

MEETING MINUTES

BOARD OF EDUCATION/TOWN COUNCIL JOINT MEETING THS LIBRARY

MARCH 4, 2010 - 7:30 P.M.

TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Frederick M. Daniels, Chairman; MaryAnn Delaney Tuttle; Jack Flynn; Harvey R. Gilbert and Craig Nussbaum

TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Dale Clayton and April C. Teveris

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS PRESENT: Robert Pagoni, Chairman; Gayle A. Block; Diane B. Clokey; Judy Grabowicz; Thomas J. Frattaroli and Robert A. Powell

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS ABSENT: Karen Bresciano; E. Steve Clark and Christine Riley Howard

OTHERS PRESENT: Steven R. Werbner, Town Manager; Mike Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services; William Guzman, Superintendent of Schools; Roger Leege, Director of Information Technology; Jane Regina, Business Manager; Christine Hutton, Finance & Records; Kathleen Raymond, Pupil Services Director; Patricia Wahlberg, Principal of Birch Grove Primary School; James Dineen, Principal of Tolland Intermediate School; Walter Willett, Principal of Tolland Middle School; Joseph Bacewicz, Principal of Tolland High School

1. Call to Order – Steven Werbner, Town Manager, called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.
2. Pursuant to Section § C9-4 of the Town Charter the Town Manager is required to call and attend a joint meeting of the Town Council and Board of Education for the purpose of discussing the appropriation request of the Board of Education

Robert Powell motioned to have the public comment section moved ahead of the discussion agenda item; Seconded by Diane Clokey Mr. Pagoni asked that public comment be limited to one minute and on the subject of the BOE budget only. All in favor. None opposed.

3. Presentation by Town/School Representatives

Patricia Wahlberg, Principal of Birch Grove Primary School – They have 706 students. Their numbers have dropped and they have reduced staff accordingly. Some of their Celebrations include: a wonderful staff; very lucky with the State budget problems that they did receive their Family Resource Center grant (reduced but they did received it); the Tolland Educational Foundation continues to buy them many things that they could not afford ex.: SMART board; received their mid-year scores; they have a very supportive PTO and the Tolland Educational Foundation They need: a social worker; Pre-K support to allow the teachers more time to evaluate incoming 3 year olds (next year they will have 10 children Pre-K through kindergarten on the autism spectrum); more technology, we are living in a world of technology and more books for the library The impact from the budget cuts over the last few years include: no new library books; no money for physical education or music materials and reduction of supply money in all curriculum areas. There is no other area to cut, except staff. She does not want larger classes. She is concerned about being able to support, as well as they can, the children with unique learning needs. She welcomes everyone to come and visit the school. It is different from how school used to be

James Dineen, Principal of Tolland Intermediate School – They have 730 students and 57.88 certified staff, a dedicated and outstanding staff. Some of their Celebrations include: academic support in math; active student body and huge band and chorus. We could not provide our children with the level of education without the help and support of the Tolland Education Foundation and the PTO. They need: to maintain current class size. To maintain the current class size, they must retain the staff that they currently employ; positions and materials that would allow teachers to spend more time effectively teaching (because of an overloaded work load for the support staff, the teachers are often called upon to perform the duties of a social worker. Doing so, takes them away from their teaching responsibilities). Budgetary impact: They cannot educate the children without highly qualified people; he can continue to ask staff to re-use materials; continue to ask parents to provide school supplies; ask teachers to be creative with the time they are given, but without the highly qualified teachers/staff members and if our class size goes up, there will not be enough time during the course of a school day to adequately meet the individual needs of our students. Once we go above 22 children per class, we are making it difficult to serve each child justly and will have a negative impact on children.

Walter Willett, Principal of Tolland Middle School – He invited anyone to the Principal's Breakfast on the first Wednesday of every month, 9:00 a.m. at the Middle School. There is no doubt that hard choices need to be made here. They have 771 students/class size is 21 to 22. Some of their Celebrations: 90% of their students in math remediation are showing great progress; the TMS achievement lab has provided over 1472 sessions to assist students with a particular concept (they get work in a particular area of need and then they are brought back into the class) and digital backpack was created to eliminate paper as much as possible and provide information through the internet (it keeps parents informed and saves money and resources). They need: special educator to handle the growing population; guidance counselor or social worker to replace position eliminated; text books, workbooks, library books and library online resources. Materials are being reduced year after year. There is nothing else to go. Cuts now will directly affect the children. Budget impact: The impact is significant, and the manifestation of previous years' budgets is really going to hit us hard this year.

