



TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID MEETING – VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON
April 3, 2024
Special Town Council Meeting
Council Chambers

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Black-Burke called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present: Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke, Deputy Mayor Darleen Klase, Councilor Mary Armstrong, Councilor Ronald Eleveld (arrived at 6:45), Councilor Kristin Gluck Hoffman (arrived at 6:39 p.m.), Councilor Ojala Naeem, Councilor William Pelkey, Councilor Leroy Smith, and Councilor Walker (arrived at 6:39 p.m.)

2) BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board President David Furie, Board Secretary and Finance Chairman Leonard Lockhart, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Terrell Hill, Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services Dr. Noha Abdel-Hady and Director of Business Services Danielle Batchelder were present. Mr. Lockhart and Dr. Hill discussed the budget process. Dr. Hill discussed the items that are needed to keep the school running and contractual obligations for employees which will see a 2.72% increase (\$2,317,062).

Ms. Batchelder explained the employee benefits and stated that before the pandemic there were no increases for many years but since the pandemic they have had to increase a little bit every year for higher employee claims. Based on the information from the insurance company, she was hopeful that this would be the last year they would have to ask for such a large increase in benefits.

Dr. Hill reviewed transportation, physical plant and magnet school tuition. He reported an increase of 0.26% (\$221,006) to transportation and a bus fuel increase of 0.14% (\$118,120). The physical plant services propose an increase of 0.18% (\$150,000) to utilities and 0.10% (\$85,000) increase to services and supplies. He also reported an increase of 0.23% (\$200,000) to magnet school tuition. These increases totaled 0.91% (\$774,126).

Dr. Hill reported that the total cost of doing business, which includes contractual obligations, transportation and fuel, physical plant services, employee benefits and magnet school tuition, will see a budget increase of 4.42% (\$3,767,978).

Ms. Batchelder reviewed the magnet school tuition and noted that they still have the same number of students attending the magnet schools but they are paying more money. She wanted the Town Council to know that it is not that our kids are leaving us

but that the tuition is growing at the CREC magnet schools and that is the reason for the increase. She said they were fortunate last year and this year to receive a reimbursement from the State but they have not learned if the schools will get it again for next year.

Ms. Batchelder reviewed the estimated revenue to the town, which totals \$13,051,819. She also reviewed additional increases based on state mandates and building needs. She said they anticipate \$200,000 for school indoor air quality and HVAC inspections, \$100,000 for supplies and materials for an elementary reading pilot program and \$87,000 for major maintenance, which is not a state mandate but a need from the District.

Ms. Batchelder continued discussing additional increases and reviewed ESSER positions that they would like to fund for the benefit of students, which totals \$1,298,849. She also reviewed 2 full-time positions that will be eliminated and possibly two more that could be eliminated based on class enrollment for next year. She reported an additional reduction in staff and that they no longer have a coordinator of office and family partnership. She stated that additional budget savings were made in technology (\$329,935), retirement savings (\$300,000), special education OOD (out of district) tuition (\$400,000) and summer learning (\$75,000).

Ms. Batchelder summarized that the total operating costs for the 2024-2025 school year will be \$85,313,339, an increase of 6.40% (\$5,129,328) as compared to last year's budget.

Mr. Furie stated that the Board of Education did approve their budget but that prior to their vote they had asked Dr. Hill what an increase or a decrease would do to the budget to get an idea of what things might look like in our district. He said they had all that information as they deliberated the budget.

Mr. Lockhart thanked the Town Council, Town Manager and town staff on their collaborative work on addressing maintenance issues this past year. He said he wanted to be sure that there was money in the budget to maintain the schools without having to go to the Town Council to ask for money. He said every year the Superintendent provides a desired list of work for all the buildings. He said there is always something unexpected that comes up and they are working to build up their budget to handle that, especially with the indoor air quality group mandating that all buildings are being checked on an annual basis. He said that it is a challenge with the limited number of professional services throughout the State to meet those mandates. He said that it is a focus of the State with the age of the infrastructure across the State and that it is their goal to stay in front of it. They are documenting and applying for state funds on an annual basis to compete for funds to ensure they are keeping up with their buildings.

Councilor Smith asked what the difference was between the total cost of doing business increase of roughly \$3.8M and the total increase of \$5.1M. Ms. Batchelder said the total

cost of doing business, which is like a snapshot of everything they are doing today and rolling it into next year with all of their contract obligations, would be an increase of 4.42%. She said the increase from the 4.42% to the 6.4% are additional items such as state mandates for the indoor air quality reporting that they now have to do, the summer reading pilot program and additional ESSER positions that they are requesting to have.

Councilor Smith said that contractual obligations is what he would consider to be fixed costs. Ms. Batchelder said yes that's right. Councilor Smith said by his calculations that contractual obligations is two-thirds of the increase. Ms. Batchelder said that is right.

Deputy Mayor Klase said there has been a lot of HVAC work done to the schools already and assumed the work that had already been done would not count for this new mandate. Ms. Batchelder said the work that had been done was to fix anything that was an issue in order to bring them up to a proper level of air quality. She stated that we could be in perfect accordance right now but we still have to be tested, spend the money and submit everything to the State.

Deputy Mayor Klase clarified that it has to be done for each site and over five years. Ms. Batchelder said yes and that they have to have all the schools up and going and then after that then they can spread it out.

Councilor Naeem wanted to follow up on the air quality question as she knew there were some additional funds in the last legislative session around air quality as it relates to school buildings. She asked if those are still available to potentially help with this or are there no funding options available for this one. Ms. Batchelder said that they have been told that there will be grant funds available for HVAC but that they have not come out yet.

