

## **MINUTES**

### **JOINT BUDGET WORK SESSION**

#### **TOWN COUNCIL AND BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL  
ROOM ALT. #6**

**DATE: MARCH 20, 2024  
TIME: 7:00 P.M.**

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

Mayor Delnicki called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

**2. Roll Call**

Members present:

Town Council: Audrey Delnicki, Mayor  
Matthew Siracusa, Deputy Mayor  
Michael Buganski, Town Council  
Toby Lewis, Town Council  
Rick Balboni, Town Council  
Carolyn Carey, Town Council  
Steven King Jr. Town Council  
Elizabeth Pendleton, Town Council  
Michael Maniscalco, Town Manager (left at 8:50pm)

Board of Education: Chairwoman Maneeley  
Dr. Carter, Superintendent of schools  
Ms. Chemerka, Director of Finance BOE  
Ms. Peterson, Assistant Superintendent  
Mr. Sanzo, Assistant Superintendent

**3. Public Input**

[Per Town Council Rules, this segment of the meeting shall not exceed thirty (30) minutes unless extended by the Chair with the consent of the majority of the Council present.]

Michael Pare, 1497 Main Street – Spoke in support for the Board of Education budget. The Administration and Board of Education has been dealing with many challenging situations including an enrollment increase. He feels the budget increase is relatively low considering there is a 15% population growth. The budget is responsible.

Andrew Paterna, 301 Strawberry Lane – Spoke in support of the Board of Education budget. He said that residents come to South Windsor because of their school system and quality of education.

## MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL  
ALT ROOM 6  
TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

WORK SESSION

Phil Koboski, 1909 Main Street – Spoke in support of the Board of Education budget and said that the increase in the budget is due to unprecedented enrollment growth.

#### 4. Items for Discussion

##### A. Board of Education Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2024/2025

Chairperson Maneeley opens the comments and referred to Dr. Carter for opening remarks.

Dr. Carter gave an overview of the Board of Education budget and said that the proposed budget is a 7.29% increase. Board of Education budget information can be found at [Budget Information - South Windsor Public Schools \(southwindsorschools.org\)](https://southwindsorschools.org/Budget-Information). Dr. Carter said that she has tried to strike a balance between meeting the needs of the students and moving the school district forward while still delivering a fiscally responsible budget but does not feel that there is a balance because it exclusively favors fiscal restraint, with very little emphasis on moving the district forward. The once balanced scale is now lopsided because this budget only keeps pace with the enrollment growth and places fiscal responsibility as the priority. This budget does not make schools safer, it does not bring new academic programs, it does not lower classroom size, and it does not improve secondary school facilities. It simply reflects the cost to maintain the status quo. Enrollment growth causes financial challenges and deferring costs of the enrollment growth is not in the best interest of the taxpayers as it will cause a bigger spike in the next budget. Dr. Carter urged town leaders to adopt this budget in full.

The budget was supported unanimously by all members of the Board of Education.

Councilor Carey asked questions regarding adding a new assistant principal (Page 11). Dr. Carter said that the rationale is due to forecasting staff. There are behaviors that require more supervision and support. Student body ratios are very high for three associate principals. They are a two-building campus (Wapping & Main Campus).

On page 12, Councilor Carey asked about clerical secretary position. Dr. Carter said this position is for finding substitute coverage.

On page 14, the pay to play fees have dropped and questioned why. Dr. Carter said that they are estimated based upon next year. Councilor Carey questioned why Title 3 and Title 4 grants are showing a decrease. Ms. Petersen said that the grants vary based upon a variety of factors but they don't know what the amounts will be until notified by the state so they are forecasting based upon what the allocations were for this year.

## MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL  
ALT ROOM 6  
TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

WORK SESSION

Councilor Carey asked about PTO fundraising (Page 31). She asked if the PTO supports the school in purchasing books. Dr. Carter said that the PTO's are very generous. These books that are being replaced are for the library and they are deemed past their useful life.

Page 67- Councilor Carey asked about the 16.9% water increase. Chris Chemerka said the water is increasing 18%. She also answered Councilor Careys question about pay for play fees and said that the middle school is \$100 per student and \$400 family cap. The high school is \$125 per sport with a \$500 cap. Hockey and gymnastics are \$400 with an \$800 cap per family.

Page 75- Councilor Carey said the percentage increase for copier expense, professional services and equipment expense is a little high and asked about the year to date cost. Dr. Carter said on page 74 there are justifications for these items.

On Page 77, Councilor Carey asked about the 18.85% increase in life insurance and asked if they are self-insured. Chris Chemerka said that they are not self-insured and they have an agency that manages the life insurance. Ms. Chemerka said that the increase is due to a portion being accidental death and dismemberment was not included last year and is included in this year's budget.

