



John L. Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR JEFF WRIGHT

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL – PUBLIC HEARING

April 13, 2010

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM in the Council Chambers of the Newington Town Hall.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Councilors Present:

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

Staff Present

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

Mayor Wright presented a Power Point presentation of the Town Council's changes to the Town Manager's budget for Fiscal Year 2010-2011 (presentation attached).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Michelle Jackson, 196 Reservoir Road – Born and raised in Newington, has two daughters currently in the school system and is a parent volunteer and is currently President of the CTA. She feels that it's critical to support the Board of Education budget as requested by the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education. She feels that whenever cuts are made there are never short term cuts. There are serious long term implications and the negative effects will be felt for years to come. Continuing to reduce programs yearly, teachers are doing without much needed supplies, continue to put off text books and computers and this brings us further away from where we want to be. She feels that our teachers go above and beyond every day in support of our children. Our teachers are the backbone of our school system and constantly strive to maintain an exceptional school community. She understands that many people concerned with the raises the teachers will be getting next year. The teachers have a contract which needs to be honored. She was disappointed at the residents and Town Council members who recently questioned the ethics of Councilors Banach and Nasinnyk with the suggestion that they abstain from voting on the Board of Education budget. They were elected by the majority of residents and voters have faith in their ability to do their jobs. She supports them 100% and thanks them for their work.

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Leroy Kelly, 288 E. Robbins Avenue – he is very proud is of how well Wallace School is doing with his children and would appreciate no cuts because the teachers there are doing such a great job, he really wants to make sure that the supplies will still be available because the children are the most important with books and programs. He goes to the school every Monday to volunteer at the school to help with the children. He feels we should keep our minds on the children and their welfare.

Cindy Barron, 190 Kimberley Road – a lifelong resident, chose their home in Newington because it's a town that values education and support the school system. She strongly encourages the Council to support a strong school budget, there is nothing more important than support education. By not supporting this budget now we will pay the price later on. She has listened to item after item being put off until the next year because of the economic times. She feels that next year we won't be better off financially than we are now. Each cut affects the education of the children. She feels that we have dedicated teachers in this Town. She understands there are many tax payers upset with teachers not wanting negotiate their salary increase, but we need to get past that point. Cutting the education budget is not affecting the teachers; it will only hurt the children. Considering fewer materials and increasing class size we can't expect our teachers to continue to produce high performing, well educated students without the necessary tools. She encourages every elected Councilor to vote on every issue. She's upset that some Councilors, when finding themselves in the minority, would use politically motivated tactics to sway a vote. She hopes that we can pull together and that the Board of Education budget will pass as it currently stands with no further cuts.

John Kennedy, 47 Broadview Street – is a long term resident and wants to encourage the Council to please give us the same facilities that many surrounding town have, meaning the turf field. He believes that just as important as a good school is a good sports program. He encourages the support of the field, where now it's not safe for the children.

Terry Darr, 75 Rockledge Drive – has two children in school system and has a positive experience in the system with the personal development and future success of her children. She believes the investment in our schools makes Newington a more desirable place to live. She would be grateful to see keeping our schools as high priority.

Eyvonne Parker-Pair, 215 Culver Street – supports the budget as it currently stands and asks that when considering the budget, that the Council uses due caution in the task you have before you. Keep something the importance of this budget at the fore and those are the children in this Town. Prior to living in Newington she and her family lived in South Windsor and when deciding to move her family, they made a very clear decision to come to Newington because of the education system. She suggested taking politics out of the decision and keep the children to the top priority. She believe that the budget should be at the top of the list and believe that the Newington school system is greater than many other school systems. She believes that we cannot put a value on what our children get.