Joseph Bacewicz, Principal of Tolland High School - Thanked the Council and Mr. Werbner for giving the Administrators time to talk to them tonight, as well as thanked the parents for coming out. We are at a critical state in this economy and things are bad within the Town, the State and within the Nation. It is directly impacting and has affected this school district. We were proud for being the 27th best town in the Nation. He thinks the educational system has helped. They are at the point where if they have significant cuts to the budget that has been presented by the Board, it is going to impact staffing and children. The high school has 942 students, serviced with a certified staff of 68 people. They are doing much more work than they ever did, with the same number of people, and almost 200 more students. They have been working to help the town maintain. Their Celebrations: They are trying to teach our kids to excel and service people. Their needs: a social worker in our system, technically there should be one at each school. They need to service our children and their families. They are pleased with our SAT scores, but not the CAP scores, in the area of reading. Assistance is needed in literacy. A coach/instructor is needed. The high school is 4 years old. The technology is into its fifth year. They need to begin thinking about replacing the technology. Budget impact: they have not increased their teaching staff. Since 2001, they've added 190 students, but 0 teachers. Since 2002-2003, the program budget has been reduced from \$689,679 to \$328,000 in 2009-2010. If you start losing staff members, you'll lose the most important resources for our schools.

Roger Leege, Director of Information Technology – The three things technology services provides: conventional IT (help desk, pc installs, etc.), tech support and support to administration and instruction. Their Celebrations: talented and committed staff and timely tech support. We are dependent on our electronic systems. He ran through the software changes that occurred in Tolland this year. Their needs: improve network service to BGP and IIS/BOE; replace Novell Netware; train district staff and

shore up perimeter protection (firewall) Budget Impact: no regular equipment replacement; tech supplies and materials cut annually.

William Guzman, Superintendent of Schools – He thanked Mr. Werbner and the Council for developing the Agenda as it is, to give the staff members/principals, etc. the opportunity to talk about their particular areas of operation. They are looking for a budget increase of 6.46% or \$2,162,471 over the current budget. He went through slides on a PowerPoint showing the results of various test scores (math, reading, science, etc). This is the first year they've had math staff members at Birch Grove, TIS and TMS. It was an initiative of the BOE last year. If a student needed remedial help in reading we had those support programs, but we've never had them in math. He commented on the DRGC, those are 30 school districts in the State that have the same demographics as Tolland. When you look at the Net Current Expenditure per Pupil "NCEP", the DRGC average is \$11,824, Tolland's is \$10,002 ('07-'08 f/y). The difference of what we provide per student is \$1,822. The difference between Tolland and DRGC overall on a per pupil basis, when multiplied out, is \$5,737,478. In this budget, they are asking for \$2,162,471. These funds are not to fund any of the items that the Principals and Leege have presented to you as a school district need: the counselor, the social worker, the literacy coach. None of that is in the budget. Money is set aside for text books and materials. The increase is going to maintain what we have. There was discussion about eliminating the World Language program at the Middle School. The BOE is very passionate about that and reinstated it. He knows that the District, Town, Nation and State are facing some dire economic times. We want to maintain what we have. No new incentives. He hopes the town supports the budget.

Steven Werbner, Town Manager – He thanked the BOE, as well as Joe Bacewicz, on behalf of his daughter and as parents, for the easy, smooth transition his daughter had when they moved into the town. The BOE is doing an excellent job. They are lucky to have motivated parents, students and educators. We are all in this together and all in the same problem. His job would be a lot easier if he didn't have to worry about where the money was going to come from. All their budgets have been very conscientious in terms of how they spend their dollars. He did mention that April Teveris was unable to attend tonight due to illness. His budget still has not come out. It comes out on March 16, 2010. The Town has very legitimate needs for which the associated costs exceed our ability to pay. He will talk of the needs of the Town on March 31st at the Public Hearing. There is no argument from him that either organization has needs. No one, including him, wants to see programs eliminated either from the Town or BOE. He knows as soon as programs are eliminated, they won't come back. He told the public that if they are all this concerned about the BOE budget, he wished they were as concerned about the State fiscal situation that we are all in. He is not talking from a Republican/Democratic view point. He is talking from a reality viewpoint. The system is broken, the State of Connecticut is floundering economically and we are all going to suffer because of it. This is one of the most efficient communities you will find. We are operating on shoestrings. While some are in a position to pay more in taxes, many are not. On the Human Services side of the operation, we are seeing more people than ever coming in for fuel, economic and budget assistance. People in Tolland are having difficult times.

