ten years, this is \$6.5M. She added imagine if it had been available for the schools. The Board does not collect revenues although it employs cost savings measures and has made many cuts. The Council should take over the principal and interest on the loan so the Board can spend its money on education. The UISF loan belongs in the Council's arena, and the town could use its excellent bond rating to secure a loan. Ms. Howard-Bender asked if in increased fiduciary transparency the Council is willing to incur the financial burden of the UISF principal and interest as it should have years ago to take the debt from the BOE. She asked if the Council agrees to go lower than the amount requested by the Board how it will help students. What programs are they willing to cut? What programs are they willing to remove? What aspect of the student experience are they willing to impoverish? While she does not believe it should be done, she asked how much would be saved if they got rid of sports.

*Mr. Marie commented that he is willing to explore if it makes sense from an administrative standpoint for the town to pay the interest. It is not really a savings. The money has to come from the town or the Board side – it is not really changing the number going to the taxpayer. Mr. Marie commented that until they see the Town Manager's budget and there is a holistic conversation, he cannot comment on what he feels*

*is a good number to send to the Board. At the end of the day, it is up to the Board to decide how the funds are used. Ms. Yudichak commented that UISF has always been an issue and she needs to learn more about it. The Council needs to think of the town as a whole. She supports the Board and is thankful for everyone who supports her son. She does not want to see anything eliminated but this happens on the town side as well. Mr. Moran noted that he cannot commit to anything at this time, but his understanding is that under state law generally boards of education are not in a position to take on debt. He would want to understand this situation better. Ms. Buckler commented that she understands a little of why it [UISF] started as it did and it makes sense why it was done, but it is something that needs to be further discussed to ensure it continues to make sense. In terms of what she would be willing to cut, the Council needs to look at the town's budget as a whole but need to take into consideration the impact when making decisions. Mr. Noonan commented that he has heard history and projections. His generation is not buying homes right now or having many kids for many reasons outside of the Council's control. He moved back and purchased a home. In terms of the ebb and flow through K-6, baby boomers had more children than the current generation is having. In terms of stakeholders and demographics, a large percentage of the town's population is made up of single parents working 60 hours/week so others can look after their children. The budget has to serve every demographic and be supportive while looking after the education of students. He noted that Mr. Foley commented that a For Sale sign can be posted on a home in town and would be purchased quickly, but Mr. Noonan asked who is leaving. It may be families who can no longer afford to live in town. He wants to serve the totality of Tolland's demographic. The median household income is good, but it is not what the majority of people make. Ms. Stargardter noted that median is the midpoint – half earn more, and half earn less. Mr. Noonan looks forward to making the budget process as seamless as possible. Mr. Regisford asked about his generation and those that follow. There are long-term impacts that need to be considered. He asked Ms. Hancock what funds are available on the town's side to offer the BOE. Ms. Hancock commented that at this time she cannot comment on this given the number of moving pieces. Many funds are governed by ordinances. Mr. Regisford asked how much is in the funds. Ms. Stargardter noted that the Council has reviewed the closing of FY23 which includes the audit. A document is available online for the balance of the accounts at the end of FY23. She will e-mail the link to Dr. Willett to share with the Board. Generally, they rely on the numbers from the end of the previous fiscal year. Ms. Philbin commented that there are opportunities to look at funds, based on regulations, that can be discussed. Regarding enrollment, there are 150 students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 146 5<sup>th</sup> graders but 183 and 190 in kindergarten and grade 1.*

*Ms. Moran commented that the town's 5-year plan is not the strategic plan for the community that she was referring to. A strategic plan would include all stakeholders and a cross section of the community that includes everyone.*

Jennifer Macionus, 159 Woodhenge, commented that she has a student at THS. This process is creating stress and concern, and the students and staff feel it. Her daughter said that she cannot imagine people being gone. She respects every educator and staff person. It is a global world, and they are talking about cutting World Language and technology programs. Coming out of COVID, Dr. Willett had to consider mental health professionals and counselors. Now they are talking about English, math, and social studies. These students will move on, but they need to think about future generations. This is affecting students, staff, and the community.