Melinda Robidoux, 21 Trotter Lane – has two sons who are students and also participate in the sports programs. She encourages the Town to take advantage of the money that has been provided by the State. She understands that there other projects to be dealt which may have to be reprioritized in putting the field in place, but she is in favor of it. Also, regarding the Board of Education, she believes that the Board of Education needs to go back and renegotiate the contract for the teachers in Town. She has great success with the schools and great relationships with the teachers and thinks a lot of the programs are lacking, the John Wallace Middle School, the gifted and talented program consists of one class, also the seventh grade science program has three labs for the year, when in the past there were weekly labs. She thinks that our current budget is not reflective of what our education department should be, maybe it's the salaries and/or additional benefits offered to the teachers that make up a significant portion of that budget. She encourages the Board of Ed to go back and reconsider renegotiating those contracts.

Dr. Mark Finklestein, 272 Candlewick Drive – Vice Chairman of the Board of Education – when considering coming to Newington his family the essential question was “how are the schools”. He said that Newington ranked 16th out of 169 towns. When he got to the Board of Education in 1999 our ranking had dropped to 119, in the last ten years the Board has worked to try to reestablish Newington's once formidable reputation. During the last two years our Town Council has had to deal with economic stresses and the pressure on these people to do the right thing has been enormous. Education is funded primarily by local property taxes so the burden of good schools falls on the tax payer, and there is no more important service than education. Children can't be taught from a down load or video screen, they need contact with experienced, caring teachers. In 2010 – 2011 the salaries

ranged from \$43,926. up to \$94,744. with number up and down the scale. These teachers are fairly paid for what they do and much is demanded from them. No one could know just how far the economy had fallen into recession.

The new negotiations beginning this summer starting July 1, 2011 will reflect more austere fiscal environment. Given all these facts he implores our Town Council members who will choose to do the right thing and support the Board of Education.

Peter Arbur, 133 Tremont Street – in the Manager's budget it looks like we'll receive less State aid. He sees about a \$700,000,000 deficit. Also noted he said that no potential raises for the Town Employees Union plus the Police Department. He asks how the Council will address these items, should a hole be created. Regarding the Board of Education, he points out that any excess premiums in the Health Program goes back to the Board of Education. The last number that was available when the Manager presented his budget was \$490,000 going back into the budget which could go up or down. So there is a potential of additional income. Also, he speaks of the surplus fund, each year starting there is a potential of a \$2,000,000 deficit which has to be built up. There will probably be a hole to be filled in. Also he speaks of the current unemployment rate is 9.1% and approximately 25,000 seniors in Newington. Seniors are on fixed incomes and 3% year after year it adds up.

Jeff Pirillo, 269 Beacon Street – is supporting the turf field at Clem Lemire. A few ago he received a call that the State of Connecticut was in the process of granting funds for youth programs to enhance their fields. He jumped on the chance that his family has continually supported and help all the programs which would benefit from a turf field. While at the State Capitol, on the phone was Tom Bowen asking if Newington was awarded this state fund would Newington be able to build this project. Mr. Bowen answered 'absolutely'. When we received word that Newington was to receive this grant, we were thrilled. His main concern is the condition of the football field. Many have worked hard to maintain this field and now is the time to take advantage of the opportunity the State has given us. He believes that the youth sports program is vital and for years to come continues to be a safe place.

Jillian Johnson, 23 Wallace Drive North – has four children in the school system. She and her husband decided to come to Newington because of the school system, before they had children. She has volunteered in the school system and see how dedicated these teachers are. Trying to teach for one day will tell you how it feels. How much the children love school tells you how great this system is. She asks that the Council continues to provide all the funds and resources to the school system.

Jim Robidoux, 21 Trotter Lane – thanks the Council members for the job they do. He said that his concern is the bad conditions at the Clem Lemire field. He pleaded for the field to get in and asks the Council to be a 'team' and get the vote through.

