



John Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR MICHAEL LENARES

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Town Manager's Proposed Budget
For Fiscal Year 2011 - 2012
March 14, 2011
Council Chambers – Newington Town Hall

Mayor Lenares called the Public Hearing to order at 7 pm for the public to express their views regarding the town Manager's Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2011 – 2012.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present:

Councilor Banach
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Casasanta
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Klett
Councilor McBride
Councilor Nagel
Council Nasinnyk
Mayor Lenares

Staff Present:

John Salomone, Town Manager
Ann Harter, Finance Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director
Paul Boutot, IT Director
Jaime Trevethan, Exec. Asst. to the Town Manager
Mary Richard, Council Clerk

Mr. Salomone presented slides illustrating each section of the Town's Manager proposed budget – FY 2011-2012, with a brief summary of each. The presentation is attached.

Ms. Cindy Barron, 190 Kimberley Road – she has spent almost her entire life in Newington, and she and her husband believe that Newington is a Town that values education. She is here tonight to urge the Council to support a strong budget and asking for support of the full budget presented by Dr. Collins with no additional cuts and listening to his budget believes that it's a very thoughtful budget with concern for the current economy, no extras were added and has reduced spending in every area in which he had control and believes that the school system has remained strong over the past few years only because we had such a strong education program in place before the downturn in the economy. She said we can't continue to underfund the schools and expect strong test scores and well prepared students. In her opinion there's nothing more important than funding education. She said that our children are the future of Newington and she finds it disheartening that in 2009 Newington was ranked 92nd in the State for per pupil expenditures and continued to spend less per pupil than the State average. By not funding essential programs we will pay the price later on, how many years can be put off replacing text books and computers. She said that in the past four years she sat in PTA meetings and listened while the budget is explained, and for four years she has listened to item after item be put off to the next year because of the

state of our economy. Each item put off and each cut we make affects the education program we provide for our students. It has been her experience that we have hard working dedicated teachers in this Town and there are many taxpayers who are upset that the teachers are still unwilling to come to the table. Being a teacher, not in this Town, she said that their contract has just been negotiated and she's taking a zero increase next year and understands the frustration. She said in the end we need to get past this point because we can't force them to come to the table. If we cut the budget, the teachers will not be punished and this will only affect the children. If the budget is cut the teachers will still make the same amount of money but class sizes will increase and students will not have the support and materials that they need. We can't expect our teachers to provide high performing well educated students without the necessary tools. In closing she hoped that we can pull together and hopes the Board of Education budget will pass as originally presented with no further cuts. She asked that we invest heavily in our children.

Ms. Sandi Girolamo, 17 Adam Drive - said that in 1998 she and her husband looked into towns to settle in and raise a family. Newington is where they decided to come and live. They had investigated the programs offered and the outstanding education department over the years. Knowing that the times now are tough and everyone needs to cut. Dr. Collins has looked hard at the Town's situation and the Board's budget and has cut where he can cut. Last year he put money aside knowing that this year would be even tougher to try to save where possible. The budget presented by Dr. Collins as originally presented calls for 18 – 24 teacher reductions. If the budget is cut any further by approximately one-half millions dollars that the Town Manager has presented that will mean an additional 10 to 15 reduction in staff. In order for our Town and students to meet the requirements for "no child left behind" our reductions will have to come in areas other than our curriculum, therefore our students will probably lose a lot of their exposure to music, art and a lot of kids won't have the opportunity to see that they are not exposed to them in the schools. She said also the countless research that shows exposure and opportunities to perform in music helps increase students in academic performance. Further she said that class sizes are going to increase, right now we're already increasing and will creep up, and this Town has always prided itself in keeping class sizes low. With the loss of 28 to 39 staffing positions, there's no way we can keep our class sizes from growing and that will have an affect on the classroom. The ability of the teacher to teach to a child individually is going to be difficult. She said that the statistics have been shown that each year during the economic trend Newington has spent less and less per pupil than the State average. She said what's more ironic, looking at the statistics performances, yes we are performing above the State average and that's a credit to our teachers but our scores are steadily declining as the per pupil expenditures are also declining. For these reasons she urges the Council to accept Dr. Collins' budget as proposed originally with no further cuts.

Jen-Win Johnson, 23 Welles Dr. North- said that she has four children in the Newington system has found a positive experience so far. She said that while she and her husband were traveling they decided to settle in Newington because of the education programs. Her husband, a Newington grad along with his Dad, Aunts, Uncles...they've all been on the receiving end of a Newington education. This Town prepared them for various levels of education and enabled them to have successful careers. She said that more now than ever they recognize that education knowledge will help take advantage during great growth and also protect from being a victim of economic downturn. She asked for help to maintain the exceptional education and reputation and give a reason to raise their children in this Town. It's difficult to rebuild one's reputation, looking at surrounding towns and the struggle they face with poor education systems. It's a negative domino effect when a generation won't buy houses in these towns. Following housing values affects everyone, with children or not. Those towns lack young people to support local businesses and an in ability to attract new businesses. She asked to please pass the school budget proposed to continue to make this Town where former graduates and new people can settle and raise their children. Let's do everything we can to move forward.

Peter Arbur, 133 Tremont Street – asked for an extra 30 seconds for his comments. He read from an article as follows – for background information, prior to May 30th, 2008 legislation submitted and passed by the State legislature for a grant for a multi purpose field at the Clem Lemire complex. On May 30th, 2008 a \$500,000 grant was made available by the State to the Council. The next step in the process was the preparation of an agreement between the State and the Town. It took until July 16th, 2009, 13 ½

months to execute this agreement that included a five year time frame for spending the money. The Town Manager, in March 2010 during a public hearing presentation of his proposed budget made no mention of the project. The initial request for the project came under public participation and was limited to the conversion of the existing midget football field from natural grass turf to synthetic turf. Members of the public noted on the record for the first time that a \$500,000 grant was at hand and had to be used immediately. There was a small window of opportunity to use it or lose it. Neither the Town Manager nor the Town Council noted that the Town was working on an agreement for the grant with the State and there was a five year time line. The Mayor, during his presentation last year, made no reference to the project. Again during public participation, remarks by members of the public were identical to what was presented at the previous presentation. Again neither the Town Manager nor the Town Council noted that the Town was in the process of working on an agreement for the grant with the State. Moving forward, November 19th, 2010 there was an article in the Town Crier entitled "Council sends Clem Lemire project out to bid." The picture presented in the article was significantly different than the scope of work of the financial responsibility noted in the public record. The funds available were \$750,000. A \$500,000 grant, and \$250,000. The engineer's estimate for the project was \$1,140,000 and also \$220,000 for lighting and \$82,000 for bleachers etc. There was no reference in the article as to the expansion of the field. In the Hartford Courant article, January 28th, 2011 was the first time the public was formally advised that the size of the field was enlarged by 16,000 square feet, or 33% to accommodate the soccer field. Furthermore the base bid for the project had been increased from \$1,014,000 to \$1,025,000. He concluded his remarks for tonight and will continued at the next public hearing.

Patty Foley, 51 Crown Ridge – said that the last time she appeared here was about a year ago and to say thank you for your support and leadership that restored the hours and book budget to the Library. This year she's here to speak as to the Manager and the Board has shown leadership again in presenting the current budget to you. She is asking the Council to truly reach to restore an approximate \$5000.00 cut to the new books, the on line date bases, the audio and e-book budget. At budget times we need to assess risks, make investments and need to see them pay off. So what does the \$5000 do for our Library and the 254,000 people who walked through the front door last year. Speaking to children and teen needs our Library has out reached to our school system and 4500 students, which is commendable. Our staff continues to work with them, but there's a great demands for on-line data bases and additional books. The \$5000 easily represents the on-line cost of data bases, and easily represents the cost of copies of books that fulfill the children's assigned summer reading lists. This \$500 might not sound significant It truly is. We need to recognize that inflation continues, and the \$5000 represents increases to children's books which costs approximately \$21.00 each now. Adult books range \$20 To \$30 and downloadable books are now \$12 to \$15 each. This \$5000 is not an expense. It is an investment in the community and shows that this investment pays off big. Our circulation averages 1,300 books and materials every day. That equates to more than 420,000 books and at the average price just mentioned that's about \$10,000,000 of value that goes around to our homes in our Town. The \$5000 investment just today alone would make a \$25,000 to \$35,000 value return in our community. That's about a 400% to 600% return in just one year. In conclusion she asked the Council to capitalize on and increase the leadership once again and strongly urges the Council to invest in the community, look at the value and restore the \$5000. to the book budget.

No further public participation.

MOTION TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING BY Mayor Lenares - 7:50pm
SECONDED BY Councilor Banach
VOTE 9 - 0

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Richard
Council Clerk