

**Town of Newtown Legislative Council Regular Meeting
Wednesday, April 3, 2013
3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT**

PRESENT: Jeff Capeci, Mary Ann Jacob, George Ferguson, Joe Girgasky, Bob Merola, Daniel Honan, Kathy Fetchick, Neil Chaudhary, Dan Wiedemann, Paul Lundquist, Dan Amaral, Phil Carroll

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Pat Llodra, Finance Director Robert Tait, John Kortze, Joe Kearney, Ron Bienkowski, Debbie Leidlein, Laura Roche, John Vourus, Keith Alexander, 15 members of public, 4 members of media, Jan Andras (Clerk)

Chairman Capeci called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

VOTER PARTICIPATION: Jen Scarangella read a letter on behalf of the PTA and PTSA Presidents (attached).

Amy _____, 103 Hattertown Road, supports the BOE budget, especially full day kindergarten. She supports the town budget that includes SROs.

Laura Terry, 64 Robin Hill Road, read letter from Michelle Hankin, 16 Greenleaf Farms (attached). Laura Terry stated that she agrees with the letter and that she supports SROs at schools.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Upon motion by Ms. Jacob, the minutes of the 3/20/13 meeting were unanimously approved.

COMMUNICATIONS: Mr. Capeci received a message from the Town Clerk advising that should the budget pass tonight, absentee ballots will be available sometime tomorrow afternoon.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Ordinance – Ms. Jacob reported that there was a lot of input from all sides regarding the gun control ordinance. They will now begin work on amending the current ordinance.

FIRST SELECTMAN'S REPORT: We have been notified that the Federal COPS (Community Oriented Policing Services) Grant will be appropriated again this year but the application forms are not yet available. Once we receive the form, there will be a quick turnaround but it will then take 6 weeks for an answer.

NEW BUSINESS

FY 2013/14 Budget

Ms. Fetchick moved the FY 13/14 Education Budget in the amount of \$72,095,304, as presented by the Board of Finance. Motion seconded.

The Education Subcommittee voted 4-2 to approve this budget amount. The big question is how much we will be receiving from the SERV Grant (School Emergency Response to Violence). There were also questions about the funding for IT. Mr. Merola

stated that he cannot support this motion due to the increase in staff with a declining student population since 2006.

Mr. Merola moved to amend the motion by decreasing the amount \$500,000. Motion seconded.

Mr. Bienkowski pointed out that teaching staff numbers have actually declined during that time (budget book page 281). Mr. Merola replied that elementary school staff has declined but his concern is at the high school. In 2006, the high school teaching staff was increased for a Bothwell enrollment projection that was too high. As a result, he feels that the high school is over-staffed.

AMENDMENT FAILED: 9 NO – 3 YES (Merola, Capeci, Wiedemann)

MAIN MOTION CARRIED: 9 YES – 3 NO (Merola, Capeci, Wiedemann)

Mr. Merola moved the Municipal Budget in the amount of \$39,054,521. Motion seconded.

Mr. Ferguson reported that the Administration/Finance Committee met and voted unanimously to approve this portion of the budget. Mr. Merola reported that the Muni/Ops Committee also voted to approve as recommended by the Board of Finance.

There was discussion about the funding for security in the non-public schools. Diane Rockwell, Office Manager, Housatonic Valley Waldorf School, stated that they have been part of the security committee process. They have safety infrastructure needs, as opposed to mental health concerns, and hope to participate in applying for grants. Peter Rodland, Trustee, Frazier Woods School, stated that they have been communicating with someone at the Justice Department and have been told that they are not eligible for those grants. They would like any information on other grant possibilities.

MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED

Ms. Jacob moved a combined budget in the amount of \$111,149,825. Motion seconded and carried: 9 YES – 3 NO (Merola, Wiedemann, Amaral)

This represents a 33.77 mill rate as opposed to the current 24.54 mill rate. The larger number is a result of the latest revaluation causing the Grand List to drop by an average of 23%. It is estimated that 79% of all properties will see a 5% or less increase in taxes.

