

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
HICKS MEMORIAL MUNICIPAL CENTER
6th FLOOR COUNCIL ROOM
MARCH 9, 2017**

Present: Richard Field, Chairman
William Eccles, Vice-Chair
Robert Green
Kristen Morgan
Joseph Sce
David Skoczulek
Paul Krasusky

Also Present: Steven Werbner, Town Manager
Michael Wilkinson, Director of Administrative Services
Kevin Eklund, Admin. Resident Trooper
Heidi Samokar, Director of Planning and Community Development
Beverly Bellody, Director of Human Services
Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance and Records
Scott Lappen, Public Works Director
Bruce Watt, Recreation Director
Lori Sherwood, Law Enforcement Admin. Secretary
State Rep. Sam Belsito
State Rep. Tim Ackert

Meeting called to order at 7:01 pm.

Town Manager Steven Werbner started the meeting by talking about the \$6,907,156 reduction in State aid from the Governor's Budget. In addition the cap on the car tax is scheduled to go from 37 mills to 32 mills. Depending on the actual mill rate adopted this is a loss of tax revenue in the amount of \$300,000 to \$800,000. There is a new proposed Special Education Grant in the amount of \$2.5 million which goes directly to the Board of Education. The impact of these changes alone with no other budget changes is approximately 6 mills or a 17.8% increase.

Reductions to the budget include but are not limited to: reduction by two our current compliment of Resident Troopers from 4 to 2. The Governor's recommended budget places 100% of the cost for Resident Troopers on the Town whereas in previous years the State assumed some of the cost recognizing that at times the Troopers assigned to Tolland are required to perform non-Tolland functions or be available to Tolland due to State mandated training requirements. The additional cost to assume 100% of salary would be \$62,000. Currently we pay between \$155,398 to \$207,683 for a Resident Trooper. The savings is \$256,956. I am recommending that we hire, from current year available funds, a consulting firm specializing in police services to work with a Study Committee appointed by the Town Council to consider future options for providing police services to the Town.

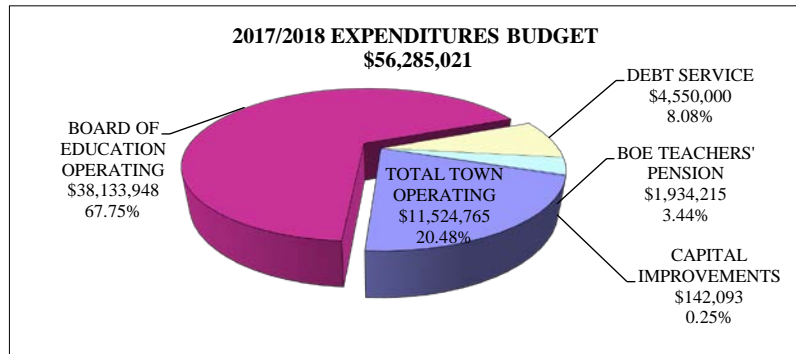
Eliminate the currently vacant position of Assistant Director of Public Safety at a savings of \$73,392 and an additional savings of \$70,000 in the Capital Budget as a result of the elimination of a vehicle and associated equipment for the position. A portion of the savings has been set aside in this year's budget for administrative changes which will be made in the department following completion of union negotiations

Additions to the budget include: \$20,000 for Economic Development consulting services;
\$20,000 to increase the stipend for volunteer firefighters which has not been increased for over six years;
\$19,000 to begin the Plan of Conservation and Development.

The Town Manager's overall budget numbers and recommendations are highlighted as follows:

Therefore, based on the impact of the Governor's budget, I am presenting you with a budget which reduces basic services, both in the Town as well as the Board of Education, while at the same time increases overall expenditures to 0.857% with Town operation expenses being a decrease of -2.89%, the Board of Education a decrease of -3.05%. The decrease in Board of Education funds will be offset by a new Special Education Grant in the same amount making the impact on the Board of Education no increase over current year expenditures. Other changes include a Capital Improvement Fund increase of \$142,093 and the new category of Teacher Retirement Pension which is budgeted at \$1,934,215. The tax increase necessary to support this budget is 4.81 mills or a 14.069% increase in the mill rate.

Without the impact of the Governor's budget, the mill rate for the Town, with the budget I am recommending, would be a decrease in the mill rate.



Each year as part of this budget message I show the tax impact to the average low-middle-higher assessed homes. After Revaluation the average assessment for these categories of homes was \$117,093 - \$188,285 - \$360,369.

| Property Tax Impact of the Town Managers Proposed Budget for Three Average Assessments | | | | |
|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| 2014 Assessment | Market Value | Taxes at 34.19 | Taxes at 39.00 | Difference |
| \$117,093 | \$167,276 | \$4,003 | \$4,567 | \$564 |
| \$188,285 | \$268,979 | \$6,437 | \$7,343 | \$906 |
| \$360,369 | \$514,813 | \$12,321 | \$14,054 | \$1,733 |

The Town Manager also talked about the concern of a high mill rate in comparison to the other Towns in the area and a discussion on fund balance and the negative effect on our bond rating if a large portion of our fund balance was used to offset lost State aid. Our Financial Advisor indicates a lowering of our bond rating could result in an additional interest cost in the amount of \$1,410,000 for our debt management plan. The Town Manager also talked about the drawbacks of our current Town referendum system.

Throughout the presentation there were questions from Town Council members and statements of residents on the following topics: charter needs changing; ways to bring economic development to Town; how to refund taxes if State gives more than we budgeted; the changing demographics in Tolland; why eliminate the Asst. Fire Dir. and hire the Asst. Finance Director; among other questions.

Both State Rep Sam Belsito and State Rep. Tim Ackert talked about the challenges of this year's budget process and that they are currently in the public hearing phase for bills in the legislature.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Wilkinson
Director of Administrative Services