Mr. Lockhart added that he serves on the indoor air quality task force and they have been tackling the situation for the last 18 months. Once they understood the situation, they developed a five year plan so everyone could do the work and to have the State legislature go back and seek additional funds for the program.

Mayor Black-Burke asked if there was any money that might be coming from the CSTE to support the reading program. Dr. Hill said that there is no real substantive money available. He said that we are eligible for a small grant, at about six figures that will help pay for the pilot, which is just a small part of the work to do the testing. He said it is absolutely not enough money to purchase the programs that they are looking at. He said they are very costly. He stated that superintendents have not stopped seeking to have more conversations with the Commissioner and individuals at the State, as well as reaching out to legislators. He said there is a lot going on but they have to prepare to move forward.

Mayor Black-Burke thanked Dr. Hill for his advocacy and stated that if it is going to be mandated that there should be state funds available to support it.

Dr. Hill added that it is not only a mandate but that they only access certain programs. Mr. Furie said that districts are also being punished for not using these programs and he gave an example of a district with high levels of literacy.

Mr. Lockhart believed that it is an interpretation issue and that they have working with the education coach representative Curry out of East Hartford who believed that educational relief will not be required and that districts should be allowed to grow their programs if they can document that they are moving in the right direction. He said no one disagrees with the right to read and its core principles but are disagreeing with the evaluation process and not being able to use their own programs and are being forced in a different direction, which can be very expensive. He said there are no monies coming to fully fund this mandate for all 169 towns in Connecticut.

Councilor Eleveld asked if they are anticipating a diesel cost of \$4.29/gallon for next year. Ms. Batchelder said that the current budget has been increased by \$122,000 now that they know what their lock-in price is and it has been adjusted with that knowledge. Councilor Eleveld said that he presumed the lock-in price is lower than what was indicated in the budget book. Ms. Batchelder said yes and that the lock-in price came in at \$2.72/gallon for diesel.

Councilor Eleveld asked about the price of gas. Ms. Batchelder said that they do not get a lock-in price for gas and that it is a calendar versus fiscal year also that usually comes out around this time but we do not have the information yet. They reviewed what was in the budget book.

Councilor Pelkey asked if we would still be considered an Alliance District. Dr. Hill said yes and that he has no idea when we will not be an Alliance District. He said the designation has kept their ECS funding where it is and that they would lose roughly \$3M immediately and another \$500,000 for staffing. He said that there is no incentive to change this designation.

Deputy Mayor Klase asked why the costs for postage, mailing and copying are so high where we have a chrome book for every student and everyone has emails at each site. Ms. Batchelder said that they have tried, like with the virtual backpacks, but in the end they want the paper copies from the families and the report cards. She said they have reduced a lot but they have been inundated from families that they want paper copies.

Councilor Naeem asked about their relationship with DATTCO for busing and how it is evolving. Ms. Batchelder said from the school perspective the amount of calls they have received have dramatically decreased. She said there are still pockets of people who are not happy and buses are still late. She said those who have switched companies are seeing an automatic 20% increase. She said that she has seen that DATTCO has been really working for them. She reported that they have 14 fewer buses than they had five years ago. She said the problem comes when a driver calls in sick and then they have to double up on a run and that is where delays happen. She said a new reporting system

(on time report) will be put in place next year and parents can use an app to see the location of the bus.

Councilor Eleveld asked if they had looked at alternate solutions for transporting kids to and from school. Ms. Batchelder said they have to provide free transportation to and from school. She said they have the drivers keep track of who is riding the bus and if the child is not there repeatedly then they will take it out of the route. She said she was interested in what Councilor Eleveld said about what other schools are doing but that she was not sure about the legality of it. Dr. Hill said that he would look into it but thought that a lot of families do not have the luxury of being able to drive their kids to school because of work schedules.

Ms. Batchelder said they had done some analysis and found that there is no issue with 88% of their students.

Councilor Eleveld said that he would try to find the article he read and share it with them.

Councilor Pelkey asked if they were budgeting \$200,000 per school for HVAC inspections. Ms. Batchelder said no, that sum is for the whole district.

Councilor Pelkey asked if the school district is required to pay for the HVAC mandate or is that something that could be moved over to the town side of the budget. Ms. Batchelder explained if it were to move over to the town and a grant came out then the school could not apply for it to get the money back.

Councilor Armstrong said that she appreciated the emails when the buses were running late. She asked why there is such a big difference in transportation for Special Ed and non-public. Dr. Hill said that Special Ed transportation, much like the outplace centers that he talked about earlier, can charge higher fees. Ms. Batchelder reviewed the different transportation line items and said that the District is responsible to pay for transportation to school even if they do not go to Windsor schools. Dr. Hill said for the Special Ed transportation, you could have a child that goes to school in Massachusetts and the District pays for that transportation.

Councilor Smith asked if fixed costs can be cut. Ms. Batchelder said yes and for something like contractual obligations, they would have to eliminate positions within the District.

Councilor Smith went further and said to possibly eliminate physical plant services, fuel and transportation. Ms. Batchelder said we would not be able to eliminate those because we are obligated to run our buses. She said the only wiggle room they would have is contractual obligations, which would then tie into employee benefits.

Councilor Smith clarified that fixed costs was not something that could be cut. Dr. Hill said correct, it is not subject to be cut very easily. As Ms. Batchelder said of the fixed

costs contractual obligations is the only one, if we had to, to cut but then we are talking about taking away staff and teachers and then class sizes increasing.

