

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING OF THE TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
MAY 2, 2011**

The Annual Budget Meeting of the Town of Fairfield was held on Monday, May 2, 2011, at McKinley Elementary School, Thompson Street, Fairfield, Connecticut.

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 P.M. by Moderator Jeff Steele.

PRESENT: 44 ABSENT: 6 VACANCY: 0

PRESENT: Becker, Herley, Richmond, Sundman, Ambrose, Jones, Steele, Stewart, Varian, Bateson, Conley, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, Palmer, R. Parker, S. Parker, Garskof, McAleese, Smey, Stamler, Brogan, DeSanctis, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Llewellyn, Schwartz, Braun, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Takami, Dillon, Felner, McGinty, Millington, Mirabile, Cafferelli, Farnen, Mears, Way

ABSENT: Challinor, DeMartino, Hug, Gall, Lynch, Rubino

ITEM NO. 1 ON CALL: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND A MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Moderator led the Body in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence, and asked those present to keep in their thoughts Miss Nancy Hanlon, a fifth grade teacher who passed away this week, and the families affected by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in light of today's killing of Osama Bin Laden by US Navy Seals.

The Moderator acknowledged First Selectman Kenneth Flatto's twelve years as First Selectman in the Town of Fairfield and congratulated on his new job as Director of Special Revenue for the State of Connecticut. First Selectman Flatto received a standing ovation.

ITEM NO. 2 ON CALL: TO CONSIDER AND DISCUSS, INCLUDING RTM COMMITTEE REPORTS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC, PROPOSED APPROPRIATIONS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$264,034,123 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF JULY 1, 2011 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2012, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE, FOR ANY LAWFUL PURPOSE. THE TOTAL PROPOSED BUDGET AS APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Gross Budget:	264,034,123
Less Estimated Receipts:	<u>(26,304,334)</u>
Net Budget:	237,729,789
Plus Reserve for Uncollected Taxes:	<u>2,740,222</u>
Amount to be Raised by Taxation:	240,470,011

The Moderator moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

MOTION: Carolyn Richmond, District 1, moved to amend the budget by reducing \$1,200,000 from Dept. 8010, Education, duly seconded.

Mary McCullough, District 3, said that she cannot support such a large decrease to the budget but acknowledged that a reduction to the education budget could be done.

MOTION: Ms. McCullough moved to amend the motion by reducing the proposed reduction by \$400,000 to \$800,000, duly seconded.

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Tom McCarthy, District 8, said that the term, "cut" is misleading, since the motion to reduce to budget is reducing the size of the increase to the budget of this year. There are fixed costs in the budget and he said we must be proactive in contract negotiations.

Kevin Hoffkins, District 7, asked Ms. Richmond to identify the areas in the budget she feels reductions could be made.

Ms. Richmond said that she did not have specific areas but a range of numbers. She discussed the recent BOE audit which had found savings in areas such as eliminating school psychologists from each elementary school, reorganization of the number of paraprofessionals, instructional improvement teachers, changing the way we do music instruction, which is very generous comparatively. She continued that it had been suggested that the curriculum leader position become part teacher, part leader. Also, transportation should be addressed and perhaps we can start charging students for parking in order to make better use of school buses.

Mr. Hoffkins asked that Dr. Title address the consequences of the proposed reduction.

Superintendent of Schools David Title said that he had given his response to the operational audit prepared for the Board of Education. Although the audit reported savings, there actually weren't any. The audit suggested hiring new teachers in place of paraprofessionals. If a reduction is made in the number of paraprofessionals, psychologists, and the music program, we would be reducing services to families. He discussed the budget process and said he did not just move the numbers forward from last year. He understands if the Town decides it cannot afford this budget, but if one votes for the reduction, one votes for a reduction of services.

Patti Dyer, District 6, said that she cannot support the cut. She pointed out that there are additional possible cuts coming with the State budget.

