

**BUDGET MEETING MINUTES
TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID MEETING
COUNCIL CHAMBERS OR ZOOM**

March 25, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.

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Katherine Stargardter

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

Members Absent: none

Also Present: Brian Foley, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Beverly Bellody, Director, Human Services; Mike Wilkinson, Director, Administrative Services (Zoom); Scott Lappen, Director, Public Works; Bruce Watt, Director, Recreation; Teresa Kristoff, Assistant Director, Human Services (Zoom); Barbara Pettijohn, Director, Library (Zoom)

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:03PM.

Ms. Stargardter noted that a Public Hearing is scheduled for April 2, 2024, at 7PM (hybrid) and is an additional opportunity for the public to provide comments.

2. PUBLIC PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (*Limited to Agenda items*) (2-minute limit) none
3. Consideration of the Town Manager's Proposed FY 2024-2025 Budget
 - a. Law Enforcement
Mr. Foley provided an overview:
 - Law Enforcement, Budget \$649,258, Decrease \$68,700

Discussion/Questions

Lori Sherwood, Tolland Resident State Troopers Office, was in attendance.

Mr. Marie asked if a sergeant was requested. Mr. Foley explained that the Lieutenant presented to the Council and asked that the Council consider a sergeant based on the seniority of the troopers. Mr. Marie asked if this was something Mr. Foley felt they could do without for a bit of if there are more substantive reasons why one is not included in the budget. Mr. Foley explained that he has not seen any definitive proof that having a sergeant makes the town any more or less safe. He is very satisfied with the services received from the CT Resident State Trooper Program. The job descriptions of troopers and sergeants are much different and at this point, he likes the patrol aspect. There is much less of this with a supervisor. Mr. Foley noted that he is pleased with how it is now but if the Council decides otherwise, he is happy to implement its decision.

Ms. Yudichak asked if a sergeant is added, if someone would be removed. Mr. Foley responded that his understanding, based on the Lieutenant's presentation, is that there would be four slots – three filled by troopers and another by a sergeant or all four would be filled by troopers with one of them possibly an administrative trooper. Ms. Yudichak referenced page 286 and asked about the increase in Food & Clothing. Mr. Foley noted that this is for community outreach as well as food & water for victims.

Mr. Moran asked if Trooper Eklund's replacement is temporary. Mr. Foley explained that he believes they are waiting to learn what the town would like to do before someone is permanently assigned. The town was not involved in the selection process but would like to be.

Mr. Noonan commented that Mr. Foley said that if troopers decide to stay in Tolland that they will earn more. Mr. Foley responded he did not say this. He explained that junior troopers make less money than senior troopers. The longer they are here, the more one's seniority goes up along with the state police step increases. Mr. Noonan commented that he agrees with wanting the crime-driven statistics but having had a couple of major incidents in town this past year, and the Lieutenant advocate for a sergeant, he asked if the town can say "no". Also, he asked if this is a place to cut without someone losing their job. Mr. Foley explained that should significant cuts to the budget be needed, this would be considered equally with others. Regarding major incidents in town, having a sergeant and more troopers would not have affected those incidents. In fact, for the street takeover, the state police were aware of it well in advance and many people they are speaking about made the decisions on how it was handled. Undercovers were in the operation the night of the incident. Mr. Foley noted that the investigative planning was fantastic. Possibly the operational end could have been improved but they were in town and on it. There was not a staff shortage. Regarding the incident where an individual bailed from a car and went into neighborhoods off the highway, the sergeant would not be working the 11PM-7AM shift and would not have made much of a difference. Resident troopers did not respond until notified early in the morning and Trooper Eklund did a good job addressing it.

Ms. Buckler confirmed that none of the resident troopers are trainees. She referenced the Performance Measurements (pg. 289), specifically burglaries. Ms. Sherwood noted that the estimates are based on the expected population increase with the apartments going in as well as the marijuana factory. They are her guesstimates. Mr. Foley noted that these are not officially generated numbers from Nexgen or the state police and are not an accurate predictor. Ms. Buckler asked about Traffic Citations and the 2024-2025 estimate that the number will double. Ms. Sherwood noted that the number does not look right to her. Mr. Foley explained that anecdotally, he expects traffic citations to increase due to reasons including increased staff, morale, and grants for traffic enforcement.