Councilor Eleveld asked what happened to the idea of being able to absorb the ESSER positions into the budget as they were told last year. Dr. Hill said that he did remember the conversation last year but that he did not say that he would absorb all of the positions but that he would do his best to have a smaller number. He said this is not the ESSER list they had originally and they have been reducing them with openings in the general budget. He said they have determined that these positions are very, very important. He said that the ESSER positions were grant funded, so he could not have moved them into the General Fund last year as those funds had not run out. He said he believed this is what we need for our district.

Ms. Batchelder added that over the last two years, they have absorbed or eliminated nine positions that they originally had in ESSER.

Councilor Eleveld asked if originally the number of positions was closer to 30 and now we are down to about 20. Ms. Batchelder said yes.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked about the process when a program is eliminated. Ms. Batchelder said that it usually starts during budget season and is very much planned out as they have to determine which students are in that track and to get them through until graduation.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked how the kids and parents are told and if programs are ever ended half way through the year. Dr. Abdel-Hady said that they do not end programs half way through because of the kids enrolled in the program. With the example of the Latin class, this time of year they start creating a schedule for next year and if there are only three students that are requesting Latin, it is not fiscally responsible to hire a full-time teacher to teach three students. She said for the students who had taken Latin I and II and needed one more year, they were offered an online option to make sure that cohort of kids could finish the program but beyond that cohort of kids then the program is cut and is not an option.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked who covered the cost of the online program. Dr. Abdel-Hady said the school covered the cost.

Councilor Pelkey asked where we fall in the ranking of the Alliance District. Ms. Batchelder clarified that there is no way to get out of the Alliance per state standards.

Councilor Pelkey clarified that there is no way we can lose the funding unless the State legislature acts. Ms. Batchelder said that they would have to say that they do not want the funding anymore and to take us off everything. She said it would affect their ECS by millions.

Dr. Abdel-Hady added that the Alliance Districts are the lowest 36 districts in Connecticut and currently we are number 15 or 16 from the bottom. She said there is no exit plan for the program and they do not know what would happen if they were to move up in ranking.

Dr. Hill wanted to clarify to the public that the State only picked certain districts and if you did not have a certain level of students of color in your district, you were not even considered. He said that we were and are outperforming many other districts that are not Alliance Districts. He said when he became Superintendent in 2020 he met with the State and asked if people knew that there was no exit plan and why districts with lower scores are not in the Alliance District. He said their answer was because they did not have a certain percentage of students with color in those other districts, so they were not considered. He said that is not shared with the public.

Mr. Lockhart said Dr. Hill made his point and that they are not one of the worst schools in the State, which has been a narrative commonly discussed in the community.

Councilor Walker asked if parents know that there is a plan to replace the summer learning. Dr. Abdel-Hady said back in mid-February, they did communicate to all families that they were not going to run summer enrichment but Treehouse, which is the in district afterschool and before school program, will run a summer camp. She said they made sure to look back at previous years to all the courses that were highly attended and imbedding all of those enrichment activities into Treehouse. She said parents will still have an option to send their kids to the program.

Councilor Walker asked if there was a cost. Dr. Abdel-Hady said there is a cost to it.

Councilor Walker asked if families are aware of this. Dr. Abdel-Hady said there are flyers and communications went out. She said a good number have signed up already for the summer.

Mayor Black-Burke asked about increases for contracted services for the high school athletic department. Ms. Batchelder said they have struggled to find athletic trainers and they are competing against everybody. She said currently they use a third party vendor that sends them athletic trainers. She said pre-pandemic they always had a couple people that were our Windsor Public Schools trainers where they knew us and we knew them. Now, we are on a rotating basis and the trainers do not know us and our students and they are learning on the fly with what needs to be done from the day before. She said she and Mr. Fulton have been working hard to recruit their own athletic trainer to have on staff full-time so we are not contracting out. She said it has been very challenging.

Deputy Mayor Klase asked what the difference is between the SEL positions, school climate and family engagement. Ms. Batchelder said going back a few years, we never embedded these into our budgets. She explained that family engagement was for any

kind of family activity or event that they want to host without having to go to the district. She said they are merging the office of family partnership and SEL into one director and will be more cohesive and use only one pot of money.

Councilor Armstrong was going to ask about the Treehouse subsidy as it was not budgeted but understood that it would replace the enhancement program. Ms. Batchelder said they are combining that program and beefing up Treehouse. She said it should have always been self-sustaining. After the pandemic, the General Fund had to pick up \$200,000 and then \$150,000 this past year. She said that if we did not do a major “remodel”, they would have had to start really absorbing funds into the General Fund. She said they hope this new program will be self-sustaining this school year and possibly making money to help off-set fees for summer camp in the future.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked if they could explain the “Event Supervision” on page 11. Ms. Batchelder said that is everything that goes into a sports event from security to the time keeper. She said a lot of that money goes to security for the football and basketball games, especially the big games.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked if when they say security if that also ties in the police. Ms. Batchelder said yes, they pay the Police Department but then the school has their own security that would also come out of the “Event Supervision” line.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked if the coaches were mainly teachers within the schools. Ms. Batchelder said not necessarily. She said they definitely have a lot but they do have a few coaches that come from surrounding towns.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked if that is an incentive that is given to teachers. Ms. Batchelder said that they definitely look internally first for coaches. Dr. Hill said that it is a part of their contract and they do receive a stipend.

