

1996-97 ANNUAL BUDGET

PUBLIC HEARING

APRIL 15, 1996

7:00 P.M.

A Public Hearing on the 1996-97 Annual Budget of the Town of Wallingford was held by the Town Council in the Robert Earley Auditorium of the Wallingford Town Hall and Called to Order by Chairman Robert F. Parisi at 7:07 P.M. All Councilors answered present to the Roll called by Town Clerk Rosemary A. Rascati with the exception of Councilor Papale who was detained out of town by employment obligations. Mayor William W. Dickinson, Jr. and Comptroller Thomas A. Myers were also present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was given to the Flag.

Chairman Parisi noted that a Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting had been scheduled to run concurrently with the public hearing tonight. Patricia Carruthers, Chairperson of the Zoning Board of Appeals, was present for a limited time therefore Mr. Parisi requested that the public bring forth any questions it had of Mrs. Carruthers at this time.

Hearing no response from the public on this Board's budget Mr. Parisi excused Mrs. Carruthers from the proceedings.

Mr. Parisi next invited questions from the public on the Board of Education budget.

Board of Education/Cafeteria

Dave Canto, 4 Meadows Edge Drive stated that he was pleased to see that the salaries and benefits portion of the budget which comprises eighty percent (80%) of the total education budget has decreased two percent (2%) from the 1994 figures. He asked, what is the incremental cost due to the school expansion project?

John Quinn, Business Manager responded, approximately one percent (1%). Approximately \$83,000 is attributed to the Middle School expansions and \$470,000 for the Yalesville School expansion.

Mr. Canto responded, these are increases in operational costs that are just due to the expansion? There is nothing more than that? It is not \$1.1 million?

Mr. Quinn responded, they are included in the bottom line of the budget.

Mr. Canto asked, when looking at the headings of Library Books &

Periodicals or Site Improvements or Building Improvements or Instructional Equipment, are any or all of the increases due to the fact that you have additional facilities?

Mr. Quinn answered, some of the increases will be due to Yalesville. About \$80,000 is budgeted for library books for the Yalesville School library. No money is budgeted for site improvements at Yalesville because that is a new facility.

Mr. Canto then asked, how much does it cost to operate the educational television station per year?

Joseph Cirasuolo, Superintendent of Schools responded, the cost is contained in the Audio Visual budget but that budget supports more than the operational cost to run the television station. The total budget for the entire audio visual services is \$151,914. The important thing to remember is that figure includes staff costs for people who do more than just operate the television station, they have other responsibilities as well.

Mr. Quinn stated, it is less than \$100,000.

Dr. Cirasuolo added, it is quite a bit less than that amount.

Mr. Canto commented that he appreciated the way the Mayor has reduced the requests to the rate of inflation. Given the fact that we have been given \$27 million for the expansion project, to increase overall spending by only two and nine-tenths of a percent (2.9%) is a very good move.

No further questions were presented with regards to the Board of Education or Cafeteria budgets therefore that portion of the meeting reserved for the Board was concluded. Both Administrative and Board members were dismissed at this time to allow for their attendance at a previously scheduled Board of Education Meeting.

General Government

Dave Canto, 4 Meadows Edge Drive extended his appreciation to the Mayor for utilizing approximately \$1.5 million of the surplus and applying it to reduce the tax rate. Many people have criticized the administration in the past for accumulating a surplus and he is sure those people are glad that we have it for things could have been a lot worse. There may come a time when we won't have that luxury to do this in future years, especially if we keep increasing the amount of capital projects. He was glad to see that the Mayor's salary was increased this year. He commended the Welfare Department for reducing their expenses by thirty-five percent (35%). It is a good precedent to set, especially in that area of the government.

Regarding Debt Service Mr. Canto stated, with respect to the total budget our debt service is only five and one-tenths percent (5.1%). How much debt can the Town absorb in the near and long term especially as we start to consider other capital projects? Are we going to reach a point where above a certain percentage of debt is detrimental or unwise to carry?

