

**REGULAR MEETING
BUDGET HEARING
APRIL 21, 2014**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, April 21, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Hemmann, Hurley, Manousos, Martino, Rell, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Barry, and Chairperson Montinieri, Absent: Councilor Kotkin.

Also present: Michael Emmett, Superintendent of Schools, Board of Education Members John Morris, Charles Carey, Elaine Steinmiller-Paradise, Gina DeAngelo, Polly Moon, Tracy McDougall, Michael O'Neil, Manager, Kathy Bagley, Director, Laurel Goodgion, Director, Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Councilor Hemmann led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Mayor Montinieri announced that there will be a presentation from our Superintendent of Schools, Mike Emmett and then our Town Manager will also present the budget and then we will have public comment.

Superintendent Emmett explained that he will be giving a very brief presentation and will actually be his third presentation presented first to the Board of Education as well as to Town Council on the 17th of March. He explained that the process with regard to how we develop our budget is actually one that begins long, long before now. We actually started in the late Fall with regards to our projections and then went through a series of budget workshops held both on Tuesdays as well as Saturday mornings over at the Stillman Building. We went line-by-line with regard to this budget. Those of you that know that have the binders about 650 pages, line-by-line, object-by-object to determine exactly what it was that we needed. Superintendent Emmett explained that the proposed budget increase for the upcoming school year is a 3.75% increase or an increase of \$1.99 million dollars. Our proposed initiatives and I said this when I presented the Council. I talked about these as being initiatives. In reality, these are just replenishing positions we've lost in the past. We are looking for a 1.0 Director of Security and Residency. As you know, school safety continues to be an issue and we just recently heard on the news of another multiple stabbing at a high school in the Pittsburgh area. We are looking for a 1.0 Instructional Supervisor for Mathematics. This again would be a replacement for a position that we previously had and we are also looking to replenish the Academic Leader Stipends both at Wethersfield High School and Silas Deane Middle School. As you probably heard in the news, school districts across the State and actually across the country are now enjoying the implementing of Common Core State Standards. Also, we are dealing with the myriad of mandates that we're required to meet upgrades. An example of that certainly would be the implementation of lifeguards at the pool. It was a cost that was not budgeted for this budget year but the mandate came forward from the legislature and we had to make due. Again, the piece with the academic leader stipends both at Wethersfield High School and Silas Deane Middle

School. These were really important functions at both schools and with the implementation of Common Core State Standards and all of the curriculum that we have written over the past two years, these positions, we feel would be very important in terms of moving forward. In the previous presentation to the Town Council, I listed a whole myriad of things that didn't make the budget. When we first began our work in late January, early February we were in the increase area of about 4.79%. Areas that we have scaled back on already include legal services, instructional supplies, tuition, we are also looking at reducing a number of paraprofessionals within the district and we look at that as an ability to save costs while at the same time ensuring that our students do not receive any less in the way of services. I am very proud of the services that we provide our students here in Wethersfield. As you will see here toward the end of the brief presentation, certainly quality school district reflects well on this town. What does the increase include? We have budget drivers here that include negotiated agreements with our unions, increases in fixed costs. I had mentioned before increases in State and Federal mandates. Increases in the town calculated Cost of the OPEB Trust and Pension. Last year, for example, the district provided \$78,000 toward the OPEB trust and this year we are projecting to be providing \$156,000 and then, of course, we certainly look at improvements in our budget initiatives. Then again, with our budget outcomes, we remain committed to providing high quality education for all of our students from our preschool 3-year olds right up to our 21-year old students receiving special education services at the Wethersfield Transition Academy. We remain focused on continuous improvement while adhering to State and Federal mandates that impact our budget. Those mandates continue to keep on coming regardless of what relief we have asked for and it is something that we cannot get out from under. We recognize that families make residency decisions based upon the quality and reputation of the school system and we know full well that the school district quality impacts property values. So again, for the next budget year, we are requesting an increase of 3.75% to adequately and effectively fund our schools.

Mayor Montinieri thanked Superintendent Emmett.