Councilor Eleveld looked at page 40 and asked about salaries. He said last year there was an increase in certified employees of about 3% and he’s seeing a 7% increase this year, which seems twice what he thought the contract was. He asked why there was such a large increase. Ms. Batchelder replied that some positions had to be moved from grants into the General Fund as the alliance is capped at \$500,000. She said the amount of money they receive each year from title and IDEA monies is not equivalent to the contractual rate increases, so she has had to move staff out of grants and into General Funds in order to keep those positions.

Councilor Eleveld asked if one of those positions was covered by the Air Force. Ms. Batchelder said no, not the whole position. She said the Air Force covers certain supplies, materials, field trips and some of the garb but they do not cover salaries. Councilor Eleveld thought that the Air Force covered part of the salary. Ms. Batchelder said no and that they used to and then they back filled the rest with Alliance funds, but

that was about 10 years ago. She said through the years, they have been picking it up little by little in the General Fund.

Councilor Eleveld said on the salaries page, there are no grant employees found in the salaries column. Ms. Batchelder said that is correct. Ms. Batchelder went on to explain the increase and used the bus monitors as an example. She said they budgeted \$45,000 for this school year and they are already in the hole because they could not find bus monitors. She stated they wrote within the para contract that they gave the first shot to paras but paras never wanted it, so they had to entice them to want to be bus monitors by offering a higher wage. She said within the contract, they will get \$30/hour for a minimum of one hour, so she had to increase that line item by \$25,000 for the next school year.

Councilor Eleveld asked aren't the bus monitors non-certified employees? Ms. Batchelder said yes. Councilor Eleveld said then isn't that an 11% increase from last year? Ms. Batchelder said the 7.39% increase includes both certified and non-certified employees.

Councilor Pelkey was curious what the impact of any and all of the ESSER positions listed have had on student academic success. He asked what the return on their investment is. Dr. Hill asked which position Councilor Pelkey was asking about. Councilor Pelkey replied any of them. Dr. Hill and Dr. Abdel-Hady reviewed all of the ESSER positions. Ms. Batchelder quickly highlighted the need for the nurse and a list of health issues that have risen in the schools.

Councilor Pelkey asked how long it will be until the school's ranking starts moving up in the State. Dr. Abdel-Hady said she truly believes that if they started tracking a cohort of kindergarteners that have had the support that they are asking for in the budget and follow them through that, we will start to see an impact. She said if they have a very intentional focus on grades K-2 and 3-5, then the hope is that more students will start on grade level when they reach grade 6 and have an easier transition to middle and high school. She said the goal is to have 70% of the students at grade level at grade 6 and then they will definitely start seeing an impact on their score and accountability report.

Councilor Pelkey asked how long it would take to see a change. Dr. Abdel-Hady said the State has a target goal for every school district and she was looking at their goal for 2030, six more years from now, and they are hoping to get to their state goal of 70% growth in their ELA and math programs.

Councilor Pelkey asked if she thought we were on track to do that with these positions. Dr. Abdel-Hady said yes, absolutely.

Councilor Eleveld asked where the district falls in the State rankings. Dr. Abdel-Hady said that she would have to look into it but in the Alliance ranking they are 15 out of 36. Dr. Hill added that there is no state ranking that is easily found.

Councilor Eleveld asked them to give an idea of what a \$1, \$2 or \$3M cut would look like or could look like and to try to avoid unnecessary harm if possible. Dr. Hill said he would give the information but that a cut would cause harm and that he did not want the public to start thinking differently. Councilor Eleveld said he did not expect to get that information now but to have them compile it and sent it to the Council.

Ms. Batchelder said that she could give a couple examples because they went through some of this already with the Board of Education.

Mayor Black-Burke said in the interest of time it would be most helpful for the Council to look at the numbers on paper and asked them to share the different scenarios with the Council by the end of the week.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman asked Ms. Batchelder to repeat the percentage of students that were diabetic. Ms. Batchelder said there was an 80% increase in those with diabetes and a 17% increase of those who required an EpiPen. Councilor Gluck-Hoffman said she also heard from Ms. Batchelder that there was a 40% increase in students requiring medication at school and she assumed that it was more than Motrin. Ms. Batchelder said correct, it is doctor ordered prescriptions and clarified that it was a 42% increase.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman said that is an issue we should focus on a lot more and mental health.

Councilor Naeem said 80% could mean a lot of things. It could be that it was 10 and now it is 18 students. The councilors agreed that it would be helpful to have more clarification on that. Ms. Batchelder said for diabetes, it went from five students to nine.

Councilor Smith asked if a reduction by 1% would affect the fixed costs too much. Dr. Hill replied that fixed costs are what they have to meet. He said 1% is \$850,000 and any kind of cut will be cutting employees. He said he would not be disclosing specific positions to the Council in a budget reduction but would indicate how many FTEs would need to be eliminated.

Councilor Smith asked what would be one of the non-monetary benefits of not being in the Alliance District. Dr. Hill said the only benefit he could see was perception and not to be judged as to what kind of school they are.

Councilor Pelkey asked what the anticipated costs were for state mandated hygiene products because he did not see it in the budget. Ms. Batchelder said they tried to get ahead of it this year and have already bought dispensers and they are being installed by staff. She said their plan is to purchase what they always have for the nurse's office and to purchase an additional set, like what they purchase for the nurses office for each school and put those in the bathrooms. She said they will monitor it and see how it goes. She said it was not put in the budget because they had no idea what it would cost.

Councilor Pelkey thought that it might be an item they would have to come back and ask for more money.

Councilor Pelkey questioned if we could lean in on the fact that we are a resource rich district. He did not see this budget as moving the needle so much as perhaps hurting the community and the students. He said we are 10-14% behind the State average for the percent of students demonstrating post-secondary and career readiness but we spend more than the State average. He said he was curious where we are in this budget that we can close that gap and close that gap fast. Dr. Hill said Councilor Pelkey had asked that question twice before and was not sure how to answer his question as Dr. Abdel-Hady had not given him a time period.