He can only give preliminary information now. His budget is not done yet. He wished he could detail the specifics and how they will impact the residents, but he can't get into that level of detail, because he is not done yet.

Revenue Realities – Before decisions are made on how best to allocate available dollars, information is needed on the revenue realities of the time. Since he has been here, he has tried to move the budget discussion forward to talk about revenues before we got into expenditures. He had an open meeting in January on revenues and 5 people were there. It is very difficult to have a community discussion on where you think you are going to go in terms of the process when you, the Community, are not getting involved. Now that expenditures are being inserted into the discussion, it is a revenue problem and that discussion has not been taken first. So, until you know how much you have to spend, how can you prioritize what your needs are? All communities are doing it backwards.

Revenue History: In 1986 the State adopted the Education and Enhancement; the revenue the State received from the gambling industry was supposed to be evenly divided with towns/cities to help pay for the cost of education. The share has dropped from 52.7% to 17.5%. The rest is going to the State to help them fund their concerns; ECS Grant is the primary source of State funding for municipalities – this grant is not projected to increase; statewide ECS funding levels – the State used \$271 million dollars of Federal ARRA dollars to allow them to reduce state funded contributions to ECS; the state share of municipal public education has decreased from a high point of 45.5% to 36.7%; Special Education funds were cut \$13 million statewide in the current year; and next year, the Governor has proposed a \$5.1 million cut in the school transportation grant. If you don't get the State grant, the only way to raise money is to increase the property taxes. He went on to point out some other Town revenue realities since f/y 2007-2008 other than education grants. They total -\$810,585 since 2007-2008 in our Revenues. The State revenues are diminishing as well. He showed a slide entitled Grand List Growth has Declined Since 2005. Five years ago, we were the fastest growing; we've dropped off the charts. If we want to maintain, let alone improve, property taxes will increase. The State Mandated Re-evaluation: this process will impact the July 1, 2010 tax bills; very few appeals have been taken; changes in assessed values vary greatly depending upon housing conditions and values. When you see this and see the values, how can you ask for an expenditure increase because of the needs we all have.

The state budget is the big problem. When you come back next year, it's going to be worse, the following year, even worse because of all the revenue problems.

State budget realities for the future: this year pales in comparison to what we could see starting in 2011-12, because of the State budget concerns. The State is projected to experience significant deficits at the end of FY 2011/12, FY2012/13 and FY 2013/14.

In conclusion, the Municipalities are the prime target for possible reduction. The next year, and several years after, stability and improvements can only be funded by increases in property taxes. When you stand up and say you support an increase in the BOE or Town budget, it is not for this one year, it is whether you are willing to come in and say that next year, the year after that, the year after and the year after that. There is no other source available to fund those expenditures at this point in time. As much as the public is concerned about the local education budget and town budget, you need to get involved in your State budget.

4. Public Comment (one minute time limit)

Gary Lotreck of 12 Holly Road – He thanked Mr. Werbner for “cheering him up”. He is glad that he gave all the information that he did. He knows the State is in a mess. He knows it's hard, but he hopes that we can keep going through with this.

A Resident from of Timber Trail – She thanked everyone. She said we have a difficult road ahead. She wants the right to vote on this budget before it gets cut. We know it's hard and we know it has to come out of our pockets.

Abigail Jeffries of 121 Wildwood Road – She thanked Mr. Werbner and commented that his job is no fun. She asked what she is voting on, \$200 extra a month? What is it going to cost her for this budget? Until she knows she can't afford it, she wants the chance to vote on it. She does not want to dismantle the schools to wait for the State's problems. She is not ready to cut staff, or pull the rug from people.

David Golden of 127 Grahber Road – He thinks the town should have the chance to vote on the budget. It is disappointing to cut that off, and not let us say what is best for our kids. Give the town a chance to vote. If it gets voted down, it gets voted down.