Town Manager Jeff Bridges then took the podium to present his budget. Mr. Bridges then presented the overall budget. Mr. Bridges explained that the town budget that he is presenting tonight includes the Board of Education budget which you just heard about and the town budget includes town spending, of course, which we would consider non educational. The road levy which is for the maintenance and reconstruction of roads and the Board of Education expenses. As you can see education as Mr. Emmett said is up 3.7, the town is 4.3 and for a total of 3.9% increase in spending for the proposed next year's budget. Now there's some adjustments that need to be made here. We got some information from our Health Insurance Advisor so that number can come down somewhat but not a lot, but we'll be making adjustments between now and adoption for health insurance. As you can see the proposed mill levy is 37.05, up from 33.46 in the current year. One of the things that's impacting the mill levy is the grand list. We went through reappraisal this year. The value of the grand list dropped 5.06 percent. So the value of the single family home in Wethersfield was \$187,000 for the current year budget. Currently, it's \$168,800. So that impacts how the mill levy is calculated. Now about 1/3 of the homeowner's in town won't see any difference in their taxes due to the change in their value or the stability of

the value on their home. About 2/3 will see increases of different scale depending on what happened to their value. If they made improvements, if the own multi-family properties, so forth and so on, but about 1/3 will see their taxes stay about the same. Mr. Bridges explained that about 17% of the commercial property in town will see their property taxes stay about the same. The rest will see different degrees of increases depending upon if they made improvements, if the value went up, so forth and so on. As you can see the spending increases, the top graph on Slide 2, over the past 10 years. One of the measures we use locally in terms of fiscal health in our rating agencies look at is the amount of unbudgeted fund balance meaning what's our rainy day fund, how much reserves can we call on in case we need additional funds. The town has a policy of trying to have at least 7-10% in a reserved fund balance. Based upon the proposed budget at the end of Fiscal 2015, which is next June, we'll have 9.8% in fund balance. Now that's important because over the next year we will be going out to the bond markets to sell general obligation bonds to fund the high school project and a healthier financial picture you can paint for the rating agencies and for the bond buyers, the lower the overall interest rate is on a 20-year bond. The Capital Fund if you look at it, it's on-line and includes an appropriation of \$8.9 million dollars. That \$8.9 million dollars represents the additional grant funds that we expect to receive from the State of Connecticut to complete the high school project. So that shows up as a revenue and expense out of the Capital Fund. Also related to the high school project we are increasing next year's budget \$498,000 for debt service for the high school project. As you can see the chart, the solid blue line is the current debt service the town has—all our existing debt. You can see it is going down. As we talked about during the referendum process, the town's debt service overall is going down and we anticipated an increase in debt service relative to the high school project and then again after so many years that will go back down as well. The \$498,000 is an effort to smooth the line rather than having severe peaks in debt service over the years. So, next year we add some money, the year after we'll add some money and that way we are not seeing drastic escalations in any one year. The amount of the debt service of the mill levy impact for the high school project will be the same when we get to 2019, which is the peak, but we won't see dramatic increases in any one fiscal year. Some highlights in the budget. As Mr. Emmett talked about school security is a high priority. There's \$150,000 in the Capital Fund for school security improvements, doors and cameras. We also have some additional funds in the Police Department budget to bring on an SRO for a juvenile detective for half year. The MDC sewer charge which the member towns are assessed for sewer service is increasing \$70,000. As Mr. Emmett said OPEB or Other Post Employment Benefits which is basically retiree health, the town is committed to \$122,000 a year. Next year, we are doubling that to \$244,000 and the following year after that it will go up another \$122,000 and so on. We are seeing a slight increase in our liability auto and property insurance. The town carries that insurance for both side's Board of Education and Town. We carry the property insurance for the entire town. As we talked about before, there is a slight decrease in health insurance due to our stop loss premium. The town is self-insured so we have a stop loss policy everything after \$125,000 the insurance company picks up those costs. We have not reflected the full deduct of the \$244,000 and what you are seeing tonight, that will be reflected for the Council prior to adoption. We are seeing a 15% worker's compensation insurance increase. Our pension contributions are increasing. Our salaries are going up per union contract. Nonunion and part-time 2.5% and for a lot of our recreation programs that utilize college and high school help and even some of the