Councilor Pelkey said we are adding \$1.3M to the budget and our focus is on the lower grades. He asked what we are doing for the middle and high school levels. Dr. Hill said we are still doing the work in the higher grades but like Dr. Abdel-Hady had said earlier the shift is going to come from the lower grades because the problems are compounded at the secondary level, so when you see students who are grade levels behind or deficient, it did not start in the middle school or higher grades. He said looking at the data, they are seeing there is an issue in grades 3-5 and that is where they are looking to address the start of the problem. He said it is a requirement of the states to see improvement by 2030 but it is his personal goal to see improvements sooner.

Councilor Pelkey said based on what Dr. Hill said that they better hold onto their chairs because he is going to be asking for more FTEs in the future for the middle and high schools as these cohorts move up. Dr. Hill said no. Ms. Batchelder said if we are catching these kids up in grades 3-5 and they are sitting in grade 6 at grade level, we will not need the amount of resources that we have at the middle and high schools to try to catch all these kids up. She said there will be a reduction but it will not be at the elementary level.

Dr. Abdel-Hady clarified how the State measures college and career readiness. She said it is by the number of kids who take two AP classes or two CTE classes. She said we may be 10-14% lower than the State average, but about 90% of our senior class has been accepted to college. She said it was important to understand the formulas that the State uses. As an educator, she said she is more focused on our first indicators, which is our academic growth and performance and that is where you will see all the interventionists work. She said graduation rate, college and career readiness, art access and fitness assessment are all indicators that the State has chosen to rate districts on but you have to determine if these are good indicators to whether our students are leaving high school ready or not.

Dr. Hill said that they have always had an incredible percentage of students go off to college. He said they send students every year to every tier of college, including ivy leagues but we have to live with these labels. He said he understands some of them but not all of them.

Councilor Naeem asked what is the reimbursement amount for magnet schools this year. Ms. Batchelder said it is about \$250,000 for this school year and she has been told that there will be additional ARPA money on top of that for this year.

Mayor Black-Burke thanked everyone for their questions. She directed the Council to get any further questions to Town Manager Souza who would then forward them on to the Board of Education. She said they would determine if they needed to have the Board come back again. She clarified again that the Board would send the different scenarios to them by the end of the week.

Dr. Hill said they hope to get those percentages back to them by tomorrow afternoon.

The Council thanked the Board.

3) REVENUES

Jim Bourke, Finance Director stated for fiscal year 2024, the adopted budget totals \$139,205,720. At this point, we are estimating revenues for this year to be approx. \$3.7M more than what was budgeted.

- Building permit fees are expected to provide additional revenue of approx. \$1.1M due to projects such as the Target facility on Groton Road and Founder's Square in Town Center (also, Eversource renovation on Blue Hills Ave; Safelite Distribution Center on Baker Hollow; Aetna on Pigeon Hill and Dollar Tree on International Dr.; 125 Poquonock Ave. apartments)
- Interest income is projected to come in over budget this year by approx. \$1.4M. This is due to better actual interest rates realized as compared to the relatively conservative rates that were used to prepare the budget.
- State Aid is expected to come in over budget by approx. \$315,000. The main reason for this is additional revenue received (\$744K) from Municipal Revenue Sharing grant that the Town received but did not budget for.
- Conveyance fees are expected to be more than budgeted due to several large corporate real estate; fees associated with the sale of vital statistics is expected to be more than budgeted due to increased activity from certain types of vital records (specifically, death certificates; due to online State death registry, Town Clerk is able to provide for any death state-wide; Carmon uses Town of Windsor for all of theirs, from 9 funeral homes and a crematory).
- Most of our other revenue categories are relatively stable, and are expected to come in slightly over or slightly under budget.

For fiscal year 2025, the proposed General Fund revenue budget totals \$145,670,840. General Property Taxes are expected to contribute approx. 85% and State Aid is expected to contribute 11%.

- Revenue from motor vehicle levies are included in the current levy. We are anticipating our FY 25 mill rate to be below the State-set cap of 32.46 mills for motor

vehicles. As a result, motor vehicles will be taxed at the same mill rate as will be used for real estate and personal property.

- Interest income is projected to increase approx. \$970 as compared to the FY 24 budgeted level. We are expecting interest rates to eventually start to decline from their current levels, but remain relatively and historically strong in the near term.
- No revenue from reimbursements related to the Airport Development zone are expected in FY 25.
- No use of opening cash is included in the Town manager's proposed budget, as per Town Council policy.
- Most other non-tax revenue categories are level funded to FY 24 budgeted amounts, or seeing small to moderate increases.

Deputy Mayor Klase asked why we expect no funding for the airport development. Mr. Bourke said there were two companies that have run through the program and there are no new companies that are registering through the State to take part in that.

Councilor Naeem asked why we are estimating low on conveyance fees. Mr. Bourke said that it is due to higher interest rates for mortgages and borrowing rates that are putting a damper on that kind of corporate activity.

Town Manager Souza said that the FY24 estimate is largely due to some major corporate sales, like the Amazon property on Goodwin Drive off of Day Hill Road sold and that approximately \$112M creates a significant amount of conveyance fees. He said that they do not know of any major sales of that nature so they budgeted along the town's traditional lines, which is mainly residential.

