

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT

**SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**

Robert F. Parisi Council Chambers

May 7, 2024

6:30 P.M.

RECEIVED FOR RECORD 5-10-24

AT 1:43pm AND RECEIVED BY

Kristen Panzo TOWN CLERK

**RECORD OF VOTES & MINUTES**

The Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, May 7, 2024 was called to order at 6:30 p.m. There was a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance was said. Councilors in attendance were Autumn Allinson, Craig Fishbein (via telephone), Thomas Laffin, Christina Tatta, Samuel Carmody, Vincent Testa, Christopher Regan, Jesse Reynolds and Chairman Joseph A. Marrone III. Mayor Vincent Cervoni, Comptroller Timothy Sena and Town Clerk Kristen Panzo were also present.

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call
3. Discussion and possible action on amendments to the Town of Wallingford Budget for FY 2024-2025

Councilor Allinson spoke about wanting to restore funding to the BOE Budget. She believes that the quality of education especially in Wallingford is important and that teachers do not become teachers for the money. She says that for years people have tried to maintain the staffing levels and pay levels, despite the growing needs in the community at large. She also mentions that the public has come to the council many times asking for increased services, maintenance and refurbishing of parks, buildings, schools and service departments.

**MOTION WAS MADE to accept the proposed budget (including the ARPA funding) and add 2.3 million back to the BOE's sustained services plan. Additionally, motioning to make the current part-time Police Accreditation Manager a full-time role, with an increase of \$21,594, and an additional \$14,870 for the IT manager, as was negotiated for his hire. This request totals \$2,336,464 dollars added back to the budget and increase the mill rate and revenue lines accordingly. This would bring the tax need to \$140,810,441 and total budget need to \$197,417,971.**

**MADE BY: ALLINSON**

**SECONDED BY: LAFFIN**

Councilor Carmody thinks it is very important to restore funds for the BOE. He says with declining test scores, hikes to health care costs, removing the cross guards from the police budget and put it into the BOE budget it is no wonder the BOE's budget struggles

each year. With the cutting of teachers, the Wallingford Schools cannot succeed in giving the children who go there the proper tools they need to succeed. He is in favor of restoring money to the BOE.

Councilor Laffin understands the \$2.3 million dollars is a lot of money, but is agreement that the BOE should have money restored back into their sustained services plan. He believes that something needs to change and that restoring money is not enough. He talked about his time on the BOE and how when he was on it they had to maintain the school buildings. He talked about the fact that the BOE has to have some increase each year. He says he is concerned when he hears people say that he would be embarrassed by the state the schools are in now. He thinks there needs to be a better way of handling things like keeping up with the schools.

Councilor Marrone agrees with Councilor Laffin and also has kids in the school district. Education as a whole is very important to him. He is concerned about the path the BOE is on and how can we fix it so it does not continue to happen. He thinks a dramatic change is needed. He says in the eight years he has been on the council he has seen the government side of the budget starve and the BOE side of the budget thrive. Town buildings have not been able to keep up like they are supposed to because of this.

Councilor Tatta talked about the past surpluses for the BOE. She discussed how the number of certified teachers has gone down each year. She said last year the council restored money to the BOE budget and suggested where they should spend the money. She was a little disappointed when she heard that the money was not used for those specific items. She said that the schools are not what they were 20 years ago and she always remembered the BOE getting an increase every year so she did not know if it is a money thing or if there is something else going on. She believes that there are areas where the BOE can save money and not have to cut teachers to do so. One example was hiring a PR company for the whole one high school campaign. By restoring some of the BOE's budget, tax payers will have to pay more per year in taxes and some might not be able to afford the tax increase.

Councilor Testa talked about his background as a culinary arts instructor at Lyman Hall. He has been an instructor for almost 10 years. He talked about his eight years on the BOE and how things were much different than they are now. He talked about his time at Sheehan High School and how when he was in school all of the teachers there were brand new. He talked about some teachers who are at the top step and making six figures and what the total cost is to give all of these teachers' increases every year. It is in the millions as far as a line item in the budget. He said the council's job is not to tell the BOE of any department where to cut and save money. The demographics have changed over the years, so saying that the schools are not like they were 20 years ago is incorrect. He made the suggestion of possibly talking to the BOE after the budget to talk about a mass early retirement for teachers and other administration, that way you can save on salaries going forward. It is only going to get worse next year if something isn't done this year.

Councilor Reynolds is in favor of restoring money to the BOE budget. He believes that the Town doesn't pay for what they are supposed to pay for. The budget this year, most of that money is not coming from the tax payers. It is coming from other sources of funds that the Town of Wallingford will not have next year which poses a problem. The cost of everything continues to go up and the Town needs to realize that it needs to pay for things at cost value. He would rather see taxes raised and the town pay for what things actually cost and that the town is paying for things they are actually supposed to be paying for. He talked about the \$2.3 million dollars restored and where that percentage comes from. That figure was the number it would take to pay for insurance and salaries so no one in the BOE would lose their job.

Councilor Regan wanted to remind everyone that what the town is facing is from state cuts in reimbursements and Wallingford isn't the only town facing these budget issues. He is in favor of the motion. He mentions that town council has a responsibility to keep the mill rate below 32 and keep taxes down.

**ROLL CALL**

**ALLINSON: AYE**

**CARMODY: AYE**

**FISHBEIN: NAY**

**LAFFIN: AYE**

**REGAN: AYE**

**REYNOLDS: AYE**

**TATTA: NAY**

**TESTA: AYE**

**MARRONE: NAY**

**MOTION: PASSED**

Councilor Tatta asked Mr. Sena about the median household number and on average what that is. She spoke about knowing what the average household number is. She wants to compare the numbers to see what this increase means for the taxpayers making a certain amount of money per year and how it will affect them. She talked about possibly using the money set aside for the community pool to possibly fund some of the sustainable services for the BOE.

The meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Panzo  
Town Clerk

Meeting digitally recorded

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Joseph A. Marrone III, Chairman

Date

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Kristen Panzo, Town Clerk

Date