library programs, we got to make the adjustments for the minimum wage increases. Our delivery charge for electricity on our municipal buildings is going up \$67,000 and on a revenue side, I've got a slide on this, our municipal aid from the State is about the same as we got for the current year. Non Property Tax Revenues, these are things like building permit fees, dog licenses, fines, forfeitures, interests on investments or what we would call disinterests on our investments as you all looked at your bank accounts and your other cash basis type investments, very little movement there. You can see the actual for 2013 on the left. What we are projecting today, that number is going to be a little higher. Those projections were done at the end of March, April is showing a slight increase in a couple of those so that will be a little higher on the projected that what we are anticipating and then next year is about the same as last year's actual. Now if you look at the fund balance, we have budgeted in the 12/13, we budgeted \$350,000 next year. Current year we have \$300,000, but due to the revenues and the other line items, we didn't need to use it, so that just lapses back in the fund balance and we anticipate for the current year that to be the same thing. Tax revenues, you can see the projections there. The current year, next year, we have been very successful on collecting prior year property taxes. We have a very compassionate yet dedicated tax collector who likes to see people pay but works with them when she needs to. It's a very good process. So you can see our tax revenues in the different categories there. Motor vehicles - people continue to buy new cars which is good, good for the economy, good for the tax base. Our Capital budget - drainage repairs we got \$90,000 and we are going to do some drainage work on Marmor Court, Cranston Street at our federal required Storm Water Phase 2 program. \$50,000 in Façade Loan Program. If you have looked up and down the Silas Deane Highway, we have invested in some of the properties along there to upgrade their aesthetics and those are loans when the property changes hands, that money is paid back and we reuse it for additional improvements. Fire safety - Station 2 new windows and lights, again Station 2 replace the bay doors and Station 3 - boiler and heat upgrades. Pavement Maintenance, this is outside the \$1.2 million dollars pavement fund, our street sign replacement and then at Wells, we'll be widening Folly Brook for a turning lane for the high school project. Park and Recreation - we've got funds in there for the cove dock matching project. We are building a new set of docks at Cove Park. We've received a \$400,000 almost \$500,000 federal grant which we need to match so those matching funds are in the Capital Budget and we are going to do some work at Willard Pool. Again, we talked about the school security sidewalk repairs \$25,000 and then various town buildings, some HVAC work. We've got a grant of \$380,000 from FEMA to replace emergency generators, we've got to match that so that's money in there. We are putting aside some money to rebuild the salt shed. We are doing some backup power systems at the Police Department for the radio system and their communication system and some roof work and a new ADA ramp at Standish House. Again, as we spoken about the \$8.9 million from the grant for the high school project. We have another fund where we purchase vehicular equipment. Police vehicles, we buy 4 a year it's on a routine replacement schedule, a new plow truck and 2 replacement pickups for Physical Services. The Fire Department - new SCBA Bottles, pagers, and a respirator fit tester to help the fire fighters fit their masks for their SCBA bottles. An aerator for the baseball fields. For those of you in the little league program, aeration of the fields helps keep those playable so we are getting an aerator that can work those fields and keep them in better shape. Truck lift for Physical Services, a portable generator that we use town-wide, a couple of mowers, a plow for the pay loader for heavy storms and then we have some other

expenses. Emergency Management Supplies – we put money aside each year so in the fifth year we have funds available for the revaluation project that we have to do every five years. We bought some tax collector's software some years ago and we are making payments towards that. We've got to upgrade some town hall computer controllers, new computers at the Police Department and then this fund also covers the equipment leases that we have in our budget. That's the proposed budget in a nut shell. The full book is a 220 page teal book and is available on-line or at the Town Manager's office and the Wethersfield Public Library has a copy as well, so take advantage and ask questions. If you would like a full copy of the 220-page document, let me know and we've got a few that we can hand out. Thank you.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nicole Ferrari, 25 Belmont St. commented that we should all be on the same page for making the town better and part of that is improving education. She commented that in the 7 years that she has been in Wethersfield, she has watched the public school budget and services get cut to the point where we pulled my older daughter out of the public school and she goes to Corpus Christi now. Mr. Ferrari commented that her second grader is still in Hanmer and would like to see him stay in the public schools. She said that we moved and chose Wethersfield because we liked the small neighborhood elementary school model and moved here for the schools. She stated that she now does not recommend people to move to Wethersfield and hears families of Corpus Christi saying don't go to Wethersfield because they don't value education. Ms. Ferarri stated that she doesn't know how we don't have a Math Curriculum Supervisor and it is absolutely insane that there is nobody in charge of the math curriculum and stated that many parents hate the math curriculum and it's a nightmare and everyday math does not correspond well with the Common Core. She commented that our teachers need to have someone in charge of the math curriculum and stated that if this position gets cut it really reflects to her where the values are as far as education goes in this town. Ms. Ferrari commented that she supports the education budget, but particularly, the Math Curriculum Supervisor is absolutely essential.

