



Tanya Lane
Acting Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR ROY ZARTARIAN

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES TOWN COUNCIL'S TENTATIVE BUDGET – 2016-2017

**NEWINGTON HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM
7:00 P.M.**

March 31, 2016

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Zartarian at 7 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II. ROLL CALL

Councilor Anest
Councilor Budrejko
Councilor DelBuono
Councilor Klett
Councilor Manke
Councilor Marocchini
Councilor Nagel
Councilor Serra
Mayor Zartarian

Staff Attendees:

Tanya Lane, Acting Town Manager
Ann Harter, Director of Finance
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Director of Finance
Jamie Trevethan, Asst. to the Town Manager – Administration
Linda Irish-Simpson, Clerk of the Council

Mayor Zartarian explained to the audience the Town Charter allowed public participation during budget public hearings to taxpayers and registered voters. It would not apply to the special meeting following the public hearing. He indicated he had offered to meet with the students at the middle or high school and the idea was rejected. Councilor Anest asked that anyone be allowed to speak at the hearing and was told a

Charter change would have to be considered at a different time since it was not on the agenda for the current meeting. Councilor Klett said that for over 30 years anyone had been allowed to speak at the budget hearing and Councilor Budrejko wanted to ensure everyone knew they would have the opportunity to speak at the special meeting that evening.

Mayor Zartarian presented the proposed tentative budget, which is attached.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – IN GENERAL

Councilors Marocchini, Anest, DelBuono, Nagel and Manke read letters received from residents into the record, which are attached.

Jennifer Freese, 109 Goodale Drive: She spoke in favor of the BOE budget and felt the cut would result in a downward spiral in the education for the children of Newington. She felt without the medical science academy in Town parents and teachers would leave Newington in search of magnet schools and the Town could not afford to lose more students.

Jennifer Rodriguez, 71 Northwood Road: She stated she wanted to ensure her young son received the same educational opportunities as her daughter. She urged the Town Council to support the BOE budget as requested.

Mark Hollis, 323 Church Street: He thanked the BOE for their hard work and reminded the Republicans they had run on a campaign of listening to the voters and hoped that was true. He stated they had rejected the Town Hall Building Committee and the Parks and Rec Committee reports as well as the proposed Town Manager's recommendations. They had spent \$40k at the Eddy Farm, paid the former Town Manager a severance package and the Mayor wanted to remove the Deputy Mayor, which was against the Charter.

Mary Udice, 26 Dalewood Road: She thanked the Councilors who had voted for the proposed budget and what was best for the children. She was in favor of the BOE and hoped the final vote would reflect what was best for all the children in Newington. The zero percent budget would increase class sizes, remove teachers and force cuts to valuable programs.

Gary Bolles, 28 Burdon Lane: He was in favor of fiscal responsibility and felt the BOE budget was not transparent or truthful. He felt the Town did not have to provide specialized education which could be given at the college level. Mr. Bolles stated the Town was ranked 44th in the State but other similar towns in the area who spent less per student were ranked higher. During the campaign residents expressed the wish for lower taxes, which was why the Council members were elected and hoped they would stand by their vote of a zero percent increase.

Tessa Woods, 94 New Britain Avenue: As a student at Newington High School, she expressed support for the BOE budget. Without an increase in the budget she felt the schools would move backwards with larger class sizes and teacher layoffs. She hoped the Town Council would reconsider their vote.

Dana Havens, 113 Stoddard Avenue: She expressed her concern over the zero percent increase and the lack of transparency. She hoped STEM could be saved and that the Town Council and the BOE could work together.

Bruce Valade, 31 Mountain View Drive: He said over the years his taxes had doubled but his income had not but was proud to live in Newington. He stated he watched as the BOE spent endlessly and needed to be upfront and honest with the taxpayers about the way money was spent. The budget should not be a party decision but the Town Council should do the right thing.

Louise Rickard, 108 Little Brook Drive: She indicated she had no children in the school system but felt all children deserved a quality school system. The zero percent budget would not maintain the status quo. The Town Council promised to listen to the residents and should abandon the zero increase.

Matt Rossi, 17 Franklin Circle: He was in favor of the BOE budget and felt under the proposal class size would increase, which would mean less individual attention for each child.

Hal Whitney, 31 Old Hatchery Lane: He stated the proposed budget was not meant to punish or to show disrespect to the BOE or teachers. He wished it was possible to always give whatever was requested. Dr. Collins should find a way to maintain the system with a zero increase for one year.

Pam Raynock, 118 Harding Avenue: She stated the Town should not sacrifice children for a paltry increase and shame on the residents who could not find the money for the tax increase. She urged the Town Council to support the BOE budget.

