

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hicks Municipal Center  
Council Chambers  
Tolland, CT 06084

REGULAR MEETING

7:30 – 10:00 P.M.

AGENDA  
August 23, 2017

**VISION STATEMENT**

*To represent education at its best, preparing each student for an ever-changing society, and becoming a full community of learning where excellence is achieved through each individual's success.*

A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting – August 9, 2017

C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (2-minute limit)

*The members of the Tolland Board of Education welcome members of the public to share their thoughts and ideas at this time. When appropriate to do so, members of the Board and the administration may respond to comments during "Points of Information". However, in consideration of those in attendance and in an effort to proceed in a timely manner, follow-up discussion may need to take place outside of the meeting setting.*

D. POINTS OF INFORMATION

E. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT - Alexandra Simon and Mallory Goldsmith.

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

F.1 2017 – 2018 Budget (No Enclosure)

G. COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

H. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

I. BOARD ACTION

J. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (2-minute limit)

*Comments must be limited to items on this agenda.*

K. POINTS OF INFORMATION

**L. CORRESPONDENCE**

Town Council Meeting- August 8, 2017

**M. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

**N. NEW BUSINESS**

**O. ADJOURNMENT**

## **TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Hicks Memorial Center  
Council Chambers  
Tolland, CT 06084

### **REGULAR MEETING – August 9, 2017**

**Members Present:** Ms. Colleen Yudichak, Vice Chair; Ms. Kathy Gorsky, Secretary; Ms. Michelle Harrold, Ms. Karen Moran, Mr. Jeff Schroeder, Ms. Susan Seaver, Mr. Bob Pagoni, and Mr. Cliff Vachon.

**Administrators Present:** Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent of Schools

#### **A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Ms. Yudichak called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Ms. Yudichak read the vision statement.

#### **B. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- Regular Meeting – July 26, 2017
- Special Meeting – August 2, 2017

Ms. Gorsky motioned to approve the minutes of the July 26<sup>th</sup> regular meeting and the August 2<sup>nd</sup> special meeting. Ms. Moran seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

#### **C. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**Correspondence:** Ms. Gorsky noted a lot of correspondence was received.

- A resident wrote to support the BOE and wished a higher percentage had been agreed upon for the referendum vote.
- A resident noted that her children have felt the effects from past budget cuts and is worried that more cuts will affect home values. She supported the use of the fund balance.
- A resident said there is an obligation to support the schools to ensure the success of the children in Town.
- A resident proposed a list of questions including: 1% fund, LEAP costs, Open Choice revenue, consolidation of bus routes, pre-purchases from the previous budget, if the district could avoid participation in some unfunded state mandates, and class sizes. She also included results from an informal Facebook survey of what voters would approve at referendum.
- A resident suggested that the budget not be based on the Governor's budget since it is not likely to be adopted and asked that the Town's budget not be based on the largest potential cut.
- A resident asked if school opening could be delayed and suggested online learning options, eliminating SBAC testing, and incorporating volunteers into the curriculum.
- Three letters want to see conservative use of the fund balance and a tax increase to support the schools.
- Three letters supported the Town Manager's proposed budget dated August 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- A resident asked that there be BOE and Town Council representatives at the meeting with the Lieutenant Governor.

- A resident provided a list of money generating and saving ideas including alumni donations, company sponsorships, renting facilities, creating a grant writing commission, and renegotiating with vendors.

D. POINTS OF INFORMATION - none

E. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT - none

F. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

F.1. 2017-2018 Budget (no enclosure)

Dr. Willett thanked the clerk for the effort and asked that this be put into the minutes.

Dr. Willett explained that last night the Town Council reviewed the Revised Budget Proposal (RBP) presented by Mr. Werbner dated August 2<sup>nd</sup>. He noted that there has been a lot of correspondence with the Town Council and among the Board members in regard to its elements.

Dr. Willett presented the BOE recommended changes (based on the feedback he received from Board members) on the RBP and asked that the members review the items, decide if the Board would like to support them, and or rank them.

- Make a total reduction from the BOE budget which does not name the special education grant as it is not part of recent versions and is unlikely to be actualized. Currently the RBP recommends what constitutes a further reduction of \$993,340 below zero or the fiscal 16/17 amount.
- Transfer the \$393,340 to the 1% Fund as permitted by the Town Ordinance and Section 10-248a of the CT General Statutes as was requested by the BOE. Dr. Willett explained that the \$393,340 is already being used to reduce the BOE budget. It was saved because the Board knew it would be a difficult budget year and it is a planned offset/deduction from the budget. To remove it by not transferring it to the 1% fund would mean reducing the amount twice. Under the ordinance, the 1% fund can be used for non-recurring or unanticipated funding needs including the following: capital items, unanticipated special education needs or other costs, purchases of goods or services above amounts originally budgeted for, items such as computers or books.
- The total reduction to the BOE budget below the 0% increase of \$39,333, 948 is \$600K and not more than that.
- If the state budget, when approved, provides more revenue than anticipated, then it is reimbursed in the order of:
  1. 1,006,660 up to the amount used is returned to the fund balance
  2. Remaining funds be allocated to the BOE and Town on 80/20% basis capped at the BOE original request amount and the amount of expenditure reductions of the Town as recommended by the Town Manager.
- If the State budget, when approved, provides less revenue than budgeted then the difference could come from the fund balance.
- If through the discretion of the Superintendent and/or BOE there are BOE funds available at the end of the fiscal year, they can be transferred to the Town. The Town can use these funds for any purposes it so chooses. This is consistent with Section § 10-222 of the CT General Statutes.

Dr. Willett explained that these items have been presented to the Board for the purpose of discussion. Any, all, or none of these items may be sent to the Town Council, they may be ranked, or they can all be discarded.

Ms. Moran inquired if these items were presented in Dr. Willett's preferential order. He responded that they were not presented in such order and would like Board feedback. If at the end the Board would like the Superintendent to convey these recommendations to the Town Council on behalf of the Board, he would need a directive that would instruct him to communicate this information to the Town Council vis-à-vis the Town Council Chairs. The Superintendent would cc the Town Manager.

Mr. Schroeder commented that he believed that this list of recommendations is a good start and noted that some items rely on other listed items.

Mr. Pagoni commented that there is a lot in the document with many ramifications. Dr. Willett is the best qualified to present an opinion on a recommended order with rationale to the Board. The Board will then evaluate the information.

Ms. Harrold noted that she has strong feelings about the 1% fund and how it was included in the RBP as part of the fund balance. The money should go into the 1% fund and not be part of the fund balance and recommended that this top the list. Mr. Vachon agreed and believes the numbers should be presented as total reductions and not as a percentage of various funds. Ms. Gorsky agreed as well. She is very concerned about linking the reductions to the \$600K coming from the special education grant since she is unsure if it will be received. Mr. Schroeder agreed and noted that the Town Manager indicated that the \$600K may not be received. Further, it should be a single number representing the total reduction.

Ms. Gorsky asked Dr. Willett to explain the language regarding the 1% fund. Dr. Willett explained that the term used is "shall". When the term "shall" is used, the following action is typically required. He added that there is language that balances this with regard to action to be taken by the Town Council in the form of a vote. If both bodies sought legal counsel on the matter he believes the Board position would be compelling but there would be discussion. Dr. Willett explained that this fund was a collaborative effort between the Board and the Town Council. The fund was designed so that the Board could avoid last minute spending and takes away "use it or lose it" compulsion. The Board may put up to 1% in this fund for a "rainy day" and fiscal responsibility.

A discussion took place. Ms. Moran would like this document to be related to the public. Ms. Gorsky agreed with Mr. Schroeder's earlier comment. Many items are related and in order for some items to take place, other items need to occur first. It is a best effort on a short timeline compiling lots of information. Mr. Schroeder inquired about "as permitted" (see 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet) and asked if it should read, "as required". Dr. Willett noted that he did some legal research and selected, "as permitted" based on this; however, if the Board would like a different term used he will do so. Mr. Vachon expressed concern that if the State budget does not provide sufficient funds, he does not want to see RIFs executed during the school year and believes the 5<sup>th</sup> bullet should

have a high priority. Dr. Willett commented that one of his greatest fears is that the Board's budget goes deeper than \$1M below zero. It would be close to cutting 30-40 staff in the earlier proposal which would be devastating. If the 5<sup>th</sup> bullet were a priority it would help offset that danger. Dr. Willett explained that the numbers are based on assumptions and a number of people are disappointed in how the State is handling this issue. If the referendum fails and a second referendum is put up two weeks later, many hope that the State's budget will come in before that second vote since based on the RBP there would need to be an additional \$741K in layoffs on the Board side which would be devastating especially after the school year has started. A way to insulate against this on the local level is to look at the fund balance.

The discussion continued. Ms. Seaver inquired about the minimum budget requirement (MBR) and if the district would still be within the MBR given the information in the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet. Dr. Willett explained that the MBR is designed so if there is a reduction in enrollment there can be an adjustment. In the district, enrollment dropped from 2015/16 to 2016/17 (although the 2017/18 enrollment is up by 22 students) and thus a reduction would be allowed. The \$600K is less than the MBR (estimated to be \$820K) if it was to be put in place.

Mr. Pagoni asked Dr. Willett if he would consider everything that is being discussed as "bad". Dr. Willett replied yes, that in more than two decades is it the worst he has ever seen. When asked if it could get worse, he replied that it could. If and when the district is at such a point, Dr. Willett said he would present the facts in any case. He has been hired to ensure that the children of Tolland are educated. He will work with whatever he is handed; however, this statement should not be taken as an assurance that all is fine. If heavy reductions come in he will do his very best but it will impact Tolland's education system in a way that is massive, catastrophic, and bad for the children. That said he will not give up on Tolland and will serve the students no matter what happens. Dr. Willett explained that communities are being forced to get into relationship-destroying battles on the local level as a result of the irresponsibility of the State to do its job and present a budget. Any tension can be attributed to the failure of the State government to execute its responsibilities to the towns of CT. The role of the members of the Board is that they need to look at what is presented and balance it to the best of their ability with what they know about the Town budget, mill rate, bond ratings, and other considerations and make a recommendation to the Town Council if the Board would like to modify the RBP. Dr. Willett noted that he completely supports the 1% ordinance. The 4<sup>th</sup> bullet was in response to members feeling there were many conditions in the RBP and the BOE would like clarity.

Further discussion took place. The Board believed that transferring the \$393,340 to the 1% fund should be the top priority and this needs to be clear. Mr. Schroeder commented that just as the State is punishing Tolland for being fiscally conservative over the years, using the 1% fund in the way described in the RBP is punishing the BOE for being proactive, fiscally conservative, and coming up with \$393K in savings. He also recommended that the two places where "can" is used in the 6<sup>th</sup> bullet be changed to "may".

Ms. Moran motioned to move the Board of Education recommendations for changes to the RBP to item I.1. Ms. Gorsky seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Dr. Willett noted that the Board's adopted budget was 2.14% (\$40,175,960) and that included reductions. At this point the total reduction from the Board's adopted budget in the RBP of August 2, 2017 is \$1,835,352.

Ms. Gorsky asked Mr. Pagoni who has been a member of the Board for almost 14 years if he has ever seen anything this devastating. Mr. Pagoni replied that he has not and that this is a "mess". Ms. Seaver noted that in the RBP there is a request for a 7.17% increase and the school proposed budget is being cut by almost \$2M. People need to vote "yes". Ms. Moran noted that once the referendum process starts the Board cannot advocate for the budget.

Dr. Willett explained that the irresponsibility of legislators could very dramatically affect Tolland. While the 7.17% may have some sticker shock, the problem is that State's situation has a very negative impact on the Town. No one is coming to save the Town. The only counter measure is the one that Tolland creates. The solution has to be a collective effort and come from the fund balance and other methods available. If people do not want the devastation level of 40 or more staff positions being reduced from the schools, they need to support the budget. Whatever comes out of the process after the Town Council meeting on Tuesday, Dr. Willett recommended that it be supported.

Ms. Yudichak clarified that if the budget is not passed there may be impacts on class sizes, pay-to-participate fees, and children may be "shuffled" around. Dr. Willett explained that if the referendum does not pass they may have to go back to the loss of World Language and subsidies for pay-to-participate, review the library resources and counselors, and class sizes would increase. The damage will cause the District and the Town to be less competitive than others including the magnet and charter schools. Everyone has to come together to reasonably do what has to be done to protect everyone's investment. In regard to the fund balance, the bond rating is good right now and the Town could consider, if necessary, a few years with a lower rating and phase in the impact. The community exists as a single symbiotic organism and if the school system eventually becomes K-6 due to impacts like this over time, it will have an effect on the local businesses and the economy. It can be difficult to see the long term effects but if this is not mitigated now, the damage will occur. Thus people need to come together cooperatively and collectively accept some discomfort to protect Tolland as a whole.

Ms. Gorsky noted that as the Board's Secretary she has logged the correspondence for almost 4 years which is almost 300 items. When reviewing those items, it saddens her to see that previous communication was in regard to adding programs and now they are about trying to keep everything together and not lose staff and everything the Board has worked so hard to create. It is devastating and a terrible situation. All they can do is come together as a community and support the education system. She cannot believe they have fallen so far due to one State budget. Dr. Willett responded that Tolland has

not yet fallen far but may. The Town has the ability to protect itself but it will be uncomfortable. People are in a precarious position and should try to avoid letting the recklessness of the State make them reckless.

Ms. Harrold commented that many people have expressed concern and would like to know if there are any updates. Specifically, people would like to know when they will receive teacher assignments. Additionally, they want clarity on the positions, how many have been let go etc. Dr. Willett responded that in regard to teacher assignments he appreciates that people want to know. That said they are reacting to a situation where they are shuffling people around and it would be disingenuous to pretend he has answers before he has them, and to make promises that cannot be kept. Class assignments will likely be sent out next week. In regard to the reductions Dr. Willett listed the following positions as of today: 2 BGP grade 2 teachers, 1 BGP computer education teacher, 1 TIS teacher, 1 TMS paraprofessional, 1 TMS math interventionist, 1 THS science teacher, 1 THS assistant principal, 1 THS art, 1 THS math, 1 THS secretary, 1.5 undisclosed reductions (union discussions pending), 1 director of curriculum position will not be filled unless otherwise decided by the BOE, and possibly 1 assistant principal at BGP may not be filled. In addition a noncertified staff reduction districtwide, and a secretary in the central office. In total, there have been more than 15 reductions. Dr. Willett noted that the number may fluctuate. For example, if the Board directs him to hire a Director of Curriculum, then 3 teacher positions would need to be eliminated. In regard to loss of livelihoods, Dr. Willett has done his best to keep that number low - many of the reduced positions have been via retirement or resignation. More available positions may need to be cut if the budget is further reduced. At the end of the process he will list the exact positions and associated dollars.

Ms. Harrold inquired about the loss of the BGP computer education teacher and if it would affect the specials. Dr. Willett explained that the BGP principal felt they could do a special schedule without the computer classes. Technology time would be done with the teachers in their classes in some parts of their instruction. In regard to the specials, there is a plan for 40 minutes each day, 5 days a week. A discussion took place, and a question about testing. There was concern that the time teachers would use in the classroom for computers would be lost elsewhere. Dr. Willett explained that there has to be a universal screen (an unfunded mandate) but they may scale back on NWEA (testing).

Ms. Yudichak clarified that the BOE recommendations to the RBP will be posted on the Board and Town websites once they are finalized and sent to the Town Council on behalf of the Board.

Dr. Willett noted that Tolland has an excellent education system and while he is not a fan of standardized tests, the district's SAT scores are amazing. The community and education system are great. He wants to bring the education system to a 2020 model with specialized programs of study. Tolland is poised to have a Tolland Business Academy and make great headway in how it handles special education and services for children. The lighthouse concept and LEAP programs are going to make the difference for the Town while bringing enrollments, tuition, and a robust school system. The programs are coming to fruition and are tremendous opportunities. For over a decade



the state has been emphasizing regionalization so Tolland will either be where people come or its students will go elsewhere. Dr. Willett's goal is to make the school system the best possible for the children and the community. If the reductions in the budget are not too massive they will be able to brush themselves off, move on, and continue greatness for Tolland.

Mr. Pagoni asked Dr. Willett how he would respond to naysayers who say there were 30-35 children in a class when they went to school and look how well they did. Dr. Willett explained that they need to look at what has been most successful for children. The US is a heterogeneous country with many different racial groups and social and economic statuses coming together in public education. It is not possible to do the things that make for a good education with classes of 35+ students. There are also legislative and contractual requirements regarding class size. Ms. Seaver added that when there were 35 kids in classes, locking kids in closets and hitting them with rulers on the knuckles was allowed.

Dr. Willett noted that Tolland has a great model of education and a powerful system with wonderful opportunities for children and it needs to preserve this.

**G. COMMITTEE AND LIAISON REPORTS**

Communications – The committee met today and reviewed budget information, the opening of schools, Celebrate Tolland (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 11-3PM), and community learning workshops for 2017/18.

CABE – Ms. Sheila McKay (CABE) will provide an outlet for people to be heard by the State on August 15<sup>th</sup> at 10:30AM in Meriden. Information will be posted on social media and the Board's website.

Town Council – Ms. Yudichak, Ms. Moran, Ms. Seaver, and Dr. Willett attended last night's meeting where the Town Manager presented the RBP to the Town Council. Town Council Liaison Kristen Morgan explained that the Governor sent correspondence to towns requesting information on their total, projected, and unassigned fund balances. Further, asked for supplemental information on the potential impact of the continuing State budget impasse on community finances. She noted that Mr. Werbner responded today with the information. He included a two page letter describing how devastating the current budget situation in the State is for Tolland and particularly for education.

**H. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

The Board will continue to work with the Town Council on the revised budget. People may voice comments and concerns at the next Town Council meeting on August 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:30PM in Council Chambers.

**I. BOARD ACTION**

**I.1. Board of Education recommendations for changes to the RBP**

Mr. Pagoni motioned to accept the BOE's recommended changes to the Town Manager's Revised Budget Plan and instruct the Superintendent on behalf of the Board of Education Chair to communicate these recommendations to the Town Council Chair and Vice-Chair to

be shared with the Town Council. Mr. Schroeder seconded the motion. All were in favor.  
Motion carried.

J. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Katrin Hinrichsen, 192 Goose Lane, commented that she likes that the cuts have been made clearer. While it is not a polite way to put it, it strikes her as a shell game. She asked about the suggested alternative if the State provides less revenue than budgeted. She understands that Dr. Willett is proposing that rather than an 80/20 division of the losses that they go to the fund balance. She asked if he was suggesting that possibly the entire fund balance could be at risk and that the Town Council would need to deal with it one way or another. *Dr. Willett responded that the recommendations came from feedback he received from Board members. He is not suggesting anything per se. One of the items discussed was if and when the State hits the Town with a larger amount than anticipated that the fund balance be considered as one of the major ways of addressing the issue. He confirmed that no upper limit was identified in the BOE response.*

Kate Howard-Bender, 103 Goose Lane, thanked Dr. Willett for his passion. In the RBP there are still increases/raises to Town employees. The \$36M budget Dr. Willett proposed is catastrophic and the worst case scenario with no ECS asked for a 10% increase in taxes. The RBP asked for a 7% increase which averages to \$500 per year and she is ok with this as a resident. She asked if they should ask for a 10% increase at the referendum and then negotiate it back to the 7.17%. She noted that she too is an educator and asked if it was a bond rating or the future of the kids – she thinks they need to look at the future of the kids.

Suzanne Kasai, 39 Wildwood Road, inquired about LEAP and if students of all ages would be at TIS and requested that Dr. Willett explain how the students of different ages would be integrated. *Dr. Willett explained that in Tolland, LEAP will take place in an underutilized wing of TIS, occupying that entire wing of the building. It will benefit from repairs and renovations and be a separate space. There will be enough room to have students of different grade levels in different areas. Currently there are 6 kids in the program and the space is sufficient for the students' needs and students of different ages will be in separate areas of the wing. There will be high school students in the program and it is usual for the programs observed to be multi-grade. He added that the older students can be transported to other locations such as THS to take courses as part of their program, returning to their LEAP classroom for other necessary services based on their IEPs. A workshop on LEAP will be held on August 16<sup>th</sup> at 6PM at 51 Tolland Green.*

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, thanked Dr. Willett for the clarity. She inquired as to the exact number less than zero. *Dr. Willett replied the current recommendation in the August 2nd Revised Budget Plan is \$993,340 less than zero.* Ms. Costa expressed concern regarding the reduction of the computer teacher at BGP. This will propagate to TIS, TMS, and THS. She clarified that the NWEA is administered on the computer. *Dr. Willett explained that the feeling is that there are computer resources in the district. At the K2 levels much of the computer work can be done in the classrooms and coincide with reading and math. After speaking with the principal, he was told that the work could be done in the classrooms and this would have the least negative impact on children. An alternative to reducing this position is to take a teacher from a classroom and increase class size.* Ms. Costa suggested that one of the four specialist teachers could teach the elementary computer skills outside of a teacher's classroom so it is done in an appropriate way.

She commented that given the cut of the assistant principal and that the paras are overworked that he is putting undue stress on the BG teacher. If it is the protocol to take NWEA and people judge the district on its scores, then Dr. Willett needs to rethink this. Ms. Costa inquired how LEAP is being marketed now and how it will be in the future. *Dr. Willett explained the benefits of LEAP. They do not need to advertise to students in the district per se – when there is a need the student will join the program. In regard to targeting students outside of Tolland, it is done with local districts. The district sends out promotional materials and invites staff to tour the facilities. Districts are looking for places with the services offered in the LEAP program. Ms. Costa inquired if any of the surrounding towns have the program. Dr. Willett responded that Vernon and Glastonbury have similar programs. A sufficient market exists. Dr. Willett explained that this is the right thing to do for the kids and will be implemented well. They will need a year to determine the threshold of the program.* Ms. Costa commented that she believes the 1% is a “no-brainer” and applauds it.

A resident commented that she believes she knows a child that will be in the LEAP program and it is amazing to her the transition from something theoretical to meeting an individual and having the service for the child and the family. The child will be back in the community with friends. These are real people and it makes a real difference.

K. POINTS OF INFORMATION

Mr. Pagoni commented in regard to the reduction of the computer teacher at BGP. With all due respect to the principal, teachers can only do so much – they are already flat out doing what they have to do. If they didn’t, there would be Spanish taught in kindergarten and all the way through the grades. Additionally, in regard to the discussion of bond ratings and the quality of the schools, he is willing to be more flexible on the bond rating. There is far too much belief that the bond rating is the “Holy Grail”. If you do not have quality education and/or atrophy in the system, then at some point the community will slide over the edge and start farming kids out to other towns. At that point no one will care about the bond rating. If the bond slides a bit so be it but it does not have to be at the top at the expense of losing the school system and that is where Tolland is now. Ms. Harrold agreed. Ms. Moran commented that with no disrespect to BGP, the reductions will be bad at all of the schools. Ms. Seaver inquired if the students could be sent home with an iPad so computer work could be done at home. Ms. Harrold wants to see kids keep their home time. Ms. Yudichak asked if it would possible to share a teacher from TIS. Dr. Willett responded that there may be an opportunity to do so. He will back the principals and their instructional leadership and would discourage doing otherwise.

L. CORRESPONDENCE

- Town Council Meeting – July 25, 2017
- Special Joint Meeting – July 31, 2017

M. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Budget

N. NEW BUSINESS - none

O. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pagoni motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:40PM. Mr. Schroeder seconded the motion. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Pascuzzi  
Clerk

## MEETING MINUTES

### TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL HICKS MEMORIAL MUNICIPAL CENTER LIBRARY PROGRAM ROOM AUGUST 8, 2017 – 7:30 P.M.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Rick Field, Chair; William Eccles, Vice-Chair; Robert Green; Kristen Morgan; Joseph Sce and David Skoczulek

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Paul Krasusky

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Steven Werbner, Town Manager; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records; Beverly Bellody, Human Services

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Rick Field called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Recited.
3. **MOMENT OF SILENCE:** Observed.
4. **PROCLAMATIONS:** None.
5. **PUBLIC PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** (*on any subject within the jurisdiction of the Town Council*) (2 minute limit)

**Donna Allegro of Peter Green Road** – She doesn't see an immediate need to open the Town Charter. They were able to find a means to suspend the budget process, and this seems like a satisfactory means to this predicament. Other than this timeline problem, she sees no other problems with the present Charter. Why go down this path when we are going to be facing challenging years ahead with budgets, falling house prices and crumbling foundations. Tolland has more than enough on their plate without opening this particular can of worms.

6. **PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS:** None.
- 7a. **REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES RESPONSIBLE TO THE COUNCIL:** None.
- 7b. **REPORTS OF TOWN COUNCIL LIAISONS:** The liaisons referred the public to the minutes of each meeting.
8. **NEW BUSINESS (ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS):**

- 8.1 Discussion on the Revised Budget Plan put forth by the Town Manager.

To view the entire revised Budget Plan from the Town Manager, please see attached.

Mr. Werbner began his budget presentation with this statement from his Budget Plan:

The situation the State has put us in is very difficult to manage for both the Town and Board of Education. As stated on several occasions, we over the years, have done everything right from developing proper reserves and financial policies to limiting exposure from high cost health plans, as well as providing only Defined Contribution Pension Plans. Furthermore, we have developed a reputation for having outstanding Town and Education services

at a fraction of the cost that other Towns pay. Yet due to costs associated with rapid growth in the early 2000s when we were at one time the fastest growing community in the State, the lack of revenue diversification due to limited land mass for development, the expense of building on available land and limited market for additional retail services, we find ourselves with a equalized mill rate above the average. So absorbing larger than normal tax increases due to reduced State aid becomes more problematic. Yet unlike the State, TOLLAND knows the need to legislate. We listen to our constituents, study the issue, debate and ultimately legislate. Doing nothing to address an issue is abdicating your responsibilities. After listening to residents for many months and waiting for some direction from the State on budgetary matters, I feel it is time to recommend a changed course of action. Let's adopt what I am calling a "Hope and Prayer" (H&P) Budget that is now apparently the new norm for local government budgeting in an era of no State budget. While our fiscal year moves forward, school is about to start, winter will be here shortly and with the withholding of State funds, cash flow will be an issue.

We need to be able to plan a course of action for at least the next two fiscal years and possibly beyond. In May our budget process was suspended in hope and a prayer that the State after eight months could figure out a budget, but that has not happened. Now, inaction at the State level means the Hope and Prayer method of budgeting must be adopted by TOLLAND and other towns because no one can, or will, tell us what our revenue will be from State sources. Hope and a prayer or devastation to services; I chose the former and I hope you do too. This will require sacrifice by all. I know what I am proposing isn't perfect. I hope and pray that what I am estimating as a loss in State revenues will be less than anticipated and that the long-term financial impact to Tolland will be more favorable. In the best interest of the future of this Town, I ask that we come together around this plan and advocate its acceptance.

Below is an outline of the H&P budget:

1. The last budget put out by the Governor was the Resource Allocation Plan. It reduces Tolland's ECS funding by 76.82% or by \$8,284,670.  
The H&P budget reduces the ECS funding by 50% or \$5,435,521.
2. The budget prepared by the Town Manager in March 2017, reduced the town expenditures by \$343,291, or 2.89% reduction in overall spending of the town operating budget.  
Those reductions are part of the H&P budget.
3. The BOE originally forwarded a budget of a 2.14% increase back in February 2017. Mr. Werbner reduced that request in his Manager's Recommended Budget to 0%. Further, he reduced the BOE budget by 1.2 million dollars based on the Governor's recommendation to create a new special education grant that goes directly to the Board. The Resource Allocation budget did not mention the new special education grant.  
The H&P budget keeps the BOE at the same level as 16/17 expenditures and in addition assumes that Special Education grant will be 50% of what the Governor proposed or \$600,000. Therefore, he is reducing the FY 16/17 expenditure level of the BOE by \$600,000. While he is hopeful this reduction will be offset by a new special education grant, should this not be the case, this type of reduction in education expenses is within the norm of the Minimum Budget Statute based on our adjusted student populations as explained at recent meetings by the Superintendent of Schools. In addition, new programs of the BOE may achieve cost avoidance or new revenue that could mitigate a reduction of this nature. The expenditure level included in the H&P budget for the BOE is \$38,733,948. Should the grant eventually be more than \$600,000, the BOE will have additional funds to utilize at their discretion not to exceed their original budget request. Should the grant not be part of the ultimate State budget or be funded in a lesser amount, the BOE will have to make expenditure adjustments.
4. In Mr. Werbner's March 2017 budget, the capital improvement budget contained \$142,093 in General Fund dollars.  
The H&P budget contains no increase in General Fund dollars for capital improvements. For some projects, they will be able to use other sources of funds, but some projects may be deferred.

5. In his March 2017 budget, he utilized \$250,000 as a revenue source from fund balance.

The H&P budget contains \$1,400,000 from fund balance. It is recommended that \$1,006,660 come from the existing General Fund-fund balance and \$393,340 from unspent FY16/17 BOE funds that were scheduled to go into the BOE 1% fund.

Tolland needs to be mindful of the importance of maintaining an appropriate fund balance level in future financial management plans to ensure the best rates on borrowed funds and to protect the Town in case of future catastrophic events.

6. With a 7.17% tax increase, there is no need for further expenditure reductions for either the Town or BOE. The mill rate increase is 2.45 mills. So long as the revenue picture is as he has created here.

If the voters reject the 7.17% increase in the mill rate and we go to a 5% increase in the mill rate, it will require a further decrease in expenditures in the amount of \$926,515. This decrease should be split between the Board of Education and the Town on an 80/20% basis. The mill rate increase will be 1.71 mills.

It is important to point out that the fiscal concerns we are feeling today carryover into the next fiscal year and beyond. One time use of reserve funds and continued erosion of grant sources along with reasonable expenditure increases may cause higher than normal mill rate increases in subsequent fiscal years. Using as an assumption for FY18/19, no further reductions in ECS for the following fiscal year, a return to use of fund balance at the \$200,000 level, a flat Grand List, a known reduction in a bond reimbursement by the State which is expiring and increases of 2.14% for BOE, 2% for the Town and 1% for capital would result in a 6% increase in taxes or 2.20 mills. Potentially over two fiscal years the mill rate could go from the current 34.19 mills to the 38 mill range.

7. If the H&P budget is adopted and the State budget, when approved, provides us with more revenue than anticipated the following is recommended in this priority order:

The money taken from the General Fund-fund balance shall be replenished.

The money that was requested to go to the BOE 1% reserve fund shall be funded.

Up to 50% of the remainder shall be set aside as reserved for tax relief in FY 18/19, 19/20, and 20/21 in equal amounts.

The remaining additional funds shall be allocated to the BOE and Town on an 80/20% basis capped at the BOE original request amount and the amount of expenditure reductions of the Town as recommended by the Town Manager.

8. If the state budget, when approved, provides us with less revenue than budgeted then the difference would come from decreased BOE and Town expenditures on an 80/20% basis.
9. Should the General Fund-fund balance be utilized in any amount greater than \$200,000 and not be replenished by additional State dollars, any expenditure savings of the Town and BOE in future years shall be returned to the General Fund-fund balance and not placed in any other reserve accounts until such time that the funds are replenished. The goal shall be that the funds shall be replenished in no more than five years and a concerted effort will be made on the part of the BOE and Town to have end of the year savings to use for this purpose. Future use of fund balance as a revenue source shall revert back to our normal of \$150,000 - \$200,000.

10. The proposed mill rate increase of 2.45 mills is 4.75 times the average mill rate increase over the last ten years.

Mr. Werbner suggests that the Council move forward with the budget. The school system needs to have a plan; otherwise it would be a mess if they didn't. And, the town needs the budget in order to get the supplemental tax bills out.

The tentative budget schedule is:

August 15, 2017 (Tuesday)	Council Discussion – Budget Finalized – Council Chambers – 7:30 p.m.
August 22, 2017 (Tuesday)	Advertise Budget
August 29, 2017 (Tuesday)	ANNUAL BUDGET PRESENTATION – THS Auditorium – 7:30 p.m. BOE is provided an opportunity to present a revised adopted budget based on funding approved by Town Council and other line item updates
August 30, 2017 (Wednesday)	Budget Presentation – Senior Center – 12:30 p.m.
September 19, 2017 (Tuesday)	Annual Budget Referendum

**\*\*ALL VOTING WILL BE HELD IN THE LIBRARY PROGRAM ROOM\*\***

There will be a vote every two (2) weeks until a budget is adopted.

A handout was provided outlining the allocations that the Governor would use in terms of the distribution of funds. Tolland is disproportionately impacted from other communities, particularly communities our size.

Mr. Werbner reviewed a memo he prepared to the Council dated July 31, 2017. The memo outlines an additional \$422,000 in reductions from various town departments. He is suggesting the Council consider implementing a lot of the reductions on his list. Some additional amendments to the list have been made based upon the H&P budget.

A handout was provided showing the property tax impact of the Town Manager's proposed H&P budget using three different scenarios.

Mr. Werbner explained the that Governor requested that the OPM Secretary send a letter asking what current fund balance levels are, and to provide any information regarding the impact of the continued state budget impasse. The Secretary of OPM, Mr. Barnes, believes that municipalities are in a better position because of their fund balances and their strong financial policies to absorb loss of funds more so than the State of Connecticut. This information, in Mr. Werbner's mind, is being asked for to prove that point. Mr. Werbner has prepared a response to Mr. Barnes, outlining that Tolland is in the perfect storm, because we are impacted by the concrete foundation problem, we are impacted by a high mill rate and we are impacted by the devastation of services. He said if you put those three things together, you've destroyed a well-managed, attractive and desired town.

**Ed Gervasi of 351 Old Post Road** – He said that it seems like all the work that the staff has done to make this town attractive has come back to haunt us. You fight more than other towns, because we have a referendum here. Some towns don't, and the residents don't get the chance to vote. He commends everyone for doing what they are doing. He does have some ideas for the BOE that he will bring up to them at a meeting. Every tax payer is like a snowflake, we are all different.

Joe Sce brought up Mr. Werbner's decision to maintain the stipend increase for fire volunteers in the amount of \$20,000. Mr. Sce realizes it's been eight years. They do a terrific job and he realizes they are volunteers, but he doesn't know if this is the year to do this. Especially with all the devastation that is being cut out of the budget (loss of teachers, etc.)

Mr. Werbner said the decision is up to the Council. Although, he added that what the volunteers due for this town versus having a fully paid fire department is a lot less than \$20,000.

**Jennifer Reuss of 966 Tolland Stage Road** – She said the stipends are small, and don't even come close to reimbursing them.

**Kenny Trice of 53 Doe Run** – He said he respects the work that Mr. Werbner has done. It is risk to borrow from the General Fund, but given the situation, it may be the time. The rates are low. If the rates were 17%, he would agree with him.



Mr. Werbner said no matter how much you increase the borrowing, the following year you're going to pay the piper. Everyone needs to understand that as long as that multi-year progression is understood, he would agree.

**Adam Bender of 103 Goose Lane** – He said our bond rating may change, but he assumes everyone's bond rating will change.

Mr. Werbner said he is not only basing this on the town's credit worthiness, and the cost of bonding. He is concerned with subsequent years.

**A Resident** asked if we borrowed from the fund, would it affect any of the current interest rates that we are paying?  
Mr. Werbner said the current rates are locked in.

David Skoczulek said he had three communications in front of him:

1. From Sam Alderstein;
2. From Sam Alderstein to the Council, Mr. Werbner and Mr. Willett; and
3. Letter from Dr. Willett to the Members of the Town Council and Town Manager dated August 8, 2017.

The letters reference the \$400,000 and the 1% fund. Mr. Skoczulek asked since the 1% fund is an ordinance, does that impact the ability to change how the money is used?

Mr. Werbner said he is not looking to change the ordinance. He is suggesting an agreement that there will not be a request this year to put that money in the 1% reserve fund and allow it to stay in fund balance to be used for this purpose. He said we are all sacrificing. He realizes the BOE would like to have this money untouched, they would prefer not to be reduced by \$600,000 and they would prefer it to be handled in a different way. They can handle it a different way, but he doesn't believe that is a fair play. He believes what he is proposing is fair in terms of the equity, in terms of balance, the tax payers, the town and the BOE. He stands by his proposal.

**Laura Roberts of 74 Nedwied Road** – She asked what the logic was that Mr. Werbner used to do the further budget adjustments of things he wanted to add back into the budget?

Mr. Werbner said it is his professional opinion that those things should not be reduced. A lot of it is Public Safety or equity in terms of his recommendation on the town employees and firefighters.

Discussion continued about the 1% fund.

Mr. Field advised that they will take up the budget at a special meeting on August 15<sup>th</sup>. He suggested that council members address any questions they may have ahead of time to Mr. Werbner so that answers can be prepared. Mr. Eccles added that he'd like to see some estimates from the BOE as to what they would think an equitable use of the 1% would be. He is open to suggestions.

## **8.2 Consideration of a resolution to initiate actions necessary to amend the Town Charter and appoint a Charter Revision Commission.**

David Skoczulek motioned to accept the following resolution:

**BE IT RESOLVED** that in accordance with Section 7-188 of the CT General Statutes the Town Council hereby initiates actions necessary to amend the Town Charter.

**FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that in accordance with CT General Statutes Section 7-190 the Town Council hereby:

1. Appoints the following individuals to the Charter Revision Commission:

Sue Errickson – co-chair,

Marilee Beebe – co-chair,

Rob Green,

Phillip Aieta,

Bryan Hurlburt,

Abigail Jeffries,

Benjamin Christensen,

Liz Costa,

Hollie Barnas;

2. Recommends that the attached list of suggested Charter Revisions be considered for amendment.
3. Submits Draft Report to Town Council by **May 15, 2018**.

Seconded by Bill Eccles.

Mr. Eccles outlined the process: The Commission will go and do their work. They will then return the suggested changes to the Town Council for a review. The seated Council will then approve or reject those changes to send to referendum. It is most likely that the new Council will start the review.

Mr. Field said the Commission is independent. They can look at things that are being put forth to them, or they can choose not to. The public will be able to come and make suggestions also. The Council will be the party to decide if they will go referendum.

David Skoczulek reviewed a list of proposed items to be considered. Some included: staggering terms among the Council and the BOE; the budget calendar; how many referendums will be had before they move to another pathway. Mr. Field said that he is in line with the staggered terms for the Council and BOE. There was an additional list of items included in the packet that were suggestions from the town staff. These will all be given to the Commission for consideration.

All in favor. None opposed. Robert Green abstained.

### 8.3 Discussion on the next steps in the search of a Town Manager.

Mr. Field said they need to put together a Town Manager Search Committee. Mr. Eccles did not agree with that approach. He said Tolland is competing right now with a lot of other towns looking for new Managers. He suggests they get a recruiter, and then use the services of that recruiter to organize a multi-step process. They can't take a year to find a person, so a firm or recruiter will get them some results. Mr. Field said the problem with that is the cost. Mr. Werbner said he has allotted money in the budget for this. It will ultimately save the town money by hiring a recruiter, and it will be money well spent. Mr. Werbner said they would issue a RFP, and then there would be various interviews involving various steps. They will obtain a firm, and actually start recruiting the first week of January. He believes they should go out for the RFP immediately. All council members agreed with this approach.

### 8.4 Consideration of a resolution to declare various equipment in disrepair or obsolete from the Board of Education.

Bill Eccles motioned to accept the following resolution:

**BE IT RESOLVED** that the list of equipment attached is hereby declared obsolete and may be disposed of in accordance with Board of Education Policy 3040, Disposal of Obsolete or Surplus Equipment/Materials.

Seconded by Robert Green. All in favor. None opposed.

8.5 Appointments to vacancies on various municipal boards/commissions.

8.5.a. Appointment to Planning & Zoning Commission (Alternate) – *1 Alternate vacancy will remain.*

8.5.b. Appointment to Library Advisory Board – *1 vacancy will remain.*

Mr. Skoczulek commented that resignation letters have been received from Laura Gregory Roberts and Katie Murray both were Alternates on the Planning & Zoning Commission.

David Skoczulek motioned to appoint the following:

**Kurt Schenher of 138 Chardonnay Lane and Mark Farrell** to the Planning & Zoning Commission as an Alternate, term 11/04/2015 – 11/08/2017; and

**Mary Jo Leahy of 14 Doe Run** to the Library Advisory Board, term 11/04/2015 – 11/06/2019.

Seconded by Robert Green. All in favor. None opposed.

9. **OLD BUSINESS (ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS):** None.

10. **REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER (A WRITTEN REPORT SHALL BE PROVIDED THE 1<sup>ST</sup> MEETING OF THE MONTH ONLY):** Mr. Werbner reminded that this is a non-recycling week, and new barrels are being delivered. If you don't want a new barrel, you need to call Willimantic Waste. Do not call the Town Manager's office; you'll just be referred to Willimantic Waste.

11. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

11.1 July 25, 2017 Regular Meeting Minutes: Bill Eccles moved to adopt the minutes; Seconded by Robert Green. All in favor. None opposed. Joseph Sce abstained.

11.2 July 31, 2017 Special Joint Meeting Minutes: Bill Eccles moved to adopt the minutes; Seconded by Robert Green. All in favor. None opposed. Robert Green and David Skoczulek abstained.

12. **CORRESPONDENCE TO COUNCIL:** Mr. Field advised that he has 11-12 e-mails from residents, which he forgot at home. They were all about the budget (75% were in favor of approving the Town Manager's proposed budget and 25% were against approving a high budget). He will bring them to the next meeting.

12.1 Eagle Scout invitation

12.2 Letter from the State of Connecticut Siting Council re: modifying an existing communications tower in town

13. **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:** Mr. Field reported the following:  
~Next Tuesday they will pick a budget.

14. **COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS FROM COUNCILPERSONS:** None.

15. **PUBLIC LISTED PARTICIPATION** (*on any subject within the jurisdiction of the Town Council*)  
(3 minute limit):

**Karen Moran of 50 Merlot Way** - She would like clarification on the 1% fund, and advised that Dr. Willett was present to answer questions. She said Dr. Willett has already found efficiencies. This is a fund to be used for educational purposes and it can be used for non-emergency things. This is an emergency and crisis for us. She

asked them to please consider what they are doing with that fund. It was put together as a partnership between the Council and the BOE. This doesn't feel like a partnership. She hopes they consider all the concerns, and hopes they all take time to read the letters that David Skoczulek spoke of.

Mr. Field said they will take this seriously. They may not come up with the decision that she wants though.

**Deb Goetz of 176 Kate Lane** - She asked Mr. Werbner if he had a chance to speak with Lt. Governor Wyman.

Mr. Werbner said yes. He said she commented that it continues to be very trying process. They are talking to each other. She indicated that she is the tie breaking vote in the Senate, and she is aware of the impact on Tolland.

She asked if the Council finalizes the budget next week, and something changes at the State level, can there be changes before it hits referendum?

Mr. Werbner said they can change the dates and stop the process if they needed to.

**Katie Murray of 8 Lisa Lane** - She has been struggling to understand the Manager's proposal. While it is confusing, she appreciates the time being spent. She sees the 1% as a savings account that the BOE has put into effect. It will offset the cut that they will feel. This account was setup to help mitigate any massive budget decreases. If we take it away from them, then we are punishing them. She wants the Council to think about how they got here and the ramifications of taking away their savings account.

**Jennifer Reuss of 966 Tolland Stage Road** - She doesn't believe anyone at the meeting realizes what it means to be a volunteer. Yes, they get a small stipend that helps with the gas, but if you take the costs to pay for gas, uniforms and boots, etc., she still spent \$940 of her own money this year. They have minimum shifts to fulfill, but they do more.

Mr. Sce said he is not saying that the volunteers don't deserve it, because they do. The question is the timing. Tolland is cutting millions of dollars from our budget, including half of the police force.

Mr. Eccles verified with Mr. Werbner that the stipend is currently in the budget. Mr. Eccles said he does appreciated what they do.

Mr. Field said they do understand how important volunteers are to this town. He also realizes how much the volunteers save this town.

**16. ADJOURNMENT:** Bill Eccles moved to adjourn the meeting; Seconded by Robert Green at 9:30 p.m. All were in favor.

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Richard J. Field, Council Chair

**Michelle A. Finnegan**  
Town Council Clerk