Robert Woodward, 456 Middletown Ave., commented that for the first time in four years in retirement before the first of the year he received notification that his pension was going up 3% and social security was going up a little. We also received notification that our long-term health care insurance was going up 15% this year and probably 8 percent this year. 15% more than exceeded the increase in my pension and social security. So knowing that taxes would be coming up and a budget I was very interested and kept an eye on the paper to see what would happen because any increase to taxes was going to be paid out of a nonexistent increase in our pension and social security. He commented that his house value dropped 3.4 percent on a home that has had no improvements since the last revaluation. At an over 10% mill rate increase, our taxes went up 7%. That's more than we are going to pay, period end of discussion on that point. Mr. Woodward stated that he knows people in town in the same position whom a 7% tax increase or whatever it is on their properties will impact negatively. He realizes that there are good reasons to increase the budget and realizes that if we went with a decrease on everything we decrease the budget. A 1.2% mill rate increase would take it back to last year. Another point 8% would take it to a 2% increase which from my point of view, at least would be affordable. He

commented that he hopes the council will take both sides of this into consideration. He stated that we have an economic situation in this country and realizes that it impacts the town, but what this budget does is impact more than himself up here and would really have to consider what he is really going to pay out of the 7% increase.

Martin Malicki, 79 Southwell Rd., commented that the Board of Education should be fully funded and thinks they should get more than what they are asking for. Mr. Malicki commented that his problem is with the town side in regards to the school buildings. He stated that his kids go to Emerson Williams and every year for years now that he has been paying attention to the budget, the Board of Education asks for perhaps as much as \$2 million dollars for capital improvements and they get a fraction of that. Because of that the roof is continually leaking and all the windows in that school, the thermal panes are gone. He commented that he suspects that because the thermal panes being gone, three windows cracked and the school system had to dip into their budget to replace that glass during the winter. Besides the lack of insulation because the thermal panes are gone a lot of those windows leak water from the rain. There are a number of walls in that school where when the winds are blowing just right, the walls leak and continually soak the carpeting. The leaks have been happening for years. The reason the roofs are leaking is because they are beyond the expected life span and the town is not funding to replace them. He commented that all of these leaks are potentially impacting the indoor air quality of the school because they are happening all over the place and some places continually. I can't see what is happening up in the ceiling tiles and the carpets and I can only guess. He stated that he would like to see the town funding more of the capital improvement requests by the school system. This is Emerson Williams. A lot of these schools are older and I can only imagine what is happening in some of the other schools. He stated that he would like to see the school budget fully funded and more appropriately, the Capital Improvement budget towards the school buildings.

Dorene Ciarcia, 36 Spring St., commented that she is Chair of the Wethersfield Public Library and thanked Laurel for presenting her 27th budget, her 12th in Wethersfield as she retires at the end of June this year. Ms. Ciarcia commented that the Library budget is 2% of the overall town budget and the increase this year is proposed at 4% which is about a total of \$1.87 million. The key factor in this year's budget is the increased use on Sundays. Currently, the Library is not open in September or June on Sundays and with this budget we would like to do that to increase actually only about \$4800 to do that but it would cover the school year by having the Library open on Sundays from September to June. The budget would also allow us to maintain our current services, replace computers as they age. Also we would maintain our current materials budget and increase that which is not only just books anymore but also online lend materials, online magazines which have proven very popular as well. Ms. Ciarcia commented that she supports the Library budget for that coming fiscal year.

Martha Conneely, 12 Fairmont St., commented that she is a new member of the Library Board and appreciates the appointment. Ms. Conneely echoes what Dorene said about how wonderful it would be to expand their hours to include Sundays in September and June. She stated that the Library is one of the most highly valued institutions in Wethersfield and is something that we