Councilor Smith asked Mr. Bourke to go over the mill rate for automobiles again. Mr. Bourke said the State of Connecticut has a uniform mill rate for motor vehicles and it is set at 32.46 mills, so in the current fiscal year, our mill rate was higher than that for real estate, so the motor vehicles were capped at 32.46 mills. He said for FY25, we are anticipating the mill rate to go down significantly because of the increase in the Grand List, so the mill rate is anticipated to be below the cap for cars. He said that everything will be taxed at the same mill rate – real estate, personal property and motor vehicle.

Councilor Smith clarified that the mill rate would be under 32.46 whichever way it goes. Mr. Bourke responded correct and that next year is proposed to have a mill rate of 28.26.

Councilor Eleveld asked what interest rate they are anticipating for the coming year. Mr. Bourke said when they formulate the interest revenue budget, the town has funds in STIF (short-term investment fund), funds with Webster bank and we have some CDs and they create a blended rate based off of those three sources. They are anticipating an interest rate of 4.7% for this year.

Councilor Eleveld said he wanted to mention for the benefit of the public why Windsor is one of the few communities in the State that requires property taxes to be paid all at

once in July instead of being spread out into two or three payments. He said the benefit is that the town is able to pick up several million additional dollars of interest income on those dollars that are sitting there as we utilize them throughout the course of the year. Mr. Bourke said that is exactly right.

Councilor Pelkey asked where the different properties that the town leases reflected in the budget. Town Manager Souza said those properties, like the restaurant that is part of the 330 Windsor Avenue community center complex, those funds go into a segregated account that we use for the maintenance of that facility and most of those are segregated out to types like that.

Councilor Walker asked if Loomis Chaffee property taxes are included. Town Manager Souza said the vast majority of their properties are tax exempt under state law and said that there is no payment of taxes from Loomis Chaffee in the budget or any of the other private schools in town, as long as they are a designated educational institute.

Councilor Walker asked if we can increase the revenue from property taxes with a conversation with Loomis or to our current attorney. Town Manager Souza said we would have to go in depth and review the prior court case and any other case across the State spanning about 30 years. He said it would take a fair amount of work to do that and might not be feasibly done in this budget calendar. He said regarding Councilor Walker's idea to count their housing units towards our affordable housing is that that State of Connecticut has specific criteria to qualify as low income and he believed it involved some sort of deed restriction, so it would require additional research to see if that was possible.

Councilor Armstrong asked what was meant by Inland Wetlands Fees on page B7. Mr. Bourke said those are permit fees that are collected by our Planning Department for inland wetland type of activity. Town Manager Souza added it is related to state law and local law if you are developing on a piece of property that has wetland soils or wetland conditions, then there is a review process that is required to go before the Inland and Wetlands Commission. He said there is a fee associated with that application and it may be for residential or a commercial/industrial property.

Councilor Armstrong asked them to explain what is the sales of publications and materials. Mr. Bourke said that our Town Clerk, Development Department and Police Department sell publications and maps and do fingerprinting, which generate fees.

Mayor Black-Burke said if there are any additional questions to direct them to the Town Manager and thanked Mr. Bourke.

4) PUBLIC WORKS

Director of Public Works Mark Goossens, Public Works Operations Manager Jesse English and Building and Facilities Manager Marco Aglieco were present. Mr. Goossens gave an overview of the budget as follows:

FY 24

The FY 2024 General Fund Expenditures are expected to be under budget by approximately \$118,860 (or 1.6%). This is due primarily to savings in Personal Services. We had position vacancies, employees receiving workman's compensation, retirements, and hiring of new employees, all of which contributed to Personnel Services savings.

In FY 2024 we performed or oversaw the surface restoration to approximately 6 miles of roads, sweeping of about 160 miles of Town roads, repairs & replacements to more than **120** catch basins, improvements to Baker Hollow Road (reconstruction), and renovations to the Town Clerk's offices.

FY 25

The proposed FY 2025 General Fund Budget reflects a decrease of \$349,020, or 4.7%, when compared to the FY2024 budget due primarily to the shift of Design Services into the Development Services group. When the expenses related to those organizational changes are removed from the FY24 adopted budget, The FY 2025 General Fund Budget reflects an increase of approximately \$231,200, or 3.4%, due primarily to Increases in Energy & Utility costs and increases in Personnel Services.

In FY 2025 we anticipate:

- Completing construction of phase 2 of the International Drive Reconstruction project
- the completion of the Baker Hollow Road Reconstruction Project (Current – summer 2024),
- the LP Wilson Community Center HVAC Improvements,
- In addition, we anticipate working with the Public Building Commission and the Board of Education to oversee the Poquonock Elementary School Roof Replacement, the LP Wilson / BOE restroom renovations, LP Wilson / BOE continued HVAC renovations, work at the Wilson Fire Station, and again, a few other smaller projects.

Councilor Naeem asked about a position that was previously budgeted in the design division but is now in traffic safety. Mr. Goossens asked if she was asking about FTEs and Councilor Naeem said yes. Mr. Goossens said in previous budgets, the Traffic Safety Engineer fell under the engineering umbrella and has since been moved into their division under traffic safety. Town Manager Souza said that position is responsible for managing all of our traffic signals, as well as roadway lights and traffic control and directional signs. He said they work hand in hand with operations, so they kept the position within the Department of Public Works.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman said they mentioned the 27 athletic fields and asked if they worked with the Board of Education, as she assumed they were not all school fields. Mr. Goossens said that is correct. Councilor Gluck-Hoffman said thank you for all they do.