Mayor Dickinson responded, there is a law which sets out a specific amount over which the Town cannot borrow. We are not close to that figure but what it really comes down to is how much you are going to reduce flexibility and have the Town's finances controlled by the necessity to make principle and interest payments to borrowing costs. We want to keep that amount as low as possible because that gives us flexibility in managing our own finances when dealing with future needs. To the extent that we take on large amounts of increased debt and don't plan for them, that is when you have a problem.

Mr. Canto then asked, was the capital budget of the Recreation Department developed with the idea of implementing or adopting Fairfield Boulevard?

Mayor Dickinson responded, it is my belief that most of the items listed are not for Fairfield Boulevard. The items are for other sites. The Bleachers for Gym line item is for Fairfield Boulevard but there is \$9,400 set aside for bleachers and \$2,696 for Player Benches in various parks. At least fifty percent (50%) or more is unrelated to Fairfield Boulevard.

Mr. Canto asked the Mayor, did you include in any portion of the budget recreation center costs for Fairfield Boulevard renovations?

Mayor Dickinson answered, there are components such as the telephone system and score board but as a general rule our cost of renovating Fairfield Boulevard will be via a bond ordinance and we do feel that we have the funds to handle that in the Capital and Non-Recurring program.

Mr. Canto noted that there are a lot of consultant costs in the budgets of the Risk Management, Health and Law Departments. The price of the consultants have contributed to the increases in each of these budgets. He understands that there are situations and times that warrant the hiring of consultants for we may not have the expertise required but is there any type of control mechanism to monitor the extent to which we use the consultants?

Mayor Dickinson responded, the control is that they aren't approved in this process. First he (Mayor) reviews the request and then the Council reviews it. The departments don't receive approval to hire a consultant unless it is for a project that is felt to be necessary for the community. That is where most of the control is.

On the other hand you can view the use of consultants as privatization. We are obtaining expertise on a particular project from private sources rather than paying full time people to have that expertise on a year round basis. You have to be careful about it but it is an example of privatizing.

Mr. Canto noted a small increase in the budget of the Animal Control Officer but was sure it was justified.

Mayor Dickinson commented, with regards to revenues, this current year we had \$2.4 million that we were able to pay from reserves to offset taxes. This proposed budget has \$1.4 million which is \$1 million less. It is an example of how the current property rate, tax, increasingly has to handle what ever increases we experience. In general, the government expenses other than education are going down three and four-tenths of a percent (3.4%). The budget illustrates a clear attempt to recognize the shortage of revenues and tries to reduce the expenses we pay each year.

Mr. Parisi asked the public to come forward with any remaining questions they may have for department heads at this time.

Mayor Dickinson stated for those viewers at home that the proposed budget would call for an increase of three-tenths of a mill which for the average assessed property of \$108,500 including two vehicles would mean an increase of \$32.55 in the course of a year.

Mr. Parisi announced at this time that the budget workshops for Tuesday, April 16th and Wednesday, April 17th are cancelled. On Thursday, April 18th at 6:30 P.M. the Council will hold a budget workshop at which all department heads are required to be in attendance. They Mayor will make a presentation on the budget to the Council at such time. The Council will then have its opportunity to ask questions of the department heads.

Mayor Dickinson pointed out that the utilities will be addressed that night as well.

Albert Killen, 150 Cedar Street asked, will the budget be reviewed in a "one night stand" method?

Mr. Parisi responded, not necessarily. If the Council needs to continue the workshop it will adjourn the meeting by 11:00 P.M. and will meet again on Monday evening.

Mr. Killen stated, if the first two departments reviewed takes all night the remaining department heads will be in attendance for no reason.

Mr. Parisi responded, it will not take all night long for the

Council will adjourn at 11:00 p.m.

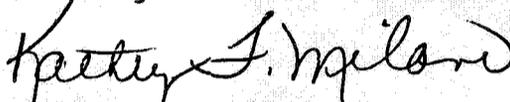
The Public Hearing on the F.Y. 1996-97 Budget of the Town of Wallingford was officially closed.

Motion was made by Mr. Knight to Adjourn the Public Hearing, seconded by Mr. Centner.

VOTE: Papale was absent; all others, aye; motion duly carried.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 7:34 P.M.

Meeting recorded and transcribed by:



Kathryn F. Milano
Town Council Secretary