want to see well funded. She stated there are only 4 hours that they are open on Sundays and for every that they are open 129 books get checked out per hour and that is a consistent usage and that doesn't even count the wifi usage and the computer usage and meeting and study rooms that people are using and stated that it's a great time to have it open especially when the schools open and then in June when projects are being wrapped up at the end of the school year and hopes that the council fully supports the Library budget. Ms. Conneely commented that she thinks we have good schools in this town. She stated that we are still talking about a math supervisor, somebody to run our math curriculum. Of course, we need department leaders for the middle school and the high school, these are obvious things and in this day and age we do need a security director. She wished that instead of talking about these things, she wishes that we can talk about expanding the foreign languages and music offering in the elementary schools and other things that are so important to meet the needs of kids that can really propel us to excellence. She stated that it's terrible that we don't have Math Olympiad. She wants to see Ropes comes back. She commented she supports the most basic and obvious things, like department leaders and security personnel. She stated that she hopes that we can begin a conversation that will propel our school system forward to that excellence that I know that as parents we want. She stated that we recognize that a good reputation of our schools is important to the reputation to our community, to our property values and it is worth it for us and she hopes that the council fully supports the school budget as well.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Cir., commented that the community looks to the Council as the managers of the town. Those who have to make the business kinds of decisions that people in business often have to make. Good, bad, easy, hard, whatever. He stated that he doesn't think anyone here can tell you where to cut or even to cut. Budgets are sort of spending guides and when money is in short supply, the community has a right to look to our leadership either on the Board of Education or here to be able to do what people in business has to do. You have to make do with less but that doesn't give you the right to do less. You still have to do things you have to do. Mr. Ruhe commented living in town is getting to be quite costly and he watches his budget carefully and it is a concern to him. He urged the council to look at the money and the important few and forget the trivial many. He stated that they need to present challenges to those that run the school and those who run the place here. How can you do what you got to do correctly and minimize waste. Make sure everybody's putting in a full day's work, which I'm not too sure of always happens and make sure that things that you would like to do are things that have to be done. There is a big difference between likes and wants. He commented that he went to through the budget and commented on the average value of a house in Wethersfield. He thinks that is a misleading number and thinks we should be looking about the mean. He stated that he had a hard time understanding how you get the 1/3 is not going to pay any taxes. He urged the council to talk in terms of the largest number of people that are going to be affected by what you do and are going to be really hurt. Mr. Ruhe commented on the premium liability and stated that he paid to have some large trees cut down on his property. He commented on the blighted property at the pond by his property and commented to get that project done because it is a liability. He commented on some of the personnel changes and questioned if the total number go up or go down and stated if the total goes up, think about it some more. If the total number goes down, you are moving in the right direction. Mr. Ruhe urged the council to take a look at it. Mr. Ruhe

commented that the voters really don't have a lot to say. We can't have a referendum and the community ought to know that a referendum on the budget is probably not going to be coming forth easily, but that's something that you guys ought to think about in another area. Mr. Ruhe commented on the Capital Improvement Budget and noticed Cloverdale Pond - \$80,000 and commented that the town should take care of their property. He commented on a \$150,000 item and culverts replaced on Fox Hill and asked if it's the one that comes out on Cloverdale pond or the one on the Golf course. Mr. Ruhe commented that he wants to make sure or try to encourage to think of those people in town who are not here, who are intimidated by being here and are afraid that you might yell at them. He urged the council to think about those people who really may be hurting and just make sure that in the final analysis that you have looked at the big dollars and don't start bragging about how you saved \$50,000 out of a \$90 million dollar budget so much as you may have to face the challenges of doing more with less. He stated that good planning permits you to do more with less.

Mia Caulfield, 120 Main St. agreed a lot with what Nicole had to say and stated that over the past few years since her son has been at school, I can't believe all the things that we've not put through or have fallen through the cracks. She stated that she has friends in other towns that have gifted programs, chess clubs and all kinds of stuff going on and it seems like every year we lose stuff and we never gain anything back. She commented that she supports the education budget and wishes that they can even get more.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd., commented that reviewed the budget as well and noted that our grand list has decreased by 5% this year. He stated that we have come through a very bad recession and has seen very little tightening of the belt here at the Town of Wethersfield and our Board of Education. He stated that as we see the decrease of those grand lists, that's affecting everybody in town by the valuation of their property and we've all lost a lot of money and who do we blame but our Chairman of the Boards. Mr. Young stated that they spend and borrow too much money and you give a lot of money away as well to friends and buddies. He stated that we have a number of people that have left this year here in the Town of Wethersfield like Nancy Stillwell, RaeAnn Palmer. He stated that it's fine to lose some people and we should be taking an opportunity at not replacing those people. We should be looking at doing the best we can with what we have. We've gone through some very difficult times and it's not over yet. Mr. Young commented that we've seen foreclosures left and right and stated that this is sad for those people who lost their money but also for the neighbors in those neighborhoods where those homes are selling or being foreclosed on. That's pushing everything down and we have our share of that and our whole operation of our town should be going down and it should have been going down over since 2008 when this recession started, but it didn't. He stated that we are losing some people on the town side and of course, we are going to ramp up and hire a few more and keep things zipping along but I talk about growth. The growth of our town hasn't been growing. Our population has grown by so tiny little it doesn't warrant any extra people to do the job or money to do the job. It should all be reduced. Mr. Young commented that we have other costs that Wethersfield tends to take on left and right. We are buying fire engines, dump trucks and everything under the sun using credit and that credit balloon is going to blow up one fine day and it's going to be just as bad and the real estate recession. As that happens, we the citizens will be

taking another hit and the valuations of our properties are just dwindling away. He stated that Board of Education is the same idea, they are losing some people and right away the Superintendent is going to be hiring new people. So whatever savings he's going to have he is going to pile it on with new employees which means budgets keep going up and up and what's our increase now 4.7% that we are looking at tonight. He stated that we just had a great opportunity, over the last year, we lost a Finance Director on the town side, we lost a Finance Director or top chief guy at the Board of Education. We should have came up with just one person to fill that position. Computer systems can handle all of that, but obviously in Wethersfield we just don't have the people that understand how it works and we end up hiring more people. As we hire more people, our tax bills keep going up and the valuation of our properties go down. He asked what has happened to our school system. You have been funding the school system for many years and over the last 13 years we haven't seen any improvement in our CMT's tests and now they are coming out with some kind of smart way of doing it and if you think your students are going to be doing better, I hope that they do, but if they don't I think you'll be hearing from me some more because you keep plowing money into something that doesn't work. Mr. Young commented on the Standish House lease and the cost of taking care of the Standish House, the renovations of the outside of it where it is going to cost us \$1.5 million dollars and talk about a real fiasco. When you read the lease, I don't know who in the world put such a thing together, but now I understand why everything keeps going up. He commented on the small amount of money that we are collecting from the Historical Society for the Standish House that is supposed to be a restaurant. Mr. Young continued to discuss the lease arrangements of the Standish House and commented that we need to do something about those leases. He stated that we need to divest and you're going to find and my statement going further is really going to be off the wall because I am going to agree that Mr. Manousos was right, we have to do something with that building and we need to divest ourselves from that building because that building is going to be an albatross around our necks for the next 47 years because it's a 50-year lease—a lease that wasn't even vetted to the public. Go back and look at the minutes. It was quiet with very little said and nobody even knew what was happening. He encouraged the town to look at making that null and void and taking that property back over because we are liable for all the expenses anyway except for \$3,000. Mr. Young suggested that we should return those properties to those owners. Let them have the headache and if they don't want it we should figure out what the fair market value is of those properties and we should liquidate them. Give the Historical Society who want those buildings so badly, give them the first shot at faire market value, not a deal. If they don't want it and can't pony up and don't want to be whole property owners in town, like the rest of us our but they want the cheap benefits, then we should sell it to an investor or private people.

John Console, 38 Ivy Lane commented that as far as the Town Council goes, it's all about a fiduciary responsibility when it is budget time and it's about all the residents in town, not just the people that have children in the school system but it's also about the retirees, new people moving into town and especially our commercial properties. Mr. Console commented that we talked tonight about budgets of 3.7% or .3% comes in at 3.9% and this goes back and forth, it's a yearly thing that happens. He stated that there are some givens. The givens are the grand list in town is down, hence the mill rate has to go up to balance that off so we have the same starting figure that

we had with us last year. As far as commercial properties go, 83%, we talk about 17% decrease but 83% will be an increase and the commercial properties, we need more economic growth in commercial properties in this town. We need that to carry the burden of the residents that are paying pretty high taxes on their properties. This is something that really has to be looked at and the more taxes do go up and especially percentages on the commercial properties, we start losing commercial properties, like the State of Connecticut is losing some commercial. When there is a lot of commercial industries, we are in some pretty serious problems with this town. The bonding is another affect with the Wethersfield High School and the taxes that will have to be going up over the years to pay for the bonding and the projections that will have to be made in years to come. Mr. Console commented that as far as the Board of Education, after six almost eight years of turmoil, we finally have, I think on the administrative side from what I have read and seen and spoken to people, we have a pretty sharp crew between the head of the Board of Education and the finance person for the Board of Education and they are going to need some time to correct what has happened over the past eight years, especially with all the turmoil that is going on and the types of problems that we have had with the Board of Education. Mr. Console stated that he is pretty confident and they will also look at these givens and make some pretty tough decisions. He commented that using the economic recovery figures for the country from 2008 to today, the percent tax increase in this town has far surpassed the percent increase of growth in the country, something else that really should be looked at with the town council in this budget session. Mr. Console stated that we need to project out the Wethersfield High School renovation project with the overruns. What the increases are going to be on the tax burden and the tax levies for the people in town. No one has spoken about once the Wethersfield High School is done, what do we do about Hanmer School and that is going to be another burden that the tax payers will have to either deal with or maybe moth ball the building and I know that these are discussions that again, the people, the administrative staff and the Board of Education and councils in the future will have to discuss to get a good balance. We'll have to balance out contracts. Insurance will continually go up and we'll need to get a good snapshot of what the town is going to look like five years from now. The finance area, between the financial area in the Town of Wethersfield and the Finance Department for the Board of Education should really sit down because I think this department has the most crucial role in forecasting the state of the economy of the entire town and what will be needed to operate this town and the Board of Education vs. the resident taxpayers and what they can continue to carry as far as paying for taxes. One question I know a lot of people have asked and many retired people have called me up and say but maybe for a few years of drastic user fee increase might be needed for parents who have children in the school system in order to get some of these programs started and going and I know a lot of retired people have carried the burden for many years, but a lot of them can't really do it anymore and again think about the commercial areas in this town and the commercial businesses that you burden them to the point where they move someplace else and then we have some serious issues. Mr. Console urged everyone to reread those two articles in the Hartford Courant. One back on February 11, 2014 about the town grand list dropping 5.6% and also on Wednesday April 9, 2014 about the 3.5 million budget hike sought. Just some observations and points.

Caroline Fazzina, 19 Fairmont St. commented that she feels that the fact as parents we have to

come up and plead our case for our school's roof that is leaking, rain coming in the walls, windows that are broken. All of that seem ludicrous that as parents we have to plead here to for that to be corrected. Like Martin said, none of us would tolerate any of this happening in our own home yet we are tolerating this happening in our children's schools where they are expected to concentrate and learn and I wonder if that can happen in that sort of environment. As a former PTO president and a very active parent at Charles Wright Elementary School, I work very hard in the school to coordinate events and fundraisers. These events and fundraisers enable the school to provide busses for field trips, enrichment for our students and capital purchases that haven't been able to be covered in our town budget. I have done and will continue to do what I can at my level and I trust the superintendent's office and the board to create a budget that accurately represents the needs of all of our schools and, more importantly, the needs of all of our students within those schools. I believe they have done so with this budget and I fully support the education budget this year.

Hannah Ford, 115 Church St., commented that she supports the Board of Education budget. She stated that she is also here as a parent of kids who participate in sports in this town and stated that the fields are atrocious. She stated that anyone who has kids in any sport activity has been to other towns and has seen the amazing fields that towns that have the same average income and that town's fields are 10 times better than ours are and that definitely has to be looked at. She stated that she is in support of school renovation and she wanted to bring up again the Hanmer School renovation needs to be addressed.

Kristen Healy, 96 Yale St. commented that she is here to ask to support the Board of Education budget. She stated that she came to the board the past year. She has two girls that go to Emerson Williams and they had one teacher cut for the third grade and had classroom sizes of 25 and 26. With students of all learning abilities and with this whole new core curriculum, it's not fair for a teacher to have such large size classes. The Board of Education had no money to get another teacher and they came forward and did what they could to give us some paras., but kids can't effectively learn with such large size classes. She stated that what is being offered in other towns such as Glastonbury, West Hartford and Avon is absolutely amazing compared to our towns. She stated that she grew up in Wethersfield and had a great education, but not so much for her kids. She stated that they have a good school but I think we can make our school system great and is here to ask you to support the Board of Education budget.

Peter Baranowski, 65 Westway, commented that he has lived in this town all of his life and stated that the town has always been good and he has always been appreciative of the school system here and thinks the folks have done a great job with the school system and supporting the school systems and he hopes that they continue to do that. He stated that he spoke to a lot of people when we were trying to get the high school approved and he stated that everyone all over town supported the school.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Ave. commented that he has been in town for 41 years and the school system he cannot complain and has been good and doesn't question the Board of Education's budget, but still has a problem that when 82% of the budget goes to salaries and

benefits. He stated that he has been out of work since 2008 and social security last year I got a 1.5% increase. He stated that if it keeps going like this where the mill rate in town since he has been here since I can remember, the only time it went down, the mill rate and not necessarily the tax amount, is in 1990's when we had the revaluation and the prices of the houses went up, the mill rate went down but the tax still went up. He stated that when he moved to Wethersfield it used to be \$127 mortgage, now I pay close to \$600 in taxes alone. When is it going to go. I just cannot believe it because when I really look at the town and I look at business, if private industries, private business were run the way town's are run, I think every business out there would be bankrupt.