Elizabeth Hoffmann, District 8, said that the services Dr. Title discussed are different from education. It would be wonderful if everyone could have everything but the education budget is being increased. We need to limit the size of the increase. "Services" is not education.

Josh Garskof, District 5, said that he does not support this motion. He said that an e-mail was received from the Town Facilities Commission indicating that it could defray some costs. Although it is too late for this budget, it should be looked at for next year.

Mr. Hoffkins said that school psychologists are performing services required by state law and court orders. ASHA recommends one psychologist for every 1,000 students but we should be using the figure recommended by the National Association of School Psychologist which recommends 1 to every 700 students.

Michael Mears, District 10, said that Dr. Title inherited the four percent salary increase for teachers in this budget. He is willing to work with the RTM and he proposed a good budget.

Board of Education Chairman John Mitola spoke to the issue of "grandfathering" students with respect to redistricting. The cost of allowing students to finish at the middle school in which they began is \$340,000 but it is the appropriate thing to do. There was an overwhelming response from parents who wished for their children to be grandfathered.

Speaking against the motion to amend the motion to reduce the education budget from \$1,200,000 to \$800,000 were Gregory Convertito; Denise Raider; Karen Fleming; BOE member Catherine Albin; Sara Jannott; Laurie Quick; John Convertito; Debra Daring, Marc Patten; Charlotte Leslie; Betty Ann

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O'Shaughnessey; Edward Stumpf, Christine Convertito; Christine Pisani; Carolyn Trabuco; BOE member Sue Brand.

Speaking in favor of the motion to reduce the education budget were Alrick Man; Robert Forcellini; Joe Witko; Palma Senatore, Dave Mackenzie; Chris Pohlmann; Wyatt Whiteman.

BOE Chairman John Mitola referred to a speaker's figures regarding the increased number of teachers in the past ten years. He reminded the Body that since 1999 an elementary school and a high school were opened. He objected to members using the audit figures when it serves their purposes but ignoring it when it does not.

Cristin McCarthy Vahey, District 6, spoke in opposition to the motion.

Kathy Braun, District 8, said that the \$800,000 reduction represents a half of a percent of the proposed \$4.1 million increase to the budget from last year. There are ample areas in which the budget could be cut without hurting services offered.

Joe Palmer, District 4, said that Dr. Title is a refreshing force in Town and he has presented a candid, honest approach with the budget. There is a bigger problem in town and he said that the fixed costs in the budget are out of control. He supports the motion.

Chad Stewart, District 2, said that historically, when a reduction is made to the education budget, the maintenance and technology areas are reduced. We cannot let IT fall further behind. He urged the Board of Education to concentrate on contract negotiations and suggested increasing class sizes.

Board of Finance member Kevin Kiley said that we have had the lowest tax increases in ten years in the past two years. Reducing the budget will cut investment areas such as maintenance. He said he does not support the motion.

Selectman Jim Walsh asked what the savings would be to each taxpayer if this motion were approved.

Fiscal Officer Paul Hiller said that \$1,000,000 is roughly a \$40 average in savings.

Selectman Walsh said that Rep. Braun raised an interesting issue in that the BOE budget increased by \$4.1 million. He pointed out that \$3.8 million is for contractual salary increases and medical costs increased by \$1.5 million. We have no control over these costs. He had proposed a cut to the BOE budget in Board of Selectmen and it passed. Some responsibility for the budget must be taken on by the taxpayers. He urged the Body to give Dr. Title some latitude and asked that they do not support an additional reduction to the budget.

First Selectman Flatto pointed out that it is not within the charge of the Town Facilities Commission to take on education maintenance issues. For two years in a row there have been no additional funds added to the Board of Ed budget.

Carolyn Richmond, District 1, said that twenty five percent of property assessments increased in the recent revaluation. The tax increase to these homeowners will not be \$40, but quite a bit more.

VOTE: The motion to amend the proposed motion to reduce the education budget by \$1,200,000 to \$800,000 was approved with 26 in favor, 16 opposed and 1 abstention (S. Parker). (Mr. Felner was not present to vote).

