

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT
SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Robert F Parisi Council Chambers
THURSDAY, May 23, 2024
7:00 P.M.
RECORD OF VOTES AND MINUTES

The Special Town Council Meeting on Thursday, May 23, 2024, was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Councilors in attendance were: Autumn Allinson (via Zoom), Samuel Carmody, Christopher Regan, Jesse Reynolds, Christina Tatta, Vincent F. Testa, and Chairman Joseph A. Marrone, III. Mayor Vincent Cervoni, and Janis Small, Corporation Counsel were also present.

1. Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call
2. Discussion and possible action regarding the Mayoral Veto of 2024-2025 adopted budget – Councilor Testa.

Councilor Testa explained that he wanted the opportunity to express support for adding the funds to the Board of Education that the Council discussed at the workshops. He respectfully asked his colleagues to reconsider their votes. He stated that he appreciates the efforts of the administration to acknowledge what the Council expressed. He understands the Mayor's position. The Council had a strong position to add \$2.3 million. A lot of thought was behind that number.

MOTION TO override the Mayoral Veto and adjustment of Council's adopted budget.

MADE BY: TESTA

SECONDED BY: CARMODY

Councilor Carmody stated that the School System is faced with significant costs for health care, the addition of crossing guards, and State reimbursements have decreased. Without the proper funding, which this budget does not provide, the school system will be facing layoffs and cuts to programs. The current budget is inadequate. He stated that he will vote to override. We must provide the necessary resources.

Councilor Allinson's comments were read by Councilor Laffin. She thanked those who sent emails and commented. She stated that historically Wallingford had lower taxes than its neighbors. This year is no exception. She shared data on the percentage of budget education plays in several neighboring towns along with this year's increase and the change in the mil rate. The Council balanced the growing needs of our community with a proposed mil rate increase of 1.07 mils or 5.68% increase over last year. The Mayor's partial veto decreases the tax increase by \$50. She stated that she would vote to support the veto.

Councilor Laffin stated that he understands where everyone is coming from. He appreciated all the messages he received. He appreciates the creative and thoughtful efforts of the Mayor. He stated that the votes to override the veto and get back to the \$2.3 million budget don't exist. Not everyone will be happy. He appreciates the work put into this and is willing to work with the BOE to make something more sustainable.

Councilor Regan stated that we tried. The BOE's original request was reduced by the Mayor's office by \$3.9 million to reduce the burden on the taxpayers. The Council came up with the restoration of \$2.3 million as a compromise. He noted that all Councilors received messages from both sides of the issue. The Mayor's line-item veto was a compromise to restore \$1.1 million to the budget. Not everyone will be

happy. We can't do these increases every year. A serious conversation on school consolidation, union contracts, our antiquated infrastructure, and other issues is needed. He stated that he will vote no.

Councilor Reynolds stated that we weren't adequately raising taxes like we should have been the last few years. He stated that he understands the effect of losing a job has on the family and the school. The schools are not updated. Now we expect the administration to sharpen their pencils. There are criticisms that we are underperforming and that combining schools will save money. These are not addressed by not fully funding this budget. This will make the situation worse. Taxes are going up. We are arguing over \$20 to \$30 and that number of people may lose their jobs.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Eileen Oliveira, 25 Stella Drive, stated that she is here for teachers who made a great difference in the life of her child. She stated that she was flabbergasted by the veto and would gladly pay more in taxes. This is the most ridiculous argument ever. We need to get together and resolve it.

Francesca Hart thanked the Council for the opportunity to discuss this. She stated that she is a parent of three, a staff member, and a former teacher. She suggested having the conversation more often so that schools can share how the money is allocated. She understands how cuts affect the students. They are trying to bridge learning gaps. Without this support, it will not be in the best interests of the students. Parents should not need to worry that current and upcoming students are getting less than students in the past. She encouraged an ongoing conversation. She invited Council members to come into the schools and see how taxpayer money is used.

Tim Kansler, 41 Hintz Drive, stated that he is a parent of three and has been a teacher for 20 years. He is very invested in this town. The education budget directly affects the children, who should always come first. Education budgets should never be cut. We all want the same things. Cutting school funding will cause increases in crime and drug use. He noted that Wallingford's class sizes are already over the optimal number. He asked the Council to fully fund the school budget. Children and families count on you.

Amy Stewart, 17 Wall Street, stated that she is a teacher who lives in town. The Town Council and the Board of Education need to have more conversations. Jobs and children are not a compromise. The special education population is going up and more children speak different languages. She thanked Councilor Testa for calling this meeting. She thanked the Council for initially voting to put the money back into the budget.

Katherine Haskell, 35 Chimney Sweep Road stated that she is a teacher and is a resident. She supports the override of the veto. This is a commitment to the future of our community. She stated that 18.9% of students receive special education services. She listed other types of support required for students. Cutting the budget is detrimental to these essential services. The needs of our students are growing. Taking money from the budget poses a significant risk. She stated that she hoped the Council would reconsider.

Charlie Elliott, 104 Simpson Avenue, stated that she is going into her senior year. She stated that she doesn't know what classes will be offered. She is having difficulty planning for her future and college because she doesn't know how this budget will affect the coming school year.

Michael Votto, 377 North Elm Street, stated that he knows the issues in past budgets. In the last few years, the central office has worked to streamline these budgets. They created the sustained and the strategic budgets so there are no surprises. We have the responsibility to keep the schools up to par. He invited the Council to ask questions outside of budget season and to visit the schools to see what's being

done. The need for extra support services is growing. He stated that he knows it is hard to make the decision but we have to put the kids first. He asked the Council to stand by their convictions.

Melanie Rossacci, 9 Platt Drive, stated that she appreciated the opportunity to speak. Public education is one of our greatest achievements but the current system for funding public education is broken. She implored the Council to work with the State to advocate for true education funding reform. We need sufficient, adequate, and equitable funding. She asked the Council to reconsider and change your vote. Two-thirds of the town's budget is for education. She encouraged the Mayor and Council members to attend Board of Education meetings. She noted that 80% of teachers live in town and that it is untrue that layoffs won't happen.

Dianna Ball, 104 Simpson Avenue, thanked the Council for this meeting. She stated that she appreciates the time and effort put into the budget and agreed with prior speakers. She knows how hard the budget is to craft. Know who you are affecting.

Maureen Reed, 89 Chapel Street, stated that she appreciates the hard decisions that have to be made. She stated that these people are teaching our future. If we can't put our money into the kids, where would you put the money? Council needs to understand the amount of money and effort it takes to educate children. She asked the Council to rethink the decision.

Anne Porier, 121 Simpson Avenue, thanked the Council for this meeting and the work they do. She stated that Wallingford has a thriving downtown and a lot to be proud of. She added that she is a teacher who lives in town. We need to make the same investment in education that we do elsewhere in town. Teachers and paraprofessionals work tirelessly to meet the needs of the students. She asked the Council to vote to restore the funding.

Chairman Marrone stated that the vote to override the Mayor's veto needs 7 affirmative votes.

ROLL CALL VOTE:		REGAN:	NO
ALLINSON:	YES	REYNOLDS:	YES
CARMODY:	YES	TATTA:	NO
FISHBEIN:	ABSENT	TESTA:	YES
LAFFIN:	NO	MARRONE:	NO

4 – AYE
4– NAY
0 – ABSTAIN
1- ABSENT
MOTION: FAILS

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman Marrone at 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl-Ann Tubby
Recording Secretary

Joseph Marrone, Chair

Date

Kristen Panzo, Town Clerk

Date