Mike Zaleski, 23 Black Birch Rd. commented that it is a positive sign that the council members have participated over the last couple of months in the Board of Education's process and that's a positive sign on moving forward and hopefully will help your work as you move forward in the next couple of weeks. He stated that his simple point would be that I would ask the town council and Board of Education to continue to invest in the town. Invest in the school budget, invest in the infrastructure of the towns. I would agree some of the town fields are in rough shape at the moment and need to continue to be invested in and hopefully, we at some day after several years of investment, we can start to look like some of the field's that we see in Glastonbury and Farmington and West Hartford. He stated that invest in capital projects. I understand purchasing equipment year after year looks like it's an expensive proposition. I would state that not investing in that equipment and not replacing those vehicles is going to ultimately cost you more in the long run. Ultimately, investing in the school buildings and the other town buildings, maintenance delayed is ultimately going to cost you more in the future. Make those investments now and let's stay competitive with other towns as we move forward.

Kim Bobin, 83 Longvue Drive, spoke on behalf of all the parents at home who are doing math homework tonight that we support the Board of Education budget as is and for all the parents who are home right now reading to their children in bed that we fully support the Library budget and she thanked the councilors for their time.

Barbara Saladin, 6 Lantern Lane commented that she is in support of the Board of Education budget. She would also like to see capital improvement money go toward the school. She stated that she has a student at Highcrest and while at the school she saw a ceiling tile fall right where the students often are and so I know there are some improvements needed from leaky roofs and such and to make sure there is enough money in the budget for paving. The parking lot at Highcrest is disastrous and fixing potholes is not enough at this point so just to make sure that there is money in the budget for that.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Rd. commented that he's been up to the podium many times asking to reduce taxes like people come up here and say they are pleading to increase taxes but it seems like those who want to increase taxes always ending up winning and everybody else who would like to see taxes going down just will never see it in this town. He commented that we have a large senior population in the 33% range and they are just about totally ignored by the prior councils and we'll see how this council handles them as well. Mr. Young commented that

we are looking for big increases coming up with the high school renovation and the Hanmer school is on the back burner. We continue to see our MDC charges for water, sewer, whatever it is continue to go up. He stated that when he looks through the budget book he sees indications of 2% increase for our unionized workers here and so much increase is over there. He commented on the Other Post Employment Benefit Fund and stated the money that is needed now and in the future to fund those retirees some day. Mr. Young commented on how the Board of Education front load the salaries and benefit area and then later on reallocate it later into lower accounts that are already over budget and spent it all. Mr. Young commented that the council needs to do it a responsible way which is to save money and not spent it all, yet nobody will take the stand and make them do the right thing. Instead, it is easier to just raise taxes. Mr. Young stated we need to find ways of saving money. He stated that we should be looking at moth balling one of our schools and stated that the State is putting up charter schools because the local Boards of Education just can't cut the mustard. Mr. Young commented that our town employees are mowing the snow shelf and asked why were we even mowing those lawns. The owners of those properties should be taking care of those. We were spending money and the whole town is paying for it. Mr. Young wish the Mayor the best of luck in saving some money for the tax payers and stated that there are 30% of senior citizens in this town that use very little services and encourage the council to come up with some pay to play with the school. He commented that all the borrowed money is the only reason what some people would say we are doing well. If we didn't have borrowed money, you wouldn't have turf on your field and you wouldn't have gotten to that point, you wouldn't have lights.

George A. Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Cir., commented about the camera surveillance and stated that our government these days have a great propensity to infringe on our rights and the freedoms that we take very seriously here in this country so a word a caution. He commented about making schools safe but again think your way through. Do we want cops in every school and stated that he is nervous about it. He commented that he is reading articles around the country about zero tolerance and kids with toy pistols end up being handcuffed and locked up and being tased and being shot and young teenagers being killed by the police in the schools that are supposed to making the schools safe. So, when you start to think about putting law enforcement people into the schools, think very, very carefully about should they have tazers, guns and be very, very cautious as you decide whether or not you want to fund that kind of safety for the children of this community.

Mayor Montinieri thanked the members of the public for coming out and giving their time and contributions with respect to our budget as we go into the final couple of week of our work. He also thanked the Board of Education and Administration for attending this evening as well as our Town Manager for his presentation.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 p.m., Councilor Martino moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor Roberts. All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 9-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved by Vote of Council
May 5, 2014