Dylan Houseworth of 37 Shores Drive – He is the 8th grade class president of Tolland Middle School. He is here to not only represent his class, but the future generations of Tolland school student. He has attended Tolland schools his whole life. He has been impressed with the quality of education he has received. His concern is seeing programs, sports, etc. discontinued. In speaking with his peers, they express similar concerns re: less clubs and sports. They need activities after school. He feels strongly being part of the Tolland Community. He asked that they join him and his family in supporting the budget.

Kim Reilly of 30 Arnold Drive – She has kids in the school system. She appreciates the situation we are in. She has made cuts in her household. The last place that we, as a Community, take is from our kids. When push comes to shove, we want to save what we can for these kids. Our PTO is amazing. The Tolland Education Fund is amazing. We have an amazing Community. We don't want to only to sustain, but grow.

Lori Steinberg of 51 Crystal Ridge Drive - She thinks educating the town and listing out the specifics would be important. Explain what the increases are going to pay for.

Patricia Doyle of 52 Susan Drive – It all has been very well said. She is not going to reinvent the wheel. She supports putting forth the budget and giving us the opportunity to vote before making cuts on it.

Andrea Kuhn of 70 Tolland Farms Road – All the presenters did an excellent job. Look at the third grade was down with their test scores. That is where we've seen all those cuts. That is where you are seeing the impact. That is where her children are, second and fourth grade. All of these cuts are going to follow them all the way through. If you want to look at the impact, look at the third grade scores.

Ken Kittredge of 37 Farmbrook Drive - Thanked everyone for the presentation. He supports both the town side and education budgets. We need to start looking at the long term and investing in our community. He thinks there are people that are willing to spend a couple of more bucks. He is supporting the BOE budget and the Town Council budget beyond the recommended town manager's budget.

A Resident of Barstow Lane – She has kids in school, and is the Tolland Middle School President. She asked that the budget be accepted as presented. The town deserves to vote on the budget. It is important that the Town Council support the BOE budget.

5. Discussion and questions between Board of Education, Town Council, Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools regarding the Board of Education proposed budget for 2010-2011

Dr. Daniels asked if the BOE had answered questions submitted prior from the Council members. The members were provided a hand-out. He asked Roger Leege if the new software programs were operating or capital expenditures. He believed they were all from operating. Dr. Daniels asked what a SMART board was. Mr. Leege commented that it is an interactive touch screen. It works with a computer and projector. When kids touch the screen, the software interacts. One per classroom is the general rule. There has been an effort lately to pursue grants to get them for TIS and IMS. Birch Grove has one. Judy Grabowicz commented that the Tolland Education Foundation has been wonderful and has provided them with a number of the boards to date. Dr. Daniels asked where the stimulus dollars show up on the revenue page. Jane Regina stated that is not listed on the revenue page. The borrowed money comes through a grant and they also received \$272,000 of ARRA money that was used in this current year's budget to offset budget items. Mr. Guzman commented that some grants are not listed, neither was the ARRA grant listed as a revenue item, because of the federal source, and they were used to supplement our programs.

MaryAnn Delaney Tuttle said that she has brought up prior years, and is making the point again that the total picture of revenue v. expenditures is incomplete if we don't see those grant monies. It really is not a true picture of the revenues that come into the Town of Tolland for the education. Also, somewhere in here, they are being allocated. Where are the expenditures for these monies? Guzman said this budget is based on the operating budget of the Town. It includes the staffing. The amount projected through the local funding revenues from the Town and from the State; we don't include the small funding sources. A side page could be provided showing the grant money we have and some stacking that we fund through those grants. Judy Grabowicz commented that the positions that are funded by grants are not in this budget. Those are accounted for separately. Positions requested in this budget are being paid for through income sources shown in this budget. It does not contain positions that are being separately funded by other grants. They are not anticipating any funding from ARRA this year.

MaryAnn Delaney Tuttle asked if there was anyway, similar to the way the Capital budget is prepared, to show different columns designating the sources of income in the BOE budget. Mr. Guzman said they can try to do that. They can do a spreadsheet for the categorical grants, but they can't show a breakdown on the grants listed for ESC transportation, because that money comes through the town. A breakdown of the ESC is not going to work.