Anna Waldzinska, 254 Beacon Street: She was in favor of the BOE budget and hoped the bio lab would continue at the high school level since education should be a priority.

Kelley Kelly, 293 Maple Hill Avenue: She said the resources needed today were much different than years ago and felt a stagnant budget would decrease the amount of money available for education because of contractual obligations. Families wanted to live where education was good and the proposed budget was not fiscally prudent.

Colleen Cultrera, 38 Carriage Hill Drive: She was in support of the BOE budget and indicated the lack of funding would have families looking to magnet schools outside of the district, which would increase the cost to the Town.

Terry Borjeson, 45 Glenview Drive: He stated voices should not be stifled by the Mayor. The Council ran on a platform of listening to the people and suggested they do so. He indicated concern that two Democratic lawyers were replaced by three lawyers to do the same amount of work.

Michael J. Fox, 1901 Main Street: He was in favor of an increase to the budget and thanked the Democrats and Councilor Klett for not voting with the majority. In the past a zero increase had been tried and the result was less teachers, less books and the buildings in Town suffered.

Amy Alexander, 16 Brentwood Road: She had children in school and was in favor of the BOE budget. She was upset with the cuts and how it would impact the schools. She indicated the Library was used by all citizens and that closing Sunday was not good and should be reinstated into the budget. She did not feel people who disagreed with the Mayor should be silenced or forced to vote his way.

Judy Igielski, 23 Old Musket Drive: She said the zero increase was shortsighted and would come back to haunt the Town. She was concerned with the number of police officers and staffing levels as well as the condition of fire trucks. She was concerned about the closing of the library on Sunday and thought it should be continued. She congratulated the young people who came out to speak about the importance of education.

Amy Mills, 28 Eddy Lane: She was disappointed and frustrated with the BOE budget. She valued education and stated the Town needed good teachers. If teachers lost their jobs, it would be the responsibility of the Town Council.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue: He indicated the entire school budget was \$71 million and \$45.5 million were salaries, \$11.5 million benefits and \$13 million for everything else. He felt the health benefits surplus should be shared between the Town and the BOE and supported the 2.8% increase. If the money was not replaced, careers, lives and education in Town would be impacted.

Kimberly DePaolis, 36 Red Rock Circle: She urged support of the budget and hoped teachers would not lose their jobs. Education was more important than money.

Jeanne Picklesimer, 97 Vincent Drive: She had two children in the school system and supported the increase in the BOE budget. She indicated it was important to restore the \$250k to Churchill Park since it must become ADA accessible in 2016 and if not, the Town could incur fines for not doing so.

Luis Cruz, 395 Mountain Road: He supported the BOE and felt education was the most important part of a community. All children should have the same opportunities as in the past.

Kevin Borrup, 16 Broadview Street: He was in favor of the budget and if passed, would negatively affect STEM and other technical areas as well as teachers. A zero increase was actually a 3% decrease in funding.

Don Carso, 89 Linwood Avenue: He was a senior citizen and on a fixed income and understood why people were concerned about taxes. No one liked to pay taxes but a zero increase would do a disservice to the children and to the Town. It would be tougher to recruit good teachers if the zero increase went through.

Lou Riccelli, 4 Grandview Drive: He wondered why the first thing to be cut would be teachers since in the private sector that would be the last thing to do. He felt the superintendent needed to tighten things up in order to make it work. He supported the children who spoke at the meeting but indicated they did not pay the bills.

Patrick Montes, 82 Starr Avenue: He indicated the school system was the reason he moved to Newington and felt the increase was important. He said there was a lack of transparency in how the money was spent but felt the BOE and Town Council needed to work together to make it work.

Kimberly Nguyen, 79 Highland Street: She spoke in favor of the increase and supported the schools programs and teachers. Underclassmen would be affected by the cuts and said an alternative plan needed to be made.

Kristen Wild, 63 Johnson Street: As a former student, she supported the BOE and had moved back to Newington because of the schools.

Jamie Hale, 143 Williamstown Court: As a graduate of Newington, a teacher and a coach she supported the BOE budget. The Town would pay more money to magnet schools if more children left the system. She urged the Council to restore the 2.8% increase.

Emily Guion, 20 Kirkham Street: She stated the proposed cuts would have an immediate effect on schools. Dr. Collins had clearly stated long term goals that were spread over several years. The cuts would be devastating to Newington.

Mary Erwin, 44 Kirkham Street: As a teacher she was in favor of the BOE budget and said class size would increase. She was in favor of her money going to the education of the children and urged the Town Council to support the BOE budget.

Mary Houle, 253 Dix Avenue: She understood the Town Council had no say in how the money was spent but the cuts would have an immediate impact on schools. She said neighboring towns who consistently invested in education did not have STEM academies. She felt Newington got a big bang for the buck and hoped the money would be restored to the budget.