Mr. Sce asked who submitted the department's proposed budget. Mr. Foley noted that he received it from Ms. Sherwood. Ms. Hancock receives the numbers from the state. Mr. Sce asked about the cost to appropriate a sergeant. A discussion took place. Mr. Foley will research the information and update the Council on the cost of four troopers plus one sergeant as well as three troopers plus one sergeant. Mr. Sce asked what the Lieutenant recommended. Mr. Foley responded that he believes the recommendation was for one sergeant and three troopers but would be happy with one sergeant and four troopers as well.

Ms. Stargardter asked if the Lieutenant provided the requested statistics and the MOU. Mr. Foley responded that they have not been received. To get the data, they need to determine what they want, the format, and they will need the permanent replacement to be involved in the discussion and be trained in Nexgen. They have not yet signed the MOU, but he will reach out to learn more. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the state pays for part of the program – 15% for two troopers including fringe. The town pays 85% for two and 100% for two. Regarding oversight, Ms. Stargardter understood that the troopers could call into Troop C for oversight, particularly on

more complex cases. Mr. Foley explained that all of the troopers have a sergeant from Troop C although one is not dedicated to the town. Ms. Stargardter asked if they replaced a resident trooper with a sergeant if the trooper would lose their job. Mr. Foley noted that they would not, there are many openings. Ms. Stargardter asked about grants for traffic enforcement. Mr. Foley explained that there are state and federal grants. Ms. Hancock and Ms. Sherwood explained that DUI Enforcement and Rural Road grants go to the town. These grants are managed in a separate fund which is used for overtime required to perform enforcement actions required by the grants.

Mr. Moran confirmed that the Lieutenant's recommendation was three troopers plus a sergeant. He asked if there is a way to get the data to help them make a decision. Mr. Foley responded that he does not believe so. The information available now is perception – does the town perceive itself as being safe? Mr. Foley noted that the town is very safe but social media exacerbates everything that happens in town. They do not know how many troopers are needed because they do not have any data. It is completely anecdotal, but he believes four troopers is a decent level. Perception falls on the shoulders of the Council and what the constituents say. Do they share if they feel safe? It is perception.

Mr. Marie asked about the increase in Communications. Mr. Foley explained that TN submits a budget based on calls and population. The same formula is applied to all associated towns.

Mr. Noonan commented that Mr. Foley stated that the proposed budget is to maintain four troopers and add a sergeant. Mr. Foley responded that he did not state this. The proposed budget is for four troopers, and this is his recommendation which is the status quo of police protection from last year to this year. Mr. Noonan commented that Lieutenant Hayward asked for four troopers and a sergeant. Mr. Foley responded that he believes the request was for one sergeant and three troopers. Mr. Noonan commented that this was not the information he received. He would like to get clarification on this. Mr. Foley noted that he will provide the cost for one sergeant and three troopers and one sergeant and four troopers. The Council has the number for four troopers.

Ms. Yudichak requested that Mr. Foley provide job descriptions as well.

b. Public Works

- Request for Information, Comparison of Infrastructure/Staffing
- Infrastructure
- Buildings & Grounds Maintained
- Fields & Grounds Maintenance
- Pavement Management Update
 - The Process
- Pavement Management Concepts
- Town of Tolland Estimated 2020 Pavement Condition
- Budget Details 2024-2025
 - Parks & Facilities, Budget \$1,621,358, Increase \$41,547 (2.6% vs. prior year)
 - Streets & Roads, Budget \$2,135,707, Increase \$46,734

Discussion/Questions

Parks and Facilities

Mr. Sce asked about the increase in overtime. Mr. Foley explained that field usage has increased and in turn maintenance. He would be happy to add a laborer to cover the additional hours. Mr. Lappen explained that from mid-May to mid-October they have four 10-hour days but in Parks and Facilities they have to split the crew and need to add additional people on Mondays and Fridays to keep up with field use. They need to pick up trash, re-line the fields, and ensure the cemeteries are presentable. Mr. Sce commented that nothing is new, but overtime has increased. Mr. Lappen explained that wages have increased and thus has the overtime rate. The overtime budget is for seasonal work and snow. While he could reduce it, he would not want to return to the Council in January if they are out of funds for overtime.