MaryAnn Delaney Tuttle asked about the Special Ed monies, especially for out of district placements. Over the years the philosophy of educating children with special needs has been to attempt to mainstream the children and to bring them back into their home district. A significant amount of children are out placed at a significant dollar amount. She asked if someone could talk to the philosophy of in-district programming for children, even those with severe conditions, versus being unable to keep them in their home district. Mr. Guzman commented that 23 students have been out placed. 23 is our average. Relative to Special Ed expenditure and the number of children in Special Ed, we run level with the State. The district is spending 15.9% of the budget for Special Education services; the DRGC 19.7% and the State 20.5%. We are very diligent and very cognoscente of the needs of the children and the best program for them.

Kathleen Raymond, Pupil Services Director - Absolutely their philosophy is to keep the children in the district. We have to ensure the safety of all children and that may be one reason why a child has to be placed out. The paraprofessionals are there on the front line and help some of these kids manage and adjust their behaviors as the days go on. Some needs are so profound that after the district has exhausted all internal resources, the planning and placement team is given no other choice. She speaks to the principals before placing a child out. Our goal is always the least restrictive environment. Every year, she meets with the planning and placements teams to see if a child can be returned to the district successfully.

Jack Flynn thanked them for the answers for the questions previously asked. He asked if the ARRA funds are returning. Ms. Regina confirmed that they were not.

Steven Werbner commented that the grant we received was a two year grant for over \$500,000. \$201,000 of it has been used. Where is the rest of it?

Kathleen Raymond explained where the funds were spent. The larger portion of the grant was for \$578,674. The \$22,899 portion of the grant, which is the 619, is relegated just to pre-school. For the pre-school portion, she contracted with a board certified behavior analyst to help with the number of very specialized needs of the children coming into the district. That is a cost saving measure and a way to keep the kids in the district. Of the \$578,000: \$100,000 went to the staff increases (special education or related services). That money was turned back over to the BOE local budget; money went to one teacher who could serve the needs of the kids in the Middle School. She also contracted to bring in a board certified analyst to work with them one day a week throughout the school year to help with

kids with behavior, attention, and social needs (\$45,000) Outside evaluations that we are responsible, including \$60,000 for neuropsychological evaluations. Additional monies were put aside to provide professional development. She didn't want to fall off the cliff once these ARRA funds were spent and then what. They elected to try to build capacity as well as increase material and equipment that they have. Those are the larger pieces of where those monies are going. We gave \$272,000 back to the local budget (funded the teacher's salary increases, the one teacher for one year; vans) and Lincoln Academy. At the end of this year, we will have \$30-40,000 left of the grant to get the required equipment. Virtually, all the funds will be expended by the end of this year. The total grant breakdown can be located online at the Special Services webpage

Dr. Daniels asked about the difference in funding for pay-to-play between the High School and the Middle School. Is there an obvious reason why? Mr. Guzman said he believed it to be a product of the number of children who are participating in sports. Joseph Bacewicz commented that he believed it was the nature of the program budget itself. The High School budget is much higher than the Middle School. The cost for pay-to-play is the same, \$125.00 fee, per sport, per athlete with a \$500 family maximum for a year.

Mr. Werbner announced that if there are any other questions, they could be relayed through him.

Dr. Daniels thanked everyone and commented that we are all aware of the challenges that are facing the State and Communities. He appreciated the presentations by the administrators and thanked the public for their participation.

Mr. Pagoni ran through some BOE bullet points:

- we need administrators, if you look at the ratios to students – administrators are critical;
- compare the pay and benefits of any of our Unions to all the surrounding DRGC and the State and you'll find we getting good bang for our buck;
- we have no PC replacement program/computers;
- Capital investment isn't very good and doesn't work very well;
- Union negotiations are difficult, we can't put them in a headlock and make them come and do what we want;
- Tolland Middle School teen teaching concept, if that falls apart, the system will fall apart.

We are all volunteers. We pay taxes just like everyone else in this Community. We are involved in this budget almost daily now. If we need 6.44%, we'll need to pay the bills also. Our job is the messenger; we put it together and bring it to you. We are all in the same boat. We do try to do things as efficiently as we can. Mr. Pagoni's made a bipartisan comment that he was disappointed that the Republicans who sit on the Town Council were not present. Of all the ones, they are the ones who needed to hear this story the most, and they are not here. He is disappointed, and is sure they have excellent reasons, but tonight is one of the biggest meetings we are going to have in this Town and they did not show up.

6. Adjournment

Steven Werbner adjourned the meeting at 9:49 p.m.

Frederick M. Daniels, Council Chair

Michelle A. Finnegan
Town Council Clerk