

# TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR

## MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL/BOARD OF EDUCATION  
VIRTUAL MEETING

JOINT BUDGET WORK SESSION

DATE: MARCH 25, 2021

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

1. Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Paterna called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Town Council

Members Present: Mayor Andrew Paterna  
Deputy Mayor Liz Pendleton  
Councilor Erica Evans  
Councilor Mary Justine Hockenberry  
Councilor Philip Koboski  
Councilor Cesar Lopez  
Councilor Karen Lydecker  
Councilor Lisa Maneeley  
Councilor Janice Snyder

Also Present: Michael Maniscalco, Town Manager

Board of Education

Members Present: Chairperson Craig Zimmerman  
Vice Chairperson Jessica Waterhouse  
Arthur Adduci  
Anitha Elango  
Beth Esstman  
Marek Kozikowski  
Michael Paré

Members Absent: Michael Gonzalez  
James O'Brien

Also Present: Dr. Kate Carter, Superintendent of Schools  
Colin McNamara, Asst. Superintendent  
Tracie Peterson, Asst. Superintendent  
Chris Chermerka, Business Manager

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#### **ITEM:**

#### **3. Public Input**

Fred and Lisa Kopper (**Exhibit A**)

Daria Plummer, 235 Orchard Hill Drive (**Exhibit B**)

Marie Cortez, 240 Orchard Hill Drive (**Exhibit C**)

#### **4. Items for Discussion**

##### **A. Board of Education Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2021/2022**

Mayor Paterna thanked the Superintendent and Board of Education for preparing a reasonable budget that meets the needs of students. Mayor Paterna then stated that he is proud to hear that South Windsor is the fastest-growing school district in the State of Connecticut.

Dr. Kate Carter, Superintendent of Schools, stated that she appreciates that the Council recognizes the Board of Education's efforts.

Answering questions from the Council, Dr. Carter explained that the proposed budget maintains the same number of counselors but shifts one position from one bargaining unit to another. The Board of Education is waiting on guidance for permissible expenditures for the federal funds that South Windsor will be receiving. The only thing known at this time is that those funds cannot be used to lower taxes. If there are requirements to maintain distance learning, federal funds could easily be consumed. The Board's current model for South Windsor teachers is not sustainable on a long-term basis and would require additional staff.

Town Manager Maniscalco informed the Council and Board of Education that the guidance he has received to date is that the funds can be used for responding to COVID-19 costs, to pay workers for responding to COVID-19 costs, reimbursing lost revenues for Government programs, and making investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. Two items that these funds cannot be used for are to fund pensions or offset taxes. The Council and Board of Education members will be updated as more information is provided.

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#### ITEM:

#### 4. A. (Continued)

Answering further questions from the Council, Dr. Carter explained that during last year's budget, a 2.69% increase was proposed in the budget, but in light of COVID-19, Dr. Carter felt that recommending no increase would be best. The illustration of 0.69% was used to show the Council that if the Board of Education had received 2.69% last year, the Board of Education would only need a 0.69% rather than 3.39% increase in this budget.

Dr. Carter informed the Council that if this budget is passed as presented, four teachers will complete the Board of Education's strategic planning initiative of having World Language Instruction from Grades 1-12. There has always been a program for Grades 7-13. If staffing for Grade 6 were not provided, there would be a disruption in the program. The introduction of Grade 6 Spanish next year will allow for a seamless continuation for access to World Language Instruction. In this budget, four FTE's for Spanish have been added, but four FTE's for Digital Literacy have been eliminated, which has become outdated, so this request is being viewed as cost neutral. The Board of Education is also looking to increase its maintainer staff by one Maintainer with a focus on HVAC.

Dr. Carter explained that the elementary schools are growing, and it is felt that an Associate Principal at Eli Terry Elementary School is necessary. There are Associate Principals presently at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and Orchard Hill Elementary School. The only elementary school that will not have an Associate Principal, if this request is approved, is Philip R. Smith Elementary School, but it may be a request in a future budget.

There is a request for one FTE Bilingual Teacher at Pleasant Valley Elementary School. The language that is creating this mandate for additional staffing is Telugu. It is unlikely to find a Certified Connecticut Teacher fluent in Telugu, so the State requires someone Certified in ELL or Certified Bilingual. It was felt that going with a Certified Bilingual Teacher would add value to the growing department of EL Teachers. South Windsor has gone from 76 students in 2010 to well over 300.

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#### ITEM:

#### 4. A. (Continued)

Mrs. Chris Chemerka, Business Manager, explained that the technology purchases that are being increased for next year are for a change in the software that is being used due to distance learning and for new devices for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders.

The Board of Education has had discussions regarding bringing Safety Officers into the elementary schools. In this budget, a Safety Officers is being proposed for Pleasant Valley Elementary School. There are traffic issues associated with Pleasant Valley Elementary School, which the Safety Officer will address.

The \$230,000 increase in transportation is being used as a placeholder during negotiations of a contract that is being renewed or extended. It is hard to know if this contract will be closed before the budget is approved.

Councilor Koboski stated that he is very impressed with the budget the Board of Education submitted considering the increase in enrollment over the last year.

Dr. Carter clarified that the Board of Education can use reserves to keep the proposed increase at 3.39%. The use of these reserves does not deplete the health of the reserves maintained. The proposed budget calls for the use of approximately \$800,000 of the Special Education Reserve Account. Mrs. Chemerka informed the Council that the balance of this account would be \$600,000, after the use of \$800,000.