Ms. Yudichak asked if it would make sense to hire a per diem person. Mr. Lappen explained that they hire seasonal help and cited difficulty in recruitment. The salary would appear lower than that of surrounding towns but now that they have included benefit information in the advertisements, it has helped. This is why they would like to get a full-time position back although it be a little higher (estimated \$46K/\$48K + benefits) than the overtime.

Mr. Moran asked if they looked at how much an additional laborer would offset overtime. Mr. Lappen explained that over the summer many staff take vacation time and coverage is needed.

Mr. Noonan commented that Mr. Foley is advocating for an increase of \$41K for Public Works and a decrease of \$68,700 decrease for Public Safety. Mr. Foley explained that he is not saying that he is advocating for the \$41K. The union contract (\$39K of the \$41K) tied his hands. Thus, essentially the Council advocated for it when it approved the contract.

Ms. Stargardter confirmed that adding an additional laborer would not eliminate overtime and that this department does not plow the roads. Mr. Lappen noted that they plow the schools, firehouses, and municipal buildings. Ms. Stargardter noted that in the description notes maintenance for fields includes those of the BOE. Ms. Hancock explained that this is reported to the state as the cost of services provided to the BOE. It is part of the MOU with the BOE in regard to providing maintenance and is part of the staffing budget. Ms. Stargardter cited Building Improvements and Material and asked if looking forward they expect it go to down with a new building for Parks & Rec. Mr. Lappen explained that this is for materials for all of the buildings.

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Mr. Lappen responded "maybe." They try to accommodate everyone's needs but when they do so, something else suffers. They have good people who are always willing to work but they can only be split so much.

Streets & Roads

Mr. Marie asked about Equipment Rental. Mr. Lappen explained that this includes paint for the double yellow line and shoulder striping. The service is contracted through the state or CROG.

Mr. Moran asked why the line has increased so much. Mr. Lappen explained that the cost of paint has increased, and painting is done annually.

Mr. Sce requested that they look at any possible adjustments to overtime. Mr. Foley noted that adjustments have been made but he will review it again as well as Parks and Facilities.

Ms. Stargardter asked where the savings are recognized given the purchase of the grader. Mr. Lappen explained that they did not have the grader when the budget was submitted. They will still need to purchase calcium but should see a savings as gravel will be reclaimed. This will be seen under Road Material. He estimated that \$25K could be cut from this line. Ms. Stargardter asked if the \$25K in materials included outsourcing for a grader to come to the town to grade. Mr. Lappen noted that the remaining \$30K was for material and he has worked out a deal with a neighboring town to have the road sprayed with a calcium product. He would not expect there to be more savings in the line this year and will need to see what things cost. Ms. Stargardter referenced page 253, Program Objectives and Goals, 7th bullet. After confirmation, she would like, "third year of a five-year" to be updated to, "fifth year of a five-year".

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Mr. Lappen responded that it is.

- c. Community Services – Human Services, Library, Recreation
- Human Services Budget \$396,258, Increase \$3,336 (0.87% vs. prior year)
 - Senior Center Services Budget \$104,203, Increase \$2,697 (2.66% vs. prior year)
 - Library Budget \$462,254, Increase \$11,685 (2.59% vs. prior year)
 - Recreation Department Budget \$173,890; Increase \$2,654 (1.55% vs. prior year)

Discussions/Questions

Ms. Yudichak referenced page 224 and noted that it seems that people needed more services and asked if they are seeing an increase in the number of residents needing assistance. Ms. Bellody explained that they are seeing new faces. People are hearing about items such as fuel assistance, the food pantry, renters' rebate, and Husky benefits. There has been more interaction with the programs. Ms. Yudichak asked if the poverty rate has increased in Tolland. Ms. Bellody explained that many of the entitlement programs are subject to income guidelines that increase annually. Ms. Yudichak asked if this is due to the increase in the age of the population or single families. Ms. Bellody explained that they have seen an increase in families as well as in the number of elderly people reaching out. It may be due to the increased communication about the programs as well. Ms. Yudichak asked about the HVCC. Ms. Bellody noted that they have been doing more referrals and will be working with Mr. Foley on a model for a Prevention Specialist.