Councilor Carey asked about budgeted tuition reimbursement amounts. Mr. Sanzo said that this is due to a survey that is sent out to staff in preparation of the budget and that is where that number is generated.

Councilor Lewis asked if the tuition reimbursement leads to salary increases. Dr. Carter said that yes, typically that is the case. Mr. Lewis asked if the Board of Education is in the best position possible with the medical and dental rates. Ms. Chemerka said that every few years they go out to bid for medical and stop-loss insurance and they were able to negotiate lower rates. She also said that \$700k of that increase is due to not having reserves last year.

Deputy Mayor Siracusa asked about the laptop leases (Page 81) and wanted to know if the repairs are included in the lease. Ms. Chemerka said that the laptops are leased for 4 years and then bought out. If repairs are needed, there is an insurance policy that students' families pay for. Some repairs can also be made in house.

Councilor Balboni asked about the unfunded mandates and asked for a copy of the list of unfunded mandates and the total dollar amount of the mandates. Dr. Carter said that it would be difficult to provide a total cost but provided some examples. There is a 50-page document of mandates (not just unfunded mandates). Some examples of unfunded mandates are:

## MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL  
ALT ROOM 6  
TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

WORK SESSION

- composting effective January 1<sup>st</sup>. This would cost an additional estimated \$11,000 for an elementary school with around 340 students.
- Indoor air quality – just the inspections can cost an additional \$150k which does not exempt new buildings.
- There is also an act regarding paraprofessionals where it states that all full-time paraprofessionals would have a starting salary of \$45k.
- Some mandates require para training which equates to an added \$25,000 expense to the Town for one additional required training.

Councilor Balboni asked for the total impact of unfunded mandates. Dr. Carter stated that the unfunded mandates are not the drivers of the budget like the increasing enrollment is. Councilor Balboni asked what the penalties are for ignoring these mandates. Dr. Carter said that the question has been talked about.

Councilor Balboni asked why the electricity has decreased \$103,000 in the budget (Page 67). Ms. Chemerka said that is due to an energy credit for efficiency of Pleasant Valley School.

Deputy Mayor Siracusa asked for clarification regarding the composting mandate and asked when it will take effect and if the compost can be sold. Chris Chemerka said that it is in effect as of January 1<sup>st</sup>. The law is written that the compost must be disposed of or given to a certified composting facility. Mr. Siracusa asked if the Town's composting facility could handle the compost. Town Manager Michael Maniscalco said that the Town's composting facility cannot handle the composting because it is food waste and the Town only handles leaf composting.

Councilor Pendleton asked what the negative impact would be to the students and staff as a whole. Dr. Carter said that if they were to cut the budget, the reductions will create a deeper hole. Once they are able to keep pace with enrollment, the numbers will start to go down.

Councilor King (Page 72) asked about the safety enhancements for cameras. His concern is that there have been robberies at gun point, break-ins and vehicle thefts and he asked what the safety enhancements are. Dr. Carter said that these are for replacement cameras or for cameras to be added in other areas. Safety is the number one concern. Dr. Carter said that she would have safety officers at every school if money were no object.

Mr. Zimmerman clarified that the building and sites projects that listed on page 72 are the projects that are in the budget. He also said that Dr. Carter has had the same conversations about increases for several budget cycles.

## MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL  
ALT ROOM 6  
TIMOTHY EDWARDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

WORK SESSION

Councilor Carey asked what happens to unexpended funds. Dr. Carter said that they are able to fund healthcare that is over expended, pensions and liabilities are also funded with the unexpended funds as well as other projects that didn't make the budget list.

Councilor Pendleton asked Mr. Maniscalco to find out what the ½ mill at 1.75, would increase the budget and the tax payers would be. Mr. Maniscalco agreed.

Mr. Macchi said that he feels it is important as the council reviews the Board of Education budget that they keep in mind the bigger picture. We have to support the idea that we want better programs for our children and give support and resources to the students and teachers by funding the programs that set South Windsor apart from other districts.

Mayor Delnicki asked about the enrollment projections for the high school and said these are the same numbers through the 1980's but they only had two principals then. Dr. Carter said that this is a different time. The demands and requirements to keep the building safe, special education has huge demands on administrative staff. Evening programs require more supervision as well. Chairperson Maneeley supported Dr. Carters comments and stated that the Board Of Education supports the superintendents proposed budget.

Mayor Delnicki gave closing remarks and stated that the Public Hearing for the 24/25 Board of Education budget will be held on Monday, April 1, 2024 at 8pm in the Council Chambers of the South Windsor Town Hall.

### 5. Executive Session

None.

### 6. Adjournment

Councilor Lewis made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:59 pm. Councilor Pendleton seconded the motion, which passes by unanimous voice vote. **MOTION CARRIES.**

Respectfully submitted,

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**Katherine J. Senerth**  
Executive Assistant