Deputy Mayor Klase thanked them for the work they do and asked about the Stony Hill School and if the one fitness class pays for all the expenses. Town Manager Souza said there is one primary tenant there and it does cover all the utilities and housekeeping responsibilities.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the small percentage increase to energy and utility costs compared to other years. Mr. Goossens said they had some in that category go up and some went down and that installing LEDs could play a part in that factor.

Councilor Armstrong said she did not see a maintenance and repair line under Parks and Grounds expenditures. Mr. Goossens said many of the costs are born under the supplies and personnel lines. He said they do as many of the repairs as they can themselves. Mr. Jesse English, Public Works Operations Manager, said if they have to contract anything out for Parks and Ground that it comes out of the services line.

Councilor Walker said he saw decreases to the services lines in the budget and asked them to explain. Mr. Goossens said they were able to use some ARF funds to complete some projects. Town Manager Souza said the line items he was asking about related to specific projects they had done in FY 24 and are considered one-time projects and we will not be doing those projects in FY 25.

Councilor Eleveld said last year they budgeted for 47 people and this year they are budgeting for 43 and asked about the difference. Mr. Goossens said because those 4 staff members will be moved to development services budget.

Councilor Eleveld said that it would be helpful to have an additional page showing what it would have looked like a year or two ago for continuity sake. Town Manager Souza said that they have the information prepared and can provide that to him.

Councilor Pelkey asked about how they determine the number of hours they will need for any given year for their maintainers positions. Mr. Goossens replied that they cannot predict the weather but that they do their best to predict costs. Town Manager Souza said that we look back over the previous years and look for trends and said that thankfully the last few winters have been pretty mild.

Councilor Pelkey asked why the whole property at Oliver Ellsworth School has the leaves blown instead of focusing more on where people use the spaces. Town Manager Souza said number one the wind blows and there is turf along the slopes that they maintain and there is undergrowth as well that they need to keep back.

Councilor Armstrong asked about facilities management and sanitary waste removal and asked if they were the ones to pick up the trash. Mr. Goossens said that it goes out to bid annually and that we pay a company to pick up trash from all town facilities.

Mayor Black-Burke said that she loves seeing the work that is being done and said she was happy with the medians.

Councilor Armstrong said the upkeep on the equipment looks great and all the councilors agreed.

Town Manager Souza wanted to thank previous Councils for investing in the fleet. He said for a good number of years, we were falling behind and over the last seven years there has been a concerted effort and as we all know whether the piece of equipment is small or large, they are not inexpensive. He said in terms of the medians, they will still have plantings, both annual and perennial, and the Wilson planters will be done in May. He said they will continue to work with the Wilson Deerfield Advisory Committee and plant planters but not as many as in the town center as there is not as much right-of-way space.

Councilor Smith asked if it would be possible for community groups to adopt a median. Town Manager Souza said that medians are difficult from a safety perspective but we have developed the beginnings of adopt a spot or place. He said if volunteers would like to contact the Public Works Department there is information on the website regarding litter pick up, which could supplement that.

5) LANDFILL ENTERPRISE FUND

Director of Public Works Mark Goossens gave an overview of the budget as follows:

Revenues

Revenues for the Enterprise Fund no longer include tipping fees for solid waste disposed at the Landfill. There are now two primary sources of revenue funds. One source is from interest earnings on the “fund balance” of the Enterprise Fund. Interest rates continue to remain very strong in FY 24, resulting in approximately \$750,000 from this revenue source.

The other primary source is from reimbursements for the closure and capping work at the site from a State Grant that has been designated for this purpose.

Reimbursement for FY 24 is projected to be approximately \$260,000, and the total of reimbursements received by the end of FY 24 are expected to be approximately \$1.6 million.

Reimbursement for FY 25 is projected to be approximately \$270,000, which will nearly deplete the \$2 million total grant.

Expenditures

Expenditures for both fiscal years are related primarily to the closure and capping work at the site. The FY 25 proposed budget includes funds for ancillary capping requirements such as the installation of stormwater conveyance swales, internal landfill and perimeter roads, the completion of stormwater detention basins and their related structures, and the capping of the tornado debris area. It also includes funds for work designed to address conditions within the adjacent wetlands.

The retained earnings of the Landfill Enterprise Fund will be used to meet costs associated with landfill closure as well as post-closure monitoring, which includes leachate management, methane gas collection system maintenance and repairs, and other long-term obligations.

At the end of FY 25, the estimated end-of-year retained earnings balance available for future obligations is estimated to be approximately \$18.1 million.

Deputy Mayor Klase said her neighborhood in particular was affected by this project and Mr. Goossens did a lot of work to help them and she thanked him for his work on this.

Councilor Pelkey asked if he had a projected landing for the retained earnings balance and he asked how long it was going to last and if it would last 30 years. Mr. Goossens said there are a couple key considerations but based on current regulations our estimated annual closure cost is around \$400,000, so if you divide the \$18M by \$400,000 it is beyond 36-40 years.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the Food Waste Program and how it has been going. Mr. Goossens said it is popular and that they have roughly 300-350 residents that have signed onto the program. He said their weekly generation when converted to an annual number is about 15 tons/year, which is a pretty decent starting point.

Councilor Pelkey asked what the cost is to run the program. Mr. Goossens said the cost at this point is simply the collection of materials by an independent company, which is about \$400/month.

Councilor Pelkey asked if there were any future expansion ideas. Mr. Goossens said they could always increase the container size but that there is always subtle changes they could do as an organization. He said the regulations on organics are changing as well and as there are more facilities, then we can expect to see more opportunities as well.

Councilor Eleveld asked if we still have to cap tornado waste, which is from almost 50 years ago. Mr. Goossens said yes and that it has been since 1978 and is part of our closure plan.