Mr. Moran asked if they assist people with applications. Ms. Bellody responded that they do. They do screening and sign people up for programs based on eligibility.

Ms. Buckler commented that it is not necessarily that they are seeing an increase in poverty, the state program limits are increasing. She asked if this is what the department is seeing – people seeking information when they become aware of the program limits. Ms. Bellody responded that this is part of it. The application process has become easier as well. Additionally, while someone's income may increase, other expenses in the household are going up as well and people are feeling the stress and seeking programs.

Mr. Noonan asked if the poverty increase for Tolland is a recorded percentage by year. He asked how it was calculated for this fiscal year. Ms. Bellody explained that it varies by program and she can provide them. It is calculated by the state and federal governments. Mr. Noonan asked if the number of families that have applied for assistance has increased. Ms. Kristoff explained that the programs change the income guidelines every year, thus changing the bracket for the lower

threshold. They are finding more families falling within the threshold. In terms of the Food Pantry, typically 3-4 families were being supported per week and now it is 6-8 families. Mr. Noonan asked about the data for fuel assistance. Ms. Stargardter referred to page 224 for the data.

Ms. Stargardter noted that funds for programs such as fuel assistance come from the state. The department assists residents with applications. She asked if people are seeking food pantry services outside of town. Ms. Bellody explained that they are. When someone applies, they provide information about other local programs as well, but the majority just use Tolland's food pantry. Ms. Stargardter asked about the youth services programs. Ms. Kristoff explained that the back-to-school vouchers and Care & Share programs are offered in the fall. For Care & Share they supported 157 households, 256 residents and the back-to-school vouchers increased to 45 families from approximately 35. Currently, they are gearing up for the summer musical and already have 50 registered participants. She is also working with the LPC and BOE to expand into more community programming as well as researching other opportunities. Ms. Stargardter noted that almost the entire budget is payroll and the HVCC. Ms. Kristoff explained that they are supported via grants.

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Ms. Bellody responded that it is.

Ms. Yudichak commented that poverty increased and there is more need. Ms. Bellody explained that the poverty income guidelines increased as well as need. Program availability has also increased and become more streamlined.

SENIOR CENTER

Ms. Yudichak asked if more is needed for Programming with the increase in programs. Ms. Bellody explained that they have had a frugal budget and rely on volunteers and donations from the community. The crunch is with the limited hours of the 25 hour/week position. They are looking at grant funding as well for programming materials.

Mr. Marie asked about the fluctuation in the line Senior Citizens Programs (page 218). Mr. Foley explained that 2021 was due to COVID. Mr. Marie asked about the balance of the ARPA account for seniors. Mr. Foley noted that it was specific for capital for senior centers. They will be going forward with the pickleball court.

Mr. Sce asked about the request for 10 additional hours/week. Mr. Foley explained that it would be an increase for the individual currently in the position.

Ms. Stargardter noted that the Senior Center is running on \$4K in programming with a substantial increase in attendance. Ms. Bellody explained that that Ms. Kowalshyn could benefit from additional funds in this line but when they were putting the budget together, they were trying to be mindful of Mr. Foley's message and the priority of requesting additional staff hours.

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Ms. Bellody responded that she would like to see it increased. The priority would be for the additional 10 hours/week for the administrative position.

LIBRARY

Mr. Sce asked about the increase in Payroll over two years. Ms. Hancock explained that for a time there was some attrition. They are now fully staffed. Additionally, due to COVID, the library was not open full hours. Mr. Sce requested the actuals.

Ms. Buckler asked about recovery after COVID. Ms. Pettijohn responded that they are pretty much where they were prior to COVID, and people are still returning for the first time since then.

Mr. Moran thanked Ms. Pettijohn for all her years of service and doing a great job at the library. Mr. Noonan echoed Mr. Moran. The library is the epicenter of care and love in the town. The outreach programs and wonderful facilities are awesome.

Ms. Stargardter thanked Ms. Pettijohn – they will definitely miss her.

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Ms. Pettijohn responded that it is.