Heather McCann, 62 Crossen Drive, commented that she did not know there was a strategic plan. Tolland has a bit of an identity crisis. It does not know who it wants to be when it grows up. It is concerning to know there is a 2-3% predetermined budget for the Board. She asked if the Board's budget process is an exercise in futility. Ms. McCann commented that the Superintendent works for the Board and asked if the Council can tell the Town Manager the budget to bring forward?

*Ms. Stargardter explained that similar to the Board's process, the Town Manager is tasked with bringing the Town Manager's Recommended Budget to the Council. Mirroring the Board's process, the Council*

*deliberates and gathers input. The Council agrees upon a budget and the Town Council's Budget is brought to referendum.*

5. Town Council and Board of Education questions on the Board of Education budget

Mr. Moran commented that it was mentioned that the average Board increase has been 1.7%. Inflation has been at 1.88% so the budgets have not kept up, so they are never looking to a level services budget and are underfunding education when compared to similarly sized districts. They are not investing in education like other towns and Tolland has the lowest per pupil expenditure. He appreciates the consideration of the financial impact on families, but the Board's role is to advocate for the best resources for students. He asked how cutting six positions and losing three teachers serves the best interests of students.

Ms. Besaw recommended reviewing the high school enrollment numbers and the number of students in classes. Many have 9-10 students. When asked, Dr. Willett explained that the cuts would mean the average would be nineteen students/class rather than sixteen which for her did not seem like an overwhelmingly bad experience for anyone. These class sizes are lower than those at the elementary school level. As far as per pupil expenditures, to Dr. Willett's testimony, students are getting a fabulous education with great outcomes. More money does not mean better. They are doing well with what is being spent. The outcomes are excellent for the town and students. Based on these conversations, she did not feel reducing these positions would be detrimental.

Ms. Gallichant commented that the reductions do not serve students and are not being made in the best interest of students. She asked that the enrollment report be reviewed along with the maximum class sizes. Although a class size is lower than what is allowed by the state, based on research it may not be best for students. Cutting the positions will likely cause some courses not to be offered. When class sizes are increased, there are other impacts. Further, nineteen programs are being reduced. These reductions are being made to save money.

Mr. Holt commented that education is not cheap, and an excellent education is even less so. The Board's mandate is to provide for the educational needs of the community. The budget put forward deals with the educational needs and identifying the educational wants. It is up to the Council to decide how to fund the budget. If the needs are met and the wants can be funded, the Board can provide a list. The Board presented the budget that it needs. Dr. Willett identified where reductions could be made that would have the least impact.

Ms. McNulty noted that BQ62 speaks to what is being asked. It states that both the constantly shrinking budget and staff make it impossible to expand or evolve what is currently being offered. Thus, it is not in the best interest of students or the schools.

Ms. Philbin commented that people come and go as do programs. The average budget for the past eleven years was 1.71% and for the past five years, 1.64% and there was a budget crisis in 2016/17 where there was a 0% budget. The largest budget was 3.13% in 2015. Regarding the per pupil expenditure, they are getting a "bang for the buck" but this district is in the lowest quartile. While they do not want to throw money at things, having programs, books, and supplies costs money. She understands being fiscally responsible, but they need to do so with appropriate funding. She noted the loss of offerings at THS.

Mr. Sheridan commented that the amount of money they are talking about funding this year has not been done before. The 3% last year was a step in the right direction. Dr. Willett's 5-year plan has an average of 4.16% year-over-year. They are starting at 6.35% and he urged that it be approved. It is needed and will put the district in a better place for students. He believes they can dig deeper and find more than \$649K that can be reallocated. This will be a focus of the FFC.

Mr. Moran commented that aside from the financial impact, he was looking for the perspective of what is best for students.



Ms. McNulty commented that the BOE put forth a 6% budget last year and a 3% budget was adopted.

Ms. Yudichak asked a question posed by a resident. The question was whether a range for the budget is decided by the Superintendent and the Town Manager before Board discussion. She asked if the Board is doing its due diligence without influence from the Superintendent and the Town Manager.

Ms. Stargardter asked if Mr. Foley provided a budget cap to the Superintendent. Mr. Foley responded that he did not. While he discusses scenarios such as insurance with Dr. Willett, the budget is not discussed.

Ms. Yudichak commented that this is different than it was when she was on the Board, and she appreciates what Mr. Foley is doing for the community.

Mr. Holt suggested that whoever posed this question refer to Board meeting videos and minutes. All the numbers Dr. Willett brought to the Board were requested.