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IN FAVOR: Becker, Herley, Richmond, Ambrose, Jones, Varian, Bateson, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, Palmer, R. Parker, Garskof, DeSanctis, Schwartz, Braun, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Dillon, McGinty, Millington, Mirabile, Cafferelli, Farnen, Way

OPPOSED: Sundman, Steele, Stewart, Conley, McAleese, Smey, Stamler, Brogan, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Llewellyn, Takami, Mears

MOTION: David Becker, District 1, moved to amend the amended motion by reducing the proposed amount of reduction to the education budget from \$800,000 to \$600,000, duly seconded.

Mr. Becker explained that he was looking for a level of consensus.

Patti Dyer, District 6, said that she is not willing to split the difference and does not support the amendment.

Sheila Marmion, District 6, agreed with Rep. Dyer and said that the figure seems random. We have an exceptional school system, from which we all benefit.

Speaking against the motion were Gregory Convertito; Kenneth Lee; Mary Hogue, Elaine Davis; Penny Proskinitopoulos.

Speaking in favor of the motion were Kate Daniello; Palma Senatore.

Cristin McCarthy Vahey, District 6, said that this is not about pitting seniors against students and said that we have a tax relief program available for seniors.

Liz Hoffmann, District 8, said that we have taxpayers who are having trouble making ends meet.

Ed Bateson, District 3, said that we should not be pitting one party against another. He has a six year old daughter in the school system and he has an elderly mother whose affairs he is overseeing. We are trying to weigh everybody's needs. This is a moderate compromise and he urged support of the motion.

Kathy Braun, District 8, said that we are not pitting one party against the other since after the education budget discussion we will start picking apart the town side. If we support this motion to cut, it is still a three percent increase over last year's budget.

MOTION: The motion to amend the motion to reduce the education budget from \$800,000 to \$600,000 failed with 11 in favor, 31 opposed and 1 abstention (S. Parker) (Mr. Felner was not present to vote).

IN FAVOR: Becker, Varian, Bateson, Palmer, Garskof, Smey, DeSanctis, Braun, Takami, Millington, Farnen

OPPOSED: Herley, Richmond, Sundman, Ambrose, Jones, Steele, Stewart, Conley, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, R. Parker, McAleese, Stamler, Brogan, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Llewellyn, Schwartz, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Dillon, McGinty, Mirabile, Cafferelli, Mears, Way

Josh Garskof explained that although he voted in favor of reducing the proposed cut in order to have less of an impact in the event the reduction is approved, he intends to vote against the main motion to reduce the budget.

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MOTION: Mr. Stewart moved the question, duly seconded and carried with 28 in favor, 14 opposed (Ms. Hoffmann and Mr. Felner were not present to vote).

VOTE: The motion to reduce Dept. 8010, Education, by \$800,000 as amended was approved with 22 in favor, 20 opposed and 1 abstention (S. Parker) (Mr. Felner was not present to vote).

IN FAVOR: Herley, Richmond, Ambrose, Jones, Bateson, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, Palmer, R. Parker, DeSanctis, Schwartz, Braun, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Dillon, McGinty, Millington, Mirabile, Cafferelli, Way

OPPOSED: Becker, Sundman, Steele, Stewart, Varian, Conley, Garskof, McAleese, Smey, Stamler, Brogan, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Llewellyn, Takami, Farnen, Mears

At 10:30 P.M., the Moderator called for a recess. The meeting reconvened at 10:40 P.M.

MOTION: Mr. Millington moved to suspend the rules in order to convene past 11:00 P.M. and to take up new business after 11:30 P.M., duly seconded and carried with 39 in favor, 5 opposed (R. Parker, S. Parker, Vahey, Hoffkins, Mears).

Bill Llewellyn, District 7, said that both sides of the aisle are frustrated because nobody can reduce the budget because of contractual obligations, negotiated by First Selectman Flatto. He said he does not intend to make any motions to reduce the budget.