Councilor Eleveld asked about interest income marked as \$590,000 and if that was helping reduce the closure costs and helping run the solid waste site. Mr. Goossens said yes. Town Manager Souza said we have this and we still cannot invest it in the market but we do have it in deposits so longer term we have it laddered out in a variety of ways. He said the Mr. Bourke manages it. He also said it was nice to see that number compared to where it was a few years ago.

Councilor Eleveld questioned why we would not be able to buy T-bills. Town Manager said we are doing quite well with our CDs.

Councilor Armstrong asked how they determine the wetlands. Mr. Goossens said those are mapped out by their consultants and is generally defined by how wet it is, the species of plants, animals and habitat.

6) RESIDENT TRANSFER STATION ENTERPRISE FUND

Director of Public Works Mark Goossens gave the following presentation on the Resident Transfer Station Enterprise Fund as follows:

The FY 25 Transfer Station budget proposes to continue to provide the same services as was provided in FY 24.

Our tonnage intake during this fiscal year continues to settle near that of pre-pandemic years; we expect to receive approximately 450 tons of municipal solid wastes (or “MSW”), and approximately 900 tons of bulky wastes at year’s end. The FY 25 proposed budget carries the same intake tonnage levels as those projected for the end of this fiscal year because activities at the transfer station appear to have leveled off near their pre-pandemic levels.

The transfer station operates as a separate, “stand-alone” enterprise fund with the goal of operating with a positive-fund-balance.

Based on current waste stream volumes, interest income estimates and the additional expense of the food scraps recycling program, the fund expects to realize a small \$1,000 net profit at the conclusion of FY 24 and expects to meet that financial goal.

The State of Connecticut remains muddled in a waste disposal crisis and the Transfer Station Enterprise Fund continues to absorb significant disposal price increases from its various vendors. This condition requires us to propose another set of price increases in order to try to meet our operating costs at the conclusion of FY 25.

In our proposed budget, we have recommended that the cost of half-year and full-year permits be raised in FY 25 by \$5 and \$10 respectively. The FY 25 proposed budget also includes price increases of \$10 per ton for both Bulky and Yard wastes to account for increased costs for managing those materials as well.

Mayor Black-Burke said there looked to be a reduction in hours and she asked if there had been a plan forecasted over time to get there or is that exactly what they need or is it based on a seasonal approach. Mr. Goossens said it is a small shift and they are using the same staff as they have in the past. He said he thought they were adequately staffed and have extra staff there during the busier times. He said the shift they see is more of a reallocation of existing staff to the correct bucket, if you will.

Town Manager Souza added that it is a little bit of a shift of Mr. Goossens' allocation of time. He said they will be taking the scale house operator, which has been 35 hours a week and moving that to a full-time position but part of that position will be moved to the Landfill Enterprise fund because that position will be taking on some of the basic administration things that Mr. Goossens had been doing. He said there would be a fair amount of administrative work to close out the landfill with the State, so there is a little bit of shifting. He said he did envision over time as we grow the recycling component of the transfer station, that there may be a need for some additional part-time hours to be able to manage it as recycling continues to evolve and grow.

Councilor Pelkey asked what a resident permit fee would allow for a resident to do. Mr. Goossens replied that it allows them to bring up to three bags of household trash per visit. He said it does not allow for construction and demolition waste.

Councilor Pelkey said so instead of paying Windsor Sanitation, a resident can pay \$200 for a resident permit and save 50%.

Councilor Eleveld asked why we cannot run the Transfer Station without a small loss from year to year. He asked if the fee would become too high. Town Manager Souza said that we are trying to balance it out. He said the disposal costs have continued to inch up, partly because of the state of the solid waste industry. Mr. Goossens said what Town Manager Souza said is exactly right and that the price increase for next year is going to be \$7/ton with an additional \$20/haul. He said that some years they lose a little bit and others they win a little bit.

Town Manager Souza said that we are rooting for a little bit higher revenue from our sales of scrap metal. Mr. Goossens said that is a huge help when the market changes.

Councilor Eleveld said that our objective is not to make a profit but to break even on overall operations. Mr. Goossens said the objective is not to lose money and to maintain the zero. Councilor Eleveld recognized the difficulty.

Councilor Armstrong asked what is China's National sword policy. Mr. Goossens said back in 2020, China instituted a policy, which basically took the global recycling markets and turned it upside down on its ear. He said China was tired of getting the world's garbage and being called recyclables, so they established new contamination rates and the recycles they got were unachievable by the vast majority of the facilities, so the whole global market came to a screeching halt. He said it had a global impact.

Councilor Walker shared concerns that the fees are going up every year and our residents are suffering. He said from what he heard from Mr. Goossens, it is not going to get any better.

Councilor Smith said in some places like in New York City, you are required to separate your food waste and he asked if we have any plans on how we would have to implement that and projected costs. Town Manager Souza said in the next three to five years there will probably be state legislation that will require that in some form or fashion most likely starting with institutions, schools and restaurants. He said it is on our radar screen. He said our curbside recycling costs us just under \$500,000/year and that collects two times a month and he said he could imagine that organic curbside collection would be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. He said it is a big number but difficult to say without knowing what the State will require.

Monday, April 8th 6:30 p.m. will be the next budget meeting.

7) **ADJOURNMENT**

MOVED by, Deputy Mayor Klase seconded by Councilor Armstrong to adjourn the meeting at 10:04 p.m.

Motion Passed 9-0-0

Respectfully Submitted,

Andrea Marcavitch
Recording Secretary