Ms. Philbin confirmed that the initial proposal was 6.98% and that 9.78% would be needed for level services. Scenarios were requested.

Ms. Yudichak asked about UISF and if the funds were moved out of the Board's budget, if the \$650K would be used for staff, classes, and programs and how much could be brought back.

Ms. Stargardter explained that the Board is asking for the town to assume the interest and principal payment on UISF that currently the Board funds and that the town not to take that amount of funding away from the Board. The expense would come out of the Board's budget but not the funds. The funds would be used for items rather than paying the principal and interest. Discussions on how this could work within the town budget would be appropriate for future Council meetings when they can get more information from staff.

Ms. Gallichant commented that the request is for the \$650K because the Board should not hold debt and it should not be paying this out of its operating budget. The assumption is that it would be built into the town's capital plan or that the town would use its bond rating for a loan. The \$650K would be in the Board's operating budget and put the Board in a better place to get to a level services budget.

Dr. Willett commented that the Board's intention is not that the \$650K be removed from the Board's budget one time; otherwise, there would be a \$650K hole the following year. This would be in perpetuity.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that if the town picks up the \$650K payment, and does not take the funding, the Board's request would be 4.84%.

Mr. Holt commented that the Board is not laser focused on the two items noted but there are a series of others that should be addressed and reviewed.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the Board is requesting that either the \$650K debt payment be taken off the BOE's operational cost and it be provided with a 4.84% budget increase or that it be provided with a 6.35% budget increase.

Dr. Willett explained that \$650K is approximately 1.4% of the budget. Between 4.84% and 6.35% are many positions and programs. The \$650K would not bring back TALC but the average cost per position is \$52K/\$54K.

Ms. Yudichak asked if in the 5-year plan they are aiming for a 4% budget increase each year.

Dr. Willett explained that the 5-year plan, if funded at 6.98% would have the following increase requests: 2.92%, 4.46%, 3.22%, 3.21%. This would provide stability for planning. Effective planning cannot be done if they do not know if they will have the resources. The objective is to go five years without significant position cuts. He added that such a commitment makes the district more competitive with magnet and charter schools and provides stability and makes the district more appealing to other districts which may be looking at Tolland for potential tuition.

Ms. Yudichak asked about the Transportation line item. Ms. Stargardter directed her to BQ5.

Mr. Noonan asked if they are thinking of outliers when thinking long term and if so, what they would be. Dr. Willett explained that they do not know what ECS funding, or excess costs will be in five years, but some basic assumptions can be made. They would not fluctuate more than a standard deviation, but budgets have in the past. If budgets stabilize, a lot can be done.

Mr. Noonan asked about the budget's monetary increase. Dr. Willett noted that it is \$2.7M at 6.35% and \$2.1M at 4.84%. Mr. Noonan asked about the mill rate. Ms. Hancock noted that this is not yet available. Ms. Stargardter noted that many things contribute to the mill rate request that goes with the Council's budget. Mr. Noonan asked if there is any support at the state level. Dr. Willett explained that many things go on and the town has been shortchanged on ECS funding. He invited Mr. Noonan to reach out to him for further conversation. Ms. Philbin noted that there is nothing preventing the Council, Board, and others from requesting more from the state. Ms. Stargardter noted that she can discuss drafting a joint letter to the state delegation with the Board Chair.

Mr. Marie commented that the Board's Adopted Budget is slightly lower than the Superintendent's Proposed Budget with the insurance offset. He asked if other modifications were made. Dr. Willett explained that the Board wanted to minimize the impact while having a budget that would successfully pass at referendum. He cited program and staff reductions. He will include this as BQ71. Mr. Marie asked if the budget assumes 100% staffing under salaries. Dr. Willett responded that it does.

Ms. Buckler commented that she heard a narrative in town that there is a tradition of threatening to cut positions in an effort to get a higher budget. She cited BQ62. She asked if the reductions are real cuts. Dr. Willett responded that BQ62 speaks to this. He explained how this happens with the example of Skills for Adolescents program that was cut but was able to be offered due to grants. The grants have run out and the program will likely not return next year. The district has a lot of hardworking people and when he hears this, it diminishes the work being done.

Mr. Holt commented that Dr. Willett and his staff are very good at making things work. A lot happens behind the scenes which allows them to adjust as needed. It is not a scare tactic. What is being proposed is to the best of their knowledge at this point.

Ms. Gallichant commented that as a Board member she is asking Dr. Willett to do all he can to find ways to alleviate some of the cuts.

Ms. Buckler asked if as Council members should assume that Dr. Willett will always be able to make it work.

Dr. Willett responded that there is a threshold. They have a great school system with people doing great things. He speaks with staff and decisions are made. World Language is an example of a program that changed over the years and other programs have been developed.

Ms. Stargardter asked what the average cost is per student for pay-to-play. Dr. Willett responded that it is \$200. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the average cost for students to participate in clubs at TIS, TMS, and THS is not included and is more. She asked if parents with students in the TPS are paying more than only their tax bill to support their students. Dr. Willett responded that they are.

Ms. Stargardter asked about the value of the annual donations by the PTOs, booster clubs, Project Graduation, TEF, and other community groups. Dr. Willett noted that it is tens of thousands of dollars.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that this money is not budgeted and requested examples of what is provided.

Ms. Gallichant explained that the PTO (Birch Grove and TIS) raise up to \$60K/year and funds may not be used toward operational expenses. The PTO provides items such as library books.

Ms. Stargardter asked how long the district has asked parents to pay for school supplies. Dr. Willett explained that the district budgets for paper and supplies but as long as he has been in the district (2006), parents have purchased items such as binders.

Ms. Stargardter cited BQ50 and asked if intervention methods are less expensive than the requirements of a 504 or IEP. Dr. Willett noted that they are. Ms. Stargardter asked if the district is doing enough in the budget with intervention efforts to continue to keep the cost saving methods in place to protect future budgets. Dr. Willett explained that in general, when there are more interventionists, fewer people seek out special education services. Ms. Gallichant commented that during the administrator rounds, they all spoke about the concerns with intervention rates and not having enough interventionists. They also discussed those who fall below the level for assistance and class sizes that make it difficult to reach students. In turn, more students need intervention. Ms. Gallichant commented that she does not believe the budget has adequate support.

Ms. Stargardter noted that Mr. Foley opened with remarks, and she responded to them as they apply to the BOE budget. In Tolland, the charter requires a BOE to be elected on a rotating basis and the Council every two years. Each elected official is duly elected or appointed to their positions. One of the charter-required charges of the BOE is to forward a budget to the Council. Time and work go into this. Ms. Stargardter requested that the budget that passed by a majority vote of the BOE go to the Council in the Town Manager's Budget. It does not matter to her that not everyone supported it but a majority of duly elected BOE members did so. The Council budget will come out of Council with a majority vote. She noted that she voted "no" on the last two Council budgets in Council. The next day she wrote an op-ed that the budget was in the best interest of the town to pass, and she committed to support the budget that comes out of the Council by majority vote whether or not hers is one of those. Ms. Stargardter asked that the Town Manager's Budget include the BOE budget. She asked if the Board members support the BOE budget that is before the Council now.

Ms. Gallichant commented that she is looking forward to how the Council will help the Board with the very healthy town funds and provide more than what is suggested in the proposal. That said, she would support the budget going forth so it would not fail referendum. From her experience, if it fails, additional cuts would have to be made. She would not want to damage the district any further. Thus, she would support it, but she does not want it to look like she is letting the Council off the hook from having important conversations. Mr. Holt responded that just like the Board, the town has a process. If the question is does the Board support the budget it put forward and believe it is in the best interest, the majority vote says that it does. If she is asking if they feel that the process of taking it from that point to the Council is appropriate, that is not a question for him to answer. He supports the budget the BOE put forward and the budget that comes out of the Council. He believes in the ability of those who will touch the budget along the way and know they will have the best interest of his kid, home, and the town in mind. Ms. Philbin commented that she believes in the process. She wishes the budget had more and voted "no" because she wanted more but believes in the process and trusts it. She supports the budget. Mr. Regisford commented that he did not want to eliminate any positions but does not want any additional positions or programs to be taken. He supports the budget as long as no additional positions are taken. Mr. Thompson commented that he supports the budget and will support whatever the Council puts forward. Ms. Besaw agreed with Mr. Thompson. Ms. McNulty commented that she supports the budget as the bare minimum of what Dr. Willett needs to do his job. She would like it to be larger. Mr. Bode commented that he supports the budget. It puts the district in a position for a sustainable 5-year plan. Mr. Sheridan noted that he supports the budget as well and agreed with Mr. Bode.