First Selectman Flatto pointed out that he inherited contractual obligations and has not increased any benefits. In fact, he said, the opposite is true. He also pointed out that the town's workforce has decreased by three percent.

MOTION: Mr. Becker moved to amend the proposed budget by reducing \$4,800 from Dept. 0103, Town Clerk, duly seconded.

Selectman Walsh asked Town Clerk Betsy Browne what impact such a reduction would have.

Town Clerk Betsy Browne said that there are several bills currently being proposed in Hartford which could affect absentee ballots. The reduction would also affect archival film storage, which is required by law. Also, certain land record and vital record books scheduled for restoration would not be able to be done.

Selectman Walsh urged the Body to reject this motion. The money is being requested for items required by state law and the Town's records need to be maintained.

Ann Stamler, District 5, said that it is not the increase being questioned, but the amount of the increase.

Ms. Browne said that the amount for proposed changes to absentee ballots is unknown. The funding would be used for land records and restoration, which fees have increased.

Ms. Stamler said that although the reductions being requested are in small amounts, she takes very seriously her responsibility to oversee the budget.

Tom Conley, District 3, asked the Town Clerk about whether revenues would be affected.

Ms. Browne stated that with recording fees and conveyance tax collections, her department adds over \$2 million to the general fund each year.

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Kathy Braun, District 8, said that in 2009, \$2,851 was spent in rental and storage and in 2010, \$2,146 was spent so far. She asked how much is being spent this year. She also asked that all town departments investigate less expensive storage fees.

Ms. Browne said that last year, some printing and binding costs had to be carried over to the next budget year due to lack of funds. This year the account is almost spent. There are forthcoming bills to be paid for storage.

Fiscal Officer Paul Hiller said that through Friday, the amount spent in printing and binding was \$79,700.

Ms. Browne said that she averages from \$6,000 to \$7,000 per month for printing and binding.

Ms. Braun asked if the RTM can elect to receive their monthly information packets via e-mail rather than USPS.

Peter Ambrose, District 2, said he does not support the motion. He works with the Town Clerk's Office on a daily basis and we have a judicious Town Clerk who runs the office with great efficiency.

VOTE: The motion to reduce the Town Clerk budget by \$4,800 failed with 3 in favor (Braun, Dillon, Mears) and 41 opposed.

MOTION: Michael Mears, District 10, moved to amend the proposed budget by reducing \$2,100 from Dept. 1050, Administrative Services, duly seconded.

Ms. Vahey asked what effect this reduction would have.

Mr. Hiller said that this account had been overspent last year.

VOTE: The motion to reduce \$2,100 for Special Departmental Supplies in the Administrative Services budget was approved with 33 in favor, 11 opposed.

IN FAVOR: Becker, Herley, Richmond, Sundman, Ambrose, Jones, Stewart, Varian, Bateson, Conley, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, Palmer, R. Parker, S. Parker, Smey, DeSanctis, Llewellyn, Braun, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Takami, Dillon, Felner, McGinty, Millington, Mirabile, Cafferelli, Farnen, Mears, Way

OPPOSED: Steele, Garskof, McAleese, Stamler, Brogan, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Schwartz

MOTION: Mr. Becker moved to amend the proposed budget by reducing \$12,130 from Department 1070, Registrar of Voters, duly seconded.

Mr. Becker explained that these funds are to be used for redistricting purposes, but redistricting will not occur until 2012.

Ms. Vahey asked what impact such a reduction would have on the Registrars.

Republican Registrar of Voters Roger Autuori agreed that redistricting would not occur until 2012.

VOTE: The motion to reduce the Registrar of Voters budget in the amount of \$12,130 was approved with 40 in favor, 2 opposed (Smey, Schwartz).

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MOTION: Hank Ference, District 3, moved to amend the proposed budget by reducing \$1,000 from Dept. 1110, TPZ, duly seconded.