Sandy Lallier, 27 Elton Drive - hopes for more discussion on where our money should go now and also how it will be laid out for future leaders. She spoke to a neighbor who has an artificial turf and compared that to he questions and basically was concerned, in that she hasn't heard a word about the real safety with this turf. She heard about where the temperatures on this field can go and went to the Park & Web site and wonders why this is such an important investment, other than following the rest of the herd. She feels that we need to maintain what we have, School systems she supports but feels that we should hold them responsible for how they spend their money but also let them know that we are there to support them. She feels that sports programs are a wonderful thing for the kids but glory days on Newington past have we actually worked this hard to get this artificial turf. She is not convinced on the safety issue and feels that maintaining what we have should be the way to go. Hopefully when considering the budget it really will be about maintaining what Newington has and not just what we want.

Todd Mortensen, 53 Meadowview Court – is a senior at Newington High School, leaving for college but still feels very strongly about. Always discussed during the school year is the possible cuts to be made and one big thing that always comes up is extra curricular activities and he stresses the importance of, that none of these should be cut because of the number of kids and teacher who participate. It builds character, not just sports, it's clubs and activities too, but so important is how we should spend the money given to our schools. In his Current Issue class where his teacher was told that he would not be supplied with the News Week articles he had been receiving on a regular basis, which a huge part of the class taken away because there wasn't the money to spend. Looking at things like a new sign or a new security car, these are nice to have but not as important as a News Week article for a Current Issues class. He thinks we should concentrate on how we're spending the money.

Amy Morris, 216 Goodale Drive - just purchased in Newington, said that the products made in the turf field can be found in your furnace in your home, the exhaust from your car, flooring and foods. She does support the turf field

and she invited everyone to walk that field right now, and see if you do that without falling. And we expect our kids to go and play on that field. As a parent she will not let her children play on something that is not safe. She's done the research and will not put her children in that situation, the field is not safe. She believes the Education in Newington is wonderful, but it comes from a lot more than books. Listening to the coaches teaching the children about life skills, how to be a team player, this is an important part of growing and this is vital. She is sure we will lose this grant if not utilized now.

Mady Kenney, 53 Crestview Drive – last week the money for Clem Lemire was not included in the budget. She doesn't doubt that that will change tonight. She was told that a plan will be introduced with the ground breaking already being arranged. She had requested a breakdown of all expenses for the total project has not been forthcoming. She reminds the Council of the studies of the 30 degrees increase in turf surface temperature and subsequent heat related issues. Also, that every eight to ten years the field will have to be replaced and disposed of, due to the fact that crum rubber is used it may require special attention. Also, there has been no mention of warranty concerns. She said that plastic verses grass flies in the face of global movement of respecting nature and organized efforts to sustain ability. Grass has a negative carbon footprint, plastic does not. The move to plastic is for convenience and greater playing time, the cost is greater than mere financial.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive – brings attention to Section 32-5 of the Code of Ethics. She mentioned Section B, Preferential Treatment. Public officials and employees shall not offer preferential treatment to others based on such factors as family ties, financial interest or other personal interests. Since the Town Attorney is employed by the Town and serves as legal advisor to the Council, Manager she would like to know how and why he rendered a legal opinion to a private citizen. In addition, as Councilor Casasanta requested full disclosure of Councilors Banach and Nasinnyk financial interest in the Board of Education budget she would also like full disclosure from the Mayor and Deputy Mayor as to what their personal interests may be in advocating of the artificial turf field. There are Councilors who will vote yes tonight on additional funding and she would like to know the reasons for their 'yes' vote. Are they buying into the scare tactics that we may lose the funding. We've had that funding available since January 2009. Why did not Parks & Rec get the ball rolling, come up with a plan, present it to the Council and then ask for more money if needed. The one main advantage to a turf field is that no games will be cancelled. Is that reason enough to spend our tax dollars a want of a special interest group. Let us know if your 'yes' vote is based on comments from the children, wishing they had a field like our neighbors. She invites people to come to our Town and put their money where their mouths are. If this is the reason for your 'yes' vote, you are not serving the interest of the voters that elected you last November. You are voting in the interest of a small group of people.