Jane Ancona Siegel, 57 Meadowview Court: She appreciated the time the Council spent on the budget but a zero percent increase was wrong. There was a lot of support for education as opposed to the vocal minority. This was the first time she considered moving from Newington and felt they needed to reach a compromise with the BOE to do what was right for the Town.

Cindy Stamm, 35 Judge Lane: She thanked the three Democrats who voted for the school budget and Councilor Klett for standing her ground even though she was going against her party. The previous BOE budgets had caused the schools to make cuts and further cuts would be devastating. She asked the Council to provide the BOE with enough money to maintain the level of education and to reach a compromise.

Forrest Helvie, 282 Lamplighter Lane: He said the cuts to education would hurt the schools and children. He suggested the Council take a hard right and make the right decision and work with the BOE.

Kathy Fleming, 111 Nicholson Street: She was a parent and teacher in favor of the BOE budget. The cuts would negatively impact education, enrichment programs and the educational system was the reason they had moved to Town. She hoped the BOE and Council could work it out.

Jen Win-Johnson, 23 Welles Drive North: She was in support of the BOE and felt through planning and investment the schools were in great shape. She wanted the investment to grow and the zero percent was unrealistic. The STEM and technology programs were important for the future.

Peter Arburr, 133 Tremont Street: He said they were in their annual tug of war and wondered how to fix it. Last year when cuts were made Dr. Collins indicated teachers and programs would have to be cut but later that week he found the money to resolve the issue. He hoped they could defer certain programs, keep some of the health savings and reach a compromise.

Jennifer Ortiz, 172 8th Street: She had two children in school and thought the budget cuts were appalling.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane: He said people moved to Newington for the education services and for the parks and recreation. Churchill Park was aging and asked for the \$250k allocation to be put back into the budget which would allow them to plan for equipment placement, moving of the pond as well as address the wetland issue. He felt it was important to keep the money in the fund and to fully fund the project.

Rick Galarza, 14 Laurence Lane: he spoke in favor of the budget and gave examples of how he felt the money could be given to the schools from other accounts. He hoped a compromise could be reached.

Ryan Campbell, 26 Johnson Street: he had been a resident for 14 years and was in support of the BOE. The contracts made with the teachers were sacrosanct and had to be honored. A compromise should be reached for the good of the children. An additional \$200 a family was a small price to pay.

Frank McGoldrick, 217 Lamplighter Lane: He was opposed to the zero percent increase and was in favor of a reasonable increase. The educational system was important to the Town and was worthy of a 2-3% increase.

Josh Shulman, 15 Longview Drive: As a BOE member, he wished the Council members had gone to the BOE for any answers to questions they might have had. He stated the teachers had agreed to a high deductible insurance plan, they had made it harder for teachers to earn more money, and the only salary increases were those on the top step. The salary increase agreed to was under the average for the surrounding area. The zero percent increase would be devastating and the Town would lose even more teachers than in the past.

Emily Guion, 20 Kirkham Street: Read letter from Joe Guion – he felt a compromise needed to be reached. The Town Manager's budget was tossed aside and the Council decided on a zero increase. The contracts needed to be honored and urged the Council to go to the BOE with questions and have them explain how the money would be spent.

Nancy Petronio, 44 Centerwood Road: She asked the Town Council to listen and respect the people in Town to maintain services like education. The Town Council decided on a zero percent increase without regard to the contracts that were made. The Town Manager lowered the requested amount approximately \$500k and without discussion with the BOE, the Council made the zero percent increase. Other departments had been cut but not to the extent the BOE had been. She realized they would not get all the money they requested but hoped the Council and BOE could reach a compromise.

Mike Johnson, 23 Welles Drive North: As a parent and graduate of Newington he did not like the power play to not allow the children to speak at the meeting, having Councilor Klett removed as Deputy Mayor and the zero percent increase proposed. The Council missed the contractual obligations and the big

picture that the schools were great and served the children well. Both sides needed to compromise for the benefit of everyone since everyone would lose.

Richard Klett, 104 Harold Drive: Stated his wife had voted no for a zero percent increase and wanted something in the middle but did not get the opportunity. The town had a flat budget with a bubble and had to make up for the \$1.4 million raise.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive: She had been watching budgets for seven years and seeing the BOE and Council go back and forth. They needed to meet, get answers and reach an agreement. There had to be a compromise and zero percent was not reasonable. The Town Hall should be addressed before the Park but after education. Items needed to be prioritized.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Nagel moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:25 p.m. and was seconded by Councilor Manke. The motion passed 9 – 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Irish-Simpson
Clerk of the Council

cc: T. Lane, Town Clerk
attach.