VOTER COMMENT: Michele Assante, Wendover Road, calculated her increase to be 10% and suggests that voters not go to the polls believing that they will see a 5% increase if that is not the case for them. She also feels that during the Board of Finance deliberations, she would have liked to see a lot more questions asked. Last year, we did not know that there were unappropriated funds in the Capital Nonrecurring Account until after the budget had been defeated more than once.

John Kortze, 25 Hundred Acres Road, speaking only for himself regarding comments made that questions were not asked during the Board of Finance deliberations this year and previous years. In fact, this year, there was an even more rigorous review. If questions are not asked or answered during a meeting that a member of the public did not attend, that does not mean it did not happen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: There will be a meeting of the Sandy Hook School Building Task Force this Friday (4/5) at 7:00 pm.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jan Andras", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jan Andras
Recording Secretary

att: Letters

These are draft minutes and as such are subject to correction by the Legislative Council at the next regular meeting. All corrections will be determined in minutes of the meeting at which they were corrected.

Dear Legislative Council Members,

As Presidents of Newtown's PTAs and PTSA we feel obliged to reach out and share with you our thoughts regarding this year's BOE budget. On March 7th we sent an email to the Board of Finance stating that we unanimously support the budget passed by the Board of Education. We further expressed our gratitude that the BOE acknowledged the needs put forth by our Superintendent and school administrators. For the past few years Newtown has passed budgets that, while perhaps fiscally prudent, have not addressed areas of need which can no longer be "tabled" and are now escalated to "must haves." We believe the Board of Finance agrees with us based on the fact that their recommended reductions (\$750k) primarily include savings in commodities. They've also suggested a slight delay in some technology implementation which, while not ideal, seems to be a fair compromise.

As you all know, contractual obligations alone cause an increase in budgets. Additionally, though grants are being sought to offset costs associated with new issues that have arisen which call for the addition of security guards and building alterations, the extent of those grant(s) is not guaranteed so provisions may have to be made. Add to that ongoing maintenance needs that also directly affect our children as well as technology requirements that cannot wait and must be implemented due to state mandates (Smarter Balanced Assessment needs), not to mention the need for full day kindergarten thanks to CCSS, and the numbers go up rather quickly.

Regarding the Charter revisions, which bifurcate the budget and add advisory questions, we think you'll agree that no matter how you cut it, we're facing an uphill battle this year. The percentage of increase being sought by the BOE makes it an even steeper climb. However, what we're hearing from our parents is that the benefits outweigh the cost. Therefore, we ask that you allow the community to speak for itself on April 23rd rather than attempting to guess at what they might, or might not, deem acceptable. If the budget should fail, for the first time, thanks to the advisory questions that will appear on the ballot, we have the opportunity to better gauge from the responses what the town truly wants.

Thank you for listening,

Maggie Conway, NHS PTSA President
Jen Scarangella, NMS PTA President
Lisa Wallace, RIS PTA President
Tracey Jaeger, SHS PTA President
Kelley Mozalak, MG PTA President
Cynthia Iaropoli & Laura Terry, HOM PTA Co-Presidents
Marabeth Pereira, HAW PTA President

Good Evening,

I want to state my support of both the town and education budgets.

This is a year of unprecedented need... In the town (municipal budget) there are funds for additional police officers, so that all public schools will now have one. There is widespread support for the town contingency account to fund the police officers for the elementary schools.

The Board of Ed budget increases have been insufficient in past years, causing some programs and expenditures to be put off, and other programs have been eliminated or reduced. The BOE budget for 2013-2014 includes full-day K, which has been put on hold for several years. It also includes technology and maintenance that have been delayed for many years (some of our technology is over 10 years old, and some technology spending is needed to support Security Committee recommendations). In addition, the budget needs to cover costs for new testing and evaluation mandates from the state.

The Board of Education budget is already vulnerable to upside risks, as other expenses, due to 12/14, may arise. Recovery costs for counseling and mental health are needs that will continue to evolve, and may not be fully covered by grants. Also, since the town has not yet heard back regarding grants that cover security, additional security costs are also still unknown.

This is not a typical budget year. Please support the town and education budgets and put them forward to voters, as is.

Thank you,

Regards,

Michele Hankin

16 Greenleaf