Ms. Stargardter told the Town Manager that there is consensus and agreement. She hopes the community knows how much work was put into the budget and continues to have faith and trust in them as elected officials to make the best decisions for the town. The BOE worked hard to get here, and she is grateful. The work now begins for the Council and the Town Manager.

Mr. Foley asked if as Chair, Ms. Stargardter is telling him to forego the process and to rubber stamp the Board budget and put it forward. Ms. Stargardter responded that she is not. She explained that she asked him to keep the BOE budget intact, as it is, and incorporate it into the Town Manager's Budget. Mr. Foley asked if this is the consensus of the entire Council. Ms. Stargardter responded that it is not. The Council did not vote on this. She explained that she just asked each Board member if they support the budget and Mr. Foley indicated earlier today that their split vote made his job easier, and she is bringing him consensus from the BOE in support of the BOE budget number presented at the very minimum.

Mr. Holt commented that the Board cannot direct the Town Manager to put anything into his budget. Ms. Stargardter agreed and noted that she cannot either. Mr. Holt noted that the Board offers and supports its budget proposal but the process from there must be followed. Ms. Stargardter agreed. Ms. Yudichak commented that she does not feel comfortable with Ms. Stargardter's question. It is a Council item. She understands that everyone came together but feels that the Town Manager is being put on the spot. Mr. Foley commented that this is what is happening. Ms. Stargardter is trying to put pressure on him, and he noted that he is going to keep doing his job. Ms. Stargardter commented that he should, and she wants him to. Mr. Foley commented that his job may not be what she wants. Ms. Stargardter commented that this happens sometimes, and they have a relationship in which they work through that. Mr. Foley commented that he appreciates the ask. He will do what he was hired to do to the best of his ability. Ms. Stargardter thanked him and noted that she appreciates this. She apologized if she misled anything. She explained that Mr. Foley brought concern about lack of consensus, and she asked the Board if there was consensus. Mr. Foley commented that the same thing happened last year and he would love to see consensus. Ms. Stargardter commented that she believes that at the end of last year's meeting there was a similar conversation and a different outcome. She wanted to ensure that the public, Mr. Foley, and Dr. Willett know that there is support from the BOE for the budget that was presented. Mr. Foley noted that the Council will have a chance to vote on this. He will recommend a budget. If it is an increase or decrease of 12%, the Council will have the final say. His job is to do what is best fiscally and to do the other things as he was hired to do. He does not have a say in the final outcome. He does not have a vote. Mr. Foley commented that it is unfair to put pressure on him to try to get him to lean the scale one way or another at this point. He thinks it is out of line. Ms. Stargardter is welcome to bring it to where she wants it or more. Ms. Stargardter apologized if there was any insinuation that she does not want it to go through the process. She wants it to go through the process. She explained that she was responding to Mr. Foley's statement at the beginning of the meeting where he indicated that there was not consensus for the budget and she just asked every member of the BOE and an answer was provided. Mr. Foley commented that Ms. Stargardter sent him a text saying it was a 5-4 vote and they both expressed disappointment. This is what he was expressing. He understands his charge.

Ms. Gallichant commented that at the beginning of the meeting Mr. Foley stated that there was not consensus, in his terms meaning a split party vote, and this made his job easy. There is no policy that states that he has to base his budget on consensus, party line votes, unanimous decisions etc. As she stated there was consensus at 6.35% and over. Ms. Stargardter is saying that there is consensus at 6.35%. Ms. Gallichant did not take this as an action to Mr. Foley but a response to his comment that he had an easy decision based on the split party vote. It was not a directive.

Mr. Foley stated that he was asked to bring the BOE budget forward by the Council Chair.

Mr. Holt recommended that they move on.

Mr. Foley asked what his charge is. Ms. Stargardter responded that Mr. Foley has a charge that did not change from this meeting. His charge is what it always has been. A vote was not taken to change anything.

**6. Adjournment**

Mr. Moran motioned to adjourn at 10:19PM.

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Motion passed unanimously.