RECREATION

Ms. Stargardter asked if Celebrate Tolland was cut from the budget. Mr. Foley responded that it was not. Ms. Hancock explained that it was supposed to be, but it was not cut. Mr. Foley explained that if they are looking for reductions, if cancelled, it would be a savings of \$3K (Professional Services) and requires a lot of work on the part of the staff. Ms. Stargardter commented that when the Recreation Coordinator position was added, the hope was that it would develop new programming and progress to being somewhat self-funded. She asked if they are seeing increases to the Recreation Fund that help offset the position. Mr. Watt responded that they have had an increase in programs and registration. The afterschool program has been reignited and they are three shy of a full program. Camp is thriving as well as other programs. It is difficult to say if the position has been offset given the ARPA funding and programs being offered at half price. He would like to see what happens when they go back to full price. If enrollments are sustained, it could offset the position and other expenditures. Mr. Foley noted that when they promote the programs it is a win. In regard to Celebrate Tolland, Ms. Stargardter noted that she sees value in it but asked for their perspective. Mr. Foley explained that it takes a lot of staff work and fundraising beyond the \$3K. That said, he wants to have a signature event in town, and it seems to be Harvest Fest. Harvest Fest and Celebrate Tolland are competing entities, are weeks apart, and the numbers do not compare. Celebrate Tolland is distal to the center and ADA accessibility although it is addressed. Mr. Foley believes the two events drain from each other and would like to focus on the signature event in the center of town with the thought of moving a lot of the programming from Celebrate Tolland to the neighboring green. Ms. Stargardter asked if they were to cut Celebrate Tolland, if the town would support the Harvest Fest event which is primarily organized by the PCC. Mr. Watt explained that that the only associated cost would be if the inflatables and games are used; otherwise, there would not be additional costs. Ms. Stargardter asked what staff would be doing otherwise if Celebrate Tolland is not held. Mr. Watt explained that summer is a full sprint and by the time Celebrate Tolland is held, the focus is on fall programming and other special events. There would not be a lack of work. Ms. Stargardter asked about Utilities. Recreation Services is one of the few departments that pays for its own utilities. Ms. Hancock explained that historically the recreation department was at Town Hall. When recreation moved to the Parker School building, the utilities became part of the department's expenditures. They were be paid out of the Recreation Fund but it got to a

point where utilities were so costly that the town had to pick up some of the costs. The department could only increase the cost of providing programs by so much. Thus, utilities were phased into the budget to reach the cap of \$44K (an agreed upon amount). Program revenues cover the differential for anything over this amount. The differential amount will be provided to the Council.

Ms. Stargardter asked if this budget is sufficient to meet the program objectives and goals for fiscal year 2025. Mr. Watt responded that it is.

Mr. Foley reviewed the next steps for the budget.

- April 2nd, 7PM, Council Chambers, Public Hearing on Town Manager's recommended budget,
- April 4th, 7PM, Council Discussion, Budget Finalized
- April 10th, Budget Advertised
- April 17th, 7PM, Council Chambers, Annual Budget Presentation
- April 18th, Senior Center, 12PM, Annual Budget Presentation
- May 7th, Annual Budget Referendum
- May 14th, Council establishes mill rate following referendum adoption.

4. PUBLIC LISTED PARTICIPATION (*Limited to Agenda Items*) (3-minute limit)

George Ulrich, Fish and Game Road, commented on higher taxes. While everyone thinks they are all needed, and to some extent they are, he asked that the Council remember that higher taxes lead to a need for more help with fuel oil, from the food pantry, and other programs. A lot of seniors do not want to put their hands out and feel bad about it, but it is getting to a point where more people will have to. It is a sad place. There were 26 in his extended family growing up and now there are only 2 in town. He understands the need for an increase, and it was said that it was only \$29/month. It is broken down to sound like not much but when looking at the expense for the year, it wipes out his social security increase. He asked where he would come up with the extra for food, gas, oil, and electricity. Every year he is a little worse off as are others. He asked the Council to be aware of everyone the budget impacts and consider that while the town has needs, so do others.

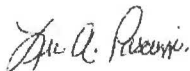
5. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Marie motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:16PM.

Mr. Moran seconded the motion.

Without objection, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair