

D.I.C.

Minutes
Special Meeting Board as a Whole
West Haven Board of Education

A Special Meeting of the Board as a Whole for Discussion on the Proposed Budget for 2016 – 2017 was held in the Board’s Meeting Room on the second floor of City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, Connecticut on January 27, 2016. The meeting was called to order by Patrick Leigh, Chairman of the Finance Committee at 6:04 p.m. Patrick stated this was a continuation of the previous Special Meeting on the Budget held on January 19, 2016.

**BOARD MEMBERS
IN ATTENDANCE:**

James W. Morrissey, Chairman
Robert Guthrie, Vice Chair
Susan Walker, Secretary/Treasurer
Patrick Leigh
Patricia Libero
Karen Pacelli
Rosa Richardson
Rosemary Russo

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Mark Palmieri

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Anne Druzolowski, Assistant Superintendent
Matt Cavallaro, Director of Finance

CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
PRESENT:**

Chairman of the Finance Committee Patrick Leigh welcomed everyone.

Board member Rosa Richardson read a letter and requested in be included in the minutes. ✕
A copy of this letter is included at the end of the minutes. Chairman Leigh asked if there were any other questions from the board. Board member Patricia Libero said no but she does have a comment. She feels that it is not our job as BOE members to decide what the city can afford. She believes that is the City Council’s job. Our job is to present a budget that acknowledges and addresses all the issues of our students. She agrees with Rosa and feels the budget should be approved as proposed and when they come back with what

they are going to give us we will make cuts as appropriate. She feels if we send them a budget that we cut and then they cut and then we come back next January and say we don't have enough money because we cut the budget knowing full well that we weren't going to be able to do it shows irresponsibility on our part. They then are going to say what is the matter with you why didn't you pass a budget that was responsible. She is concerned about not passing the budget as presented by the Superintendent. She feels we need to support this budget and pass it as it is presented.

Board member Rosemary Russo understands both Rosa and Pat's concerns and thinks that everyone in this room puts education and the needs of the children first but she also feels that as an elected board we also have responsibility to the people who elected us and to the taxpayers and four million dollars is a big increase. She thinks they should look at it and see if we can present a budget that is maybe a little bit more in line with what the city can afford. We all read the papers and know what is going on in the city and I think that we need to give the budget due diligence and look through it; many eyes are better than a couple of sets of eyes. In previous years, not the last few but prior to that the board always discussed it line by line and spent many hours with the budget. As a board we need to be more involved in this decision; we are voting for it and I want to know more about it. She is not, not supporting Neil and is not, not supporting teachers the administration and students. She is pro education and has been in education all her life and understands from that side what this feels like but to discuss it and look at it more closely isn't harmful to anybody. Maybe if the budget that we present is a little bit more in line maybe it will just get approved and this is her hope.

Chairman Leigh asked if there were any questions on the budget. Patrick has a few if there were no questions at this time. He wanted to understand the criteria for the step levels. Matt Cavallaro gave him information on a 1 – 10 step level but there was nothing listed on what makes a 1, 2, 3 all the way to 10 and he would like some clarification on how the steps are decided when someone applies for a position. Superintendent Cavallaro stated it is on years of experience and once you are in a teaching position in this district you become part of the step scale. If we hire you at step 1 it will take you 10 years to reach the top step of 10. You will advance an increment each year until you reach the top step. We try to hire quality teachers at the lowest possible step however in shortage areas like math, chemistry and biology and some of the fine arts if a teacher is coming in with years of experience those are the times we would bring this person in at a step given the number of years of experience and it being a shortage area but once they come in and are locked in a step they advance one step a year the same as every other teacher. Patrick asked if the step level and years of experience are defined. Neil said Step 2 is two years teaching experience and if you have done an internship in a shortage area we might use that as a year of experience to be competitive in a shortage area. Patrick said then each step is the years of experience. Correct. A discussion about Dept. Chairs took place. Neil stated that is contractual and they receive a \$4,800 a year stipend and by contract they apply for those positions annually. There was a question on Data personnel at the high school and their salary. Neil said the number of hours they work and the fact they work summers is taken into account. A further discussion took place. Patrick then asked why

Savin Rock Community School's United Illuminating bill is double that of other schools. Neil said it is because they have air conditioning.

Rosemary Russo stated she didn't see anything in the budget for the Perkins grant and asked if we received money this year. Matt said we have not had access to the grant for the last two years. Neil said we applied for it this year but have not received work yet but we may actually owe money from previous years and the state is still in the process of completing an audit. This is about a \$100,000.00 a year grant. Rosemary asked if there are other smaller grants that aren't included in this budget that we have. Yes. About how much do they total roughly. Matt said \$150,000.00 to \$200,000.00. Rosemary said you get a lot of money for materials and technology and that is also in the line item budget the technology and materials; is there an overlap there. Matt said no because the Alliance Grant and ECS money is combined so part of the \$46,000.00 (five million is the Alliance Grant). OK. Matt said if we do something different with the Alliance Grant and the state does not approve it four million dollars will be taken right off the top of the ECS money. Rosemary thanked him for explaining this. A further discussion took place about Title I and Title II. Matt stated those are separate standalone grants with a separate fund for each of those grants and the state has to approve the money and the positions we have and the things we are doing. They can cut the grant at any time and disallow some of the things we suggest. We have had a consistent amount of money for those two grants. What is the total amount for the Title I Grant; about 2.2M this year. OK and that is not included in that 46,000.00. No it is not.

Jim Morrissey heard some comments from a couple of board members about past history and that nature. This is a new board and I believe the new members have a right to question this budget. No one wants to hurt the children of this city but just because the Superintendent wants a 4% raise and Jim knows he is working hard on behalf of the children but we can't just give it. We need to look and see if we can possibly save some money before the budget gets to the city council. If he asked for an 8% raise would we just give him an 8% raise; I don't think so. This new board has a right to ask the questions this evening and further on down the road. The fact of the matter is and we know it that we are not going to get 4%. Perhaps the Superintendent can work with us over the next few days and possibly come up with another plan that we can come back to the council with then we can work together with them instead of trying to work against each other and come to an agreement. We should show that we are trying to work with the Superintendent, the taxpayers and more importantly not hurt the children. This is a new board and he doesn't care about the past history of boards. That is what they did in the past. New board members have a right to question what they want to question. We have asked the Superintendent to look at ways to possibly reduce the costs and come back to us and maybe on Monday night we can approve the budget and present it to the City Council and see where we go with it.

Rosa Richardson stated with all due respect Mr. Chair (Patrick Leigh) she hears where Chairman Morrissey is coming from and appreciates that and she is a homeowner and tax payer OK she gets it but she wants to emphasize tonight that no matter what we do to this budget when it goes before the City it is going to get cut. She knows and understands that. We need to stand firm and present this budget to the city as it exists and then we will

have to make some serious decisions when the budget comes back to us but we shouldn't be making cuts before it goes there. We will have to make those serious decisions when it comes back to us anyway.

Jim understands that but 4% is a pie in the sky and there is no way we are going to get 4%. If we can try and pare it down a little bit and work with the City Council instead of working against the Council we can try to come up with an agreement that we both can work with. If it was an 8% or 12% increase are you going to just vote for it? I'm not going to do that. We are not going to get 4%. We on the board are for the children but I am a realist too. If we work together rather than against one another we will be better off.

Rosa said we will work together when the end result comes to us. She has no qualms about that at all. She respects all her colleagues that sit here with her but with that said she would like to put a motion on the floor to approve the budget as recommended. Pat Libero seconded that. Jim Morrissey said this meeting was noticed as just for discussion and we can make a motion on Monday night. This meeting was for discussion of the budget with the agreement we would make the motion on Monday night. Rosa said she wasn't part of that meeting she was at work. Jim said he understands but it is right here in the notice discussion on the budget. Neil said there is no vote it is a special meeting so Jim you are correct there cannot be a vote tonight anyway. Jim would like to have the Superintendent come back before the meeting on Monday night and make some suggestions and recommendations that can tear the budget down a little bit that you can live with and this board can live with then we can make the motion on Monday night to approve the budget. Neil said we will do our best and come back with something.

Rosemary said if we come up with something more within the city's grasp maybe we won't have to come back and make very drastic cuts. If we show that we care and are looking to see what we can do and still keep our programs and keep our children educated it might make the whole budget process a little bit easier. Rosemary remembered a question on the grants. Does the ECS Grant follow a formula depending on the population as to how much money you will get? Neil said as far back as when he was on the City Council he didn't know what the formula was but he knows that West Haven has always received a higher percentage than most districts and we have always gotten a high percentage. It is now over 50% of our budget. He is sure economics and the ability to pay plays a role and whatever revenue the city gets as far as commercial and things like that. He knows West Haven's is very high. A further discussion took place.

Bob Guthrie said the nine board members advocate on behalf of children. To look at this budget we know a couple of things. We are relying on state grant numbers and don't know where those numbers are going to come in and we have been told to expect no less but there is no guarantee. The outlook on the state could certainly throw these numbers into flux. We already know that Special Education needs are going to rise and the city has proven in the past not to pass that additional money on to us so we can't assume that money is going to be there. We know there are three contracts up for negotiation which will cost money one way or another. We can all agree there are a couple of areas where we would like to reduce class size and we certainly aren't going to be able to do any of

this by reducing what we ask for. He agrees with everyone that the 4% number is not going to be what we see back from the City Council but doesn't think any of us can predict what the City Council will lock into. It takes a substantial number of votes on the City Council's side to change those numbers also.

Jim Morrissey thanked his fellow board members for their passion and believes they certainly have the best interest of the children at heart. We might disagree and that is no problem at all it is a great thing. This new board has a lot of questions to ask and we look forward to more discussion as we go along. Jim believes we are all here to make sure that our children receive the best education as possible and we want to work with our teachers, administrators, superintendent and assistant superintendent to try to achieve these goals. He knows it will be a very difficult year it has been this way for many, many years but hopefully things will start changing in the city with the development and things of that nature will bring some more tax revenue in. Jim said he knows ECS is here for two years and was wondering if we could talk to our legislators in Hartford to see if we can shake the tree a little more and get some more money from them. We are a distressed city and we should put everything on the table and see what we can do to further the education in West Haven and talk to our State Senators and State Reps and see where we go. It will be difficult for us there is no question about this but he appreciates everyone coming this evening and he knows we all have the best interests of the children at heart.

Rosa Richardson said if there is no other discussion she would like to make a motion to adjourn. Patrick said sure but before we adjourn he would like to say he values everyone's feedback and is glad we were able to have this discussion and answer some of these questions. As a first time board member this is a lot of learning, a lot of numbers and things that I need a little more understanding on but he is glad that everyone has valid points and he thinks that we will come to a conclusion on Monday and pass the budget where we need it to be. Motion to adjourn.

Rosa said with that motion to adjourn.

Pat Libero seconded the motion.

All board members present were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Secretary

As a City employee and as a taxpayer, I must tell you I am very aware of our city's financial situation. I recognize that this crisis did not happen overnight, and I am not addressing this matter so as to lay blame on any "one" administration. I understand that the current administration was handed a very difficult task when they took office. However, I do not believe that our children's educational needs must suffer due to our city's fiscal irresponsibility.

Previous City Council Members; the governing body of this City, allowed unbalanced budgets to go into effect by default. Political factions affected our city's fiscal demise due to irrational decisions or indecisions. Hence, over a period of many years, we are now faced with an enormous deficit.

With that said, the Members of this Board were elected to support the educational, as well as general well being of all students enrolled in our public school system. We have watched our annual budgets get cut substantially but with no lower expectations on educating our youth. Attached is a copy of the 2014-15 State Department of Education Net Current Expenditures Report which shows that West Haven, although not the lowest per student, is not up the par with per student expenditures in relation to other communities of its size.

The Board voted to provide all day kindergarten last year despite the fact that many were concerned about being able to sustain the program. Cutting this budget then sending it to the Finance Committee/Mayor, who will cut it some more, is not going to be pretty. The city has a history of making cuts to the Board of Education Budget, why do we want to have it cut twice? If cuts are substantial enough we may have to make some very serious decisions like: do we eliminate all day kindergarten do we lay off teachers or maybe even do we close another school?.

I am of the opinion that it is our responsibility to support the budget as proposed by our administrators and to defend it to our Mayor and Council Members. I have never heard of a Board wanting to go over the budget by each line item and making cuts as deemed appropriate. Past history has always been to support the proposed budget and deal with the cuts made by the city.

For our newly appointed members, The Board has expressed concern about decreases in the city's contribution to the Board of Education Budget for many years. As Supt. Cavallaro has stated time and time again, the city's percentage of the overall budget has decreased year after year and now only covers approximately 41% of the total budget. I would like the city to bring the curve back up over time. I believe that the city has an obligation to educate our children. We have an obligation to ensure that our children are educated to the best of their ability.

I believe it is appropriate to approve the recommended budget as proposed by our Superintendant and that we be united in our efforts to keep cuts to a minimum. I also believe that we should stand united before our City Council in a show of support to our students and educators.