Nick Mirabile, District 9, asked for how this cut would affect the Plan and Zoning budget.

TPZ Chairman Bryan LeClerc said that he understands that certain members want to roll figures back to previous years but explained that they need to be careful and to look at the bigger picture. TPZ is required to publish public hearing notices for each meeting and he said they have met every week this month. Neighbors must be notified via certified mail and zoning changes must be published. He asked that the Body not approve this motion.

Mr. Mirabile said that we need to listen to constituents. His have asked him to hold the line on taxes and to pave the roads. We must be careful when it comes to nickel-and-diming our town departments.

Mr. Ference said that the \$1,000 reduction being sought is not for postage; it is for special departmental supplies.

Ms. Stamler asked what would happen if a department has a required expense and went over budget.

Mr. Hiller said that they look at the department budget as a whole and try to shift figures around to pay for overages.

Ms. Stamler said that the RTM should be able to reduce the budget by department rather than by line item.

VOTE: The motion to reduce the TPZ budget by \$1,000 was approved with 27 in favor, 14 opposed (Mr. Stewart, Mr. Parker and Ms. Parker were not present to vote).

IN FAVOR: Becker, Herley, Richmond, Sundman, Jones, Bateson, Ference, McCullough, Palmer, Garskof, McAleese, Smey, DeSanctis, Hoffkins, Llewellyn, Braun, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Takami, Dillon, McGinty, Millington, Cafferelli, Farnen, Mears, Way

OPPOSED: Ambrose, Steele, Varian, Conley, Santalesa, Stamler, Brogan, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Schwartz, Felner, Mirabile

MOTION: Ms. Braun moved to amend the proposed budget by reducing Dept. 1230, Conservation, by \$1,080, duly seconded.

Ms. Stamler asked for a friendly amendment in order to include an additional reduction of \$23,575 but Ms. Braun refused.

Conservation Director Tom Steinke explained that the increase in the rental and storage line item reflects the expected expenses required for dike repair. If a dike failed during a flood, many thousands of dollars of damage would result.

Selectman Walsh asked the maker of the motion to rescind the motion, since a flood would affect taxpayers' homes and cause many thousands of dollars in damage. This is a safety and prevention issue.

First Selectman Flatto explained that the funds are used to rent specialized equipment required. The dike has deteriorated severely.

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Mr. Jim Gallagher said that the Town of Fairfield has the most competent department heads in the State. He urged the Body not to make cuts for the sake of cutting, because people are going to suffer the consequences.

VOTE: The motion to reduce the Conservation budget by \$1,080 failed with 2 in favor (Richmond, Ference), 38 opposed and 1 abstention (Jones) (Mr. Stewart, Mr. Parker and Ms. Parker were not present to vote).

Ms. Stamler referred to Conservation Line Item 54310, Maintenance and Repair of Equipment. She asked if half of the requested \$23,575 could be put off until next year.

Mr. Steinke explained that the funds are used for culvert repair and protection. Reducing the figure could result in thousands of dollars worth of damages in the case of a flood.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Patti Dyer, District 6, moved to adjourn, due to the lateness of the hour and the large amount of budget line items left to consider, duly seconded.

VOTE: The motion to adjourn was approved 28 in favor, 12 opposed (Mr. Stewart, Mr. Parker, Ms. Parker and Mr. DeSanctis were not present to vote).

IN FAVOR: Herley, Richmond, Sundman, Ambrose, Jones, Varian, Ference, McCullough, Santalesa, Palmer, Garskof, McAleese, Stamler, Dyer, Marmion, Vahey, Hochberg, Hoffkins, Schwartz, Harrison, Hoffmann, McCarthy, Takami, Dillon, Felner, McGinty, Mirabile, Cafferelli

OPPOSED: Becker, Steele, Bateson, Conley, Smey, Brogan, Llewellyn, Braun, Millington, Farnen, Mears, Way

The meeting stood in adjournment at 11:50 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne
Town Clerk

Recorded by: Ann Roche