Eric (Unknown) high school student – briefly on the Newington School system, his experience has been great and he really likes the Newington School system. He has been surrounded by educators who love to teach since he was five years old, has been challenged, nurtured and grown a lot both as a student and as a human being. On numerous occasions he has noticed teachers at every level making learning fun and more accessible. The teachers are successful, not because of money but because of a passion innate in them. He's very happy with the things available in the Newington School system and in a few months his time will be completed and doesn't want any incoming student to be deprived of any of the opportunities that he has had.

Robert Randich, 43 Brook Street – here with Boy Scouts who are required to be at a Council meeting. He wants to mention that each Councilor takes their responsibilities very seriously and none were elected to say 'no' to anyone, no one likes to say no. But at the same time, you have been charged with the future of this Town. He thinks that everyone should look at the budget has got to understand that we may be looking at substantial reduction next year in support from the State. He asks that we be very careful in the decisions.

Martha (Unknown), 17 Wells Drive – new resident has been here for five years and when looking at towns they got a lot of feedback of many towns, with a realtor with information on Newington. Newington schools have such dedicated teachers, staff and resources and kids love it here. All her children are excited to be here and charged up about learning here, and she encourages keeping Newington at the forefront of the school system in Connecticut so more families will want to move here.

David Tupper, 106 Saddle Hill Road - is in favor of the turf field. He's a bit concerned about his son playing on the field as it is and now is the time to act. He said that warranty on the field is eight years but the turf field would be 12 to 15 years.

Mayor Rod Mortensen 53 Meadowview Court - says he's watched about all hearings and has some constructive comments. He believe that the Town has been run extremely well, both the Town and the Board of Education with their respective duties and he thinks that people take his comments as independent comments. One problem

he has had is when figuring the tax increase you take the median assessment in Town and say what the increase in taxes would be. Using approximate figures, for \$166,000 assessment the average tax increase would be \$143 rounded up. That means 4,000 households will have a larger tax increase. What is not mentioned is the businesses. Today he got some figures for other areas of the country, and at home we pay taxes on property, businesses have to pay for all their equipment. One business not named is paying \$64,000 in Real Estate taxes and \$36,000 in personal property tax, totaling about \$100,000 and their tax bill isn't going up \$143. but going up \$3,000. As a business in Newington for 50 or 60 years, in the last 35 years this is the worst business has been. He suggested that it's not too late to make some adjustments to the budget.

David (unknown) NHS student - here for the artificial turf but also for the schools, which is very hard as they are. The teachers complain about how little resources, and about how large the classes are and the kids can get very crazy some classes and increasing class size would be worse. The new field is really needed.

Amanda Hurwitz, 71 Harris Drive - speaking in favor of the artificial turf, in that there are benefits giving kids opportunity for more physical activity which is important for health now and later. She said that Newington was awarded this grant of \$500,000 and we're charged with the decision to use it or not. In general she believes it's a positive thing to do and she hopes it moves forward.

Clark Castelle, 167 Connecticut Avenue – spoke previously in favor of supporting the teachers and wants to thank the parents and students who came out tonight and believes that the 12,000 households and businesses and 8,000 families in support of 355 teachers which are the heart and soul of our educational system.

Peter Gajowiak, 60 Pickens Drive – on the Education budget he feels that we have to look at how we spend the money. He believes that we are underfunding our schools. He also feels that Clem Lemire should be supported and encourages everyone to support it.

Pam Austin, 105 Old Farm Drive - she thanked the Council for their consideration of Clem Lemire. Unfortunately the spit and shine won't work anymore, the maintenance hasn't been done so we need to rip it out and plant grass or we need to take monies we do have and try to get that field in for the safety of the children. She said that after walking the field and was amazed at the deterioration in six months. She said that a scheduled lacrosse game now is not happening. She said she wouldn't send her child out there, and she asked that we get moving on it straight away because we already have one season in jeopardy with no place to go.

Seeing no further public comment, Councilor Lenares moved to close the Public Hearing at 8:26 p.m. Motion seconded by Councilor Cohen. Motion passed 9-0.

Submitted Respectfully.

Mary Richard
Clerk of the Council