Dr. Carter stated that it is hopeful that a use for the federal dollars that are anticipated could be used towards more impactful resources such as mental health. If staffing is increased, with this in mind, the Board will need to be careful because this would then become the Town's responsibility in future budgets. Another option would be for the Board of Education to continue its partnership with Effective School Solutions, which is a clinical program at the high school that provides mental health support to students and families. Dr. Carter explained that the Special Education Reserve Account could be used for mental health, but she reminded the Town Council that anything that is done that is related to staffing unless you have a plan to sunset it, it does create a financial obligation if the support persists past the Fiscal Year.

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#### ITEM:

#### 4. A. (Continued)

Mrs. Chemerka informed the Council that at this moment, the Board of Education budget has approximately \$200,000 sitting in an unallocated account, but there are structural changes that will need to be addressed at Timothy Edwards Middle School due to the increasing enrollment, so that amount will most likely change.

Dr. Carter explained how pay increases are determined for union employees. The increase for non-bargaining unit employees is determined by the Board of Education. Retiree savings in the budget is anticipated at \$542,000.

At 8:00 p.m., the Work Session was recessed in order to hold a public hearing. The Work Session reconvened at 8:02 p.m., while the public hearing was kept open to give the public a chance to call in to make a comment or email their comment in.

Deputy Mayor Pendleton stated that she supports the proposed budget of the Board of Education and realizes that there are concerns about the increases over the next three years due to student enrollment. Deputy Mayor Pendleton requested that the Superintendent of Schools and Town Manager work together to develop a financial game plan for the future.

Board member Paré stated that the Board of Education has made substantial investments in preparation for the future and suggested that there may be an opportunity to use the Federal Funds towards HVAC at the secondary schools.

Dr. Carter explained to the Council that she does not feel lowering the appropriation request is fiscally responsible and could create larger impacts in future budgets.

#### 5. Executive Session

None

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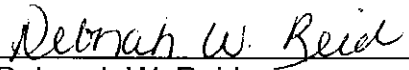
**March 25, 2021**

**ITEM:**

**6. Adjournment**

Councilor Maneeley made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m. Deputy Mayor Pendleton seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah W. Reid  
Clerk of the Council

**[External]Support for Board of Education Budget**

Elizabeth Kopper [lisakautumn44@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 23, 2021 11:41 AM

**To:** TownCouncilComments

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or on clicking links from unknown senders.**

To whom it may concern:

We are writing to voice our support for the 2021-2022 Board of Education budget. South Windsor provided an outstanding education for our children and continues to offer a well rounded education for current students. We have watched the school population grow, shrink, and grow again over the 40 plus years that we have lived here. The school population is currently growing and the education budget reflects that growth, as well as the high quality education that South Windsor offers. We urge the Town Council to approve the budget as presented.

Respectfully submitted,  
Fred and Lisa Kopper

**[External]From Daria Plummer, Comments for March 25th Town Council meeting**

dariap@aol.com

**Sent:** Tuesday, March 23, 2021 1:10 PM

**To:** TownCouncilComments

**Cc:** Reid, Deborah

Exhibit B

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or on clicking links from unknown senders.**

Dear Members of the Town Council,

I write to you this evening in full support of the Board of Education's 2021-22 budget, as presented to you by Superintendent Carter and the Board of Education.

Education in South Windsor is valued highly. This was so in 1967, and made known to me, when I was first hired here as a teacher and remains such today as we embark on the rebuild of Pleasant Valley Elementary, the fourth school to be rebuilt within the Board's brilliant 10 year plan elementary schools plan. Quality supported education is a cornerstone that defines South Windsor.

The Board's budget increase, in a community now considered the fastest growing school district in Connecticut, is primarily due to enrollment, the subsequent staffing needs, and contractual obligations for facility and transportation.

Both the Board and the Superintendent are to be congratulated on their due diligence for their budget, and guiding us through mandated and necessary needs for our students, which include the expansion of the Eli Terry Intensive Program serving autistic and special needs students district-wide, increased high school reading support for special education students, as well as ensuring that the district's world language initiative receives the support it requires.

Not one of us will ever forget this pandemic, especially all Board of Education staff and the families and students they serve. Included in this budget is a continuation of mental health supports for students and families—an absolutely necessary aspect of education, especially now.

Our schools have shouldered on and our administration and staff have worked relentlessly to provide education in uncharted waters. They are to be commended, lauded, and applauded for doing so and for developing a lean budget based on absolute needs and maintenance of the excellence we know and want as a community for our schools.

Thank you. I urge your full support of the Board's budget.

Daria Plummer  
235 Orchard Hill Drive  
South Windsor  
dariap@aol.com



## **[External]Support of Board of Education Budget**

Exhibit C

mcortez.gcp@gmail.com

**Sent:** Thursday, March 25, 2021 11:18 AM

**To:** TownCouncilComments

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or on clicking links from unknown senders.**

I strongly support Superintendent Dr. Carter's proposed budget for South Windsor School System.

I have lived in South Windsor for 18 years and I have seen the positive results of having my children enrolled in a strong and supportive school system. My oldest son, will be graduating from UCONN this spring and my youngest is a Junior at South Windsor High School. His access to a great education, a wonderful music program and sports have made him a well-rounded student. The number one reason my husband and I decided to move to South Windsor was the quality of the school system.

As an educator and a mental health professional myself, I have seen how the COVID-19 Pandemic has had a negative impact on students across the state, academically and emotionally. It is our responsibility to meet the deficits that this pandemic has brought onto our children. In addition to that, given how technology has become a fast and evolving part of our lives, it is essential that our schools are up to date with technology. On a sad note, given the negative and violent situations that have occurred in our society, the security of our children in our schools should always be a top priority.

Sincerely,

Marie Cortez, LCSW  
240 Orchard Hill Drive  
South Windsor, CT 06074