



John L. Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR JEFF WRIGHT

Minutes – Special Meeting

Newington Town Council

March 15, 2010

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 8:25 pm in the Helen Nelson Room of the Newington Town Hall.

I PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II ROLL CALL

Councilors Present:

Councilor Banach
Councilor Casasanta
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor McBride
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Councilors Absent

Councilor Nagel

Staff Present

John Salomone, Town Manager
Dr. Collins, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Schumann, Asst. Superintendent of Schools
Lou Jachimowicz, Business Manager – Board of Education
Ann Harter, Finance Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director
Jaime Trevethan, Exec. Asst. to the Town Manager
Mary Richard, Council Clerk

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive – thanks the Board of Education for allowing us to use their phone line and all of the Council for opening up the phone lines.

IV CONSIDERATION OF NEW BUSINESS

A Budget Review – Board of Education

Present were Chairman Steve Woods, Superintendent Dr. Collins, Dan Carson, Board Member. Mr. Woods and Mr. Carson are also members of the High School Code Compliance Project. Mr. Woods thanked the Council for having the Board of Education at this meeting to present their 2010 – 2011 budget.

Mr. Woods presented a Power Point presentation of the Board of Education's proposed budget (presentation attached).

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Mayor Wright asked, regarding the requested increase in the budget of 3.61%. He stated that everyone realizes that these are difficult economic times, but this request represents 84% of the total budget increase. He appreciates the frustration the Board of Education has but could we break down as far as where we are with the contracts with the NTA, he believes that if we look at the impact of the teachers pay increases for example, he said that the Board of Education is asking to increase your budget by over 3%.

Mr. Carson suggested that we keep today's discussion focused on what we can answer and the affirmative of some degree of certainty and the Council would be better served if we take that path. Mayor Wright said the average salary of the administrator is \$116,000. We're not giving the administrators in contract an increase this year. Mr. Carson asked the 84% the Mayor referred to, what does that equate to in dollars. Mayor Wright answered that it equates to \$1,726,449. Mr. Carson asks as it's broken down as in Mr. Salomone's budget shows a \$143. tax increase does that mean 84% of that \$143. is what this is about. Mayor Wright answered that yes that any increase means a lot, 84% is important. Also when we reached out for the Board of Education, the NTA did not want to negotiate in any savings for us. And looking at the spread sheet, the average teacher this year, the average increase is 5.6%, which represents 2% of the 3% tax increase, he would strongly encourage you to work those numbers down, and taking into consideration the benefits we pay for comes almost to \$100,000. What can we do to get past this. Mr. Carson said that a year from now when we enter contract negotiations we can look at that, but now we're in the middle of a contract right now. We do have a contract with NTA.

Councilor Casasanta noted 10 special education tutors to be cut was mentioned in the Special Education area. Mr. Carson stated that there are some positions that will be discontinued but it's not mandated.

Councilor Casasanta inquired regarding the negotiations, what has changed between the last contract and now. Mr. Woods, stated that because there was some confusion, I have asked the Superintendent to send a formal request to the NTA to see if they're interested in negotiations, and we have not had a response to that. The NTA cannot be forced to come to the table, and until they do agree there is nothing you or I can do.

Councilor Klett said that when the negotiations are in process and that is going to be 0 percent, that doesn't mean that this body isn't going to have to step up and find some money somewhere. She also noted that this will be two years that the Board of Education and the Town Administrators have not taken an increase. She also asked Mr. Woods, do we have to open negotiations in order to decide, is it possible to ask specifically rather than having to open the entire contract.

Mr. Woods answered that 'yes' it can be done that way, but will take months to settle. Councilor Klett asked Mr. Woods if we are presently understaffed. Mr. Woods stated that we are definitely understaffed. Some of the schools do not have Vice Principals.

Councilor Lenares asked if the Board of Education could provide an itemized list of cuts, with the departments from which these cuts are made. Also he asked if two more teachers were being added and where will they go. Dr. Collins answered that after examining the situation, the added teachers will be placed wherever the need is greatest.

Councilor Banach asked Chairman Wood if there are any increases in student fees. Chairman Woods answered that there are increasesfees and also raising feesfrom \$55. To \$75 and that was to absorb the cut in athletics.

Councilor Nasinnyk stated that she was at the Board of Education when this was presented and the closing of the elementary for two nights a week at 5 PM is that also for the middle school. Mr. Woods said yes it would also include the middle schools. She asked if the Board is eliminating six teachers positions. Mr. Woods answered that it was originally six positions, but back in February reinstated two of those positions.

Councilor Cohen commented about the teachers salaries, it is what it is and if there is no concession there would have to be in our budget.

Councilor Lenares asked if opening the contracts do all the teachers go in on this or is there a selected body of teachers to vote on it. Mr. Woods said that he wasn't sure what the number of teachers would be involved, and just bringing it to the table does not mean that it's a success.

Councilor McBride asked when closing schools at 5 PM how will that affect the after school programs. Mr. Woods said no it would not affect the after school programs, we'll have to better manage the time we have.

Mayor Wright asked about the increase in tuition costs. Mr. Carson said that only in out placement those feel are going up. Mayor Wright asked about the contract for NTA and when do you send out the pink slips to the teachers. Mr. Carson said that by State Statute, and the slips go out on April 1. Mayor Wright asked that looking at the increase to the Board of Education, last year a letter was sent out on March 23rd and listed programs that could be reduced eliminating a cut and he has asked what these different costs were, but there was not a lot of numbers associated with it. If you had to do a general cost of all the programs listed how would you do that. Mr. Carson answered that they couldn't do that. Mr. Woods said looking back on what was a zero percent increase from our discussions. Mayor Wright said that these deductions are cuts representing only \$1.6 million dollars? He feels it almost feels misleading. Mr. Woods referred back to his presentation, said that until we have a real number and come back together as a group it is painful to make those decisions. Until we get our number at 3.61% we can come back with answers.

Councilor Klett questioned what a letter from last year's budget has to do with this year's budget. Mayor Wright said the Board of Education has requested a 3.61% increase, the Town Manager's request increase is 3% and there will probably be more letters sent out and the full value of what's listed here is far greater than what potential of reduction of decrease will be.

Mayor Wright commented that as a member of this Council, he cannot support a 3% increase at this point with the average salary of administrative is \$116,000. And essentially the average pay increase is 5.6% which represents 2% of the 3% tax increase. He would hope that the teachers would come to the table. He strongly encourages more with the teachers, and he appreciates all the time here and all the work you've put into your budget for the Board of Education and he knows what a great school system we have.

Councilor Casasanta thanked Chairman Woods for his effort and hard work. Councilor Banach thanked the Board of Education for their work, and knows that the budget is being used most efficiently.

Councilor Nasinnyk stated that she is aware that this is the lowest budget in ten years coming before the Council and when her children were in school in the 90's and it did take a long time for an increase in the budget. If you can maintain the services so that when times are better you will be asking for more money.

Mr. Woods stated that the Board has submitted a very affordable budget and they are very proud of this budget and worked very hard at this budget, and thanked the Council for having this meeting and the consideration.

III PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – ON AGENDA

Neal Forte, 123 Church Street – thanked the Council and the Board of Education for the work they do. He doesn't want to see the education system. However in the economy we're in, many people out of work, it is his concern that we cannot seem to come to some agreement and not have a \$1.6 million salary increase. Seeing the presentation there were a lot of cuts, the only place with no cuts was in salaries. He would like to see a cut in salaries and have it go into places where it's most needed, which is the students.

Peter Gajowiak, Pickins Drive – has three children and appreciates everything the Board of Education is doing. Things we should do everything we can to preserve every teacher's job. Secondly we need absolutely to not do any increases whatsoever for this year. Thirdly, we should not be sending letters asking our teachers to come to the table. The assumption is almost like we don't care about our kids. The teachers should want to come to the table and make sacrifices like everyone else and preserve their jobs. He thanked everyone for what they do but feels that the Council has to step it up and get teachers help.

Maddie Kenny, Crestview Drive – spoke of how proud she is of our Board of Education, and hopes that someone will fight for her grandchildren.

Jeff Hedberg, Northwood Road - we all agree everyone cares for the kids. It's been said that's there nothing we can do, just get by it. That's completely wrong, there is something all of you can do. Now that there has been a formal request made perhaps we are beginning to made progress. This Council has the final decision, this Council funds the Board of Education and if they take zero again this year it would be a great mistake.

Rose Lyons, 46 Elton Drive – feels strongly in supporting the budget for the Board of Education. She feels that the Board is not in a position to negotiate right now. She asked any parents to please show up now and express your opinion.

IV REMARKS BY COUNCILORS

Councilor Nasinnyk commented on the 18 people who spoke for the Library, there were several others who were not named who sent emails and she assured them that she did read their messages.

Councilor Lenares commented that everyone feels that the Council is cutting into the Board of Education budget but no one's salary is getting cut, we're trying to preserve jobs. He would suspect that some teachers would forgo their 3% raise to hold their job.

IV ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Wright commented that it was a great night with a lot of input, and with that he entertained a motion to adjourn at 10:15 PM

MOVED BY: Councilor Lenares

SECONDED BY: Councilor Nasinnyk

VOTE: 8 – 0 (Councilor Nagel absent)

Respectfully Submitted,

Mary Richard
Council Clerk