

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT
BUDGET WORKSHOP MEETING
Robert F. Parisi Council Chambers
April 15, 2025
6:30 P.M.
RECORD OF VOTES & MINUTES

The Town Council Meeting on Tuesday, April 15, 2025, was called to order at 6:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was said. Councilors in attendance were Thomas Laffin (came at 7:38pm), Christina Tatta, Vincent Testa, Christopher Regan, Craig Fishbein, Autumn Allinson (came at 8:30pm), Samuel Carmody and Chairman Joseph A. Marrone. Mayor Vincent Cervoni, Comptroller Tim Sena and Town Clerk Kristen Panzo were also present. Councilor Jesse Reynolds was absent.

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call
3. FY 2025-2026 Budget

Civil Preparedness
Fire Department
Fire Marshall
Police Department
Public Works

Civil Preparedness:

Chief James Buck and Deputy Fire Chief Mike Shaw gave a presentation to the council.

Councilor Fishbein asked about the maintenance equipment line item and where does that fall into the budget. Chief Buck stated that it should be in the main budget packet as its own line item.

Vice Chair Tatta asked if the new CERT Team was in the budget being presented or if it will be funded elsewhere. Chief Buck stated that the CERT Team is volunteer based and does a great job. He said that this team has been in existence for a few years now, so it is not something new. He also mentioned that it is funded by grants.

Fire Department:

Chief James Buck gave a presentation to the council explaining where the department is and where they are going.

Councilor Testa talked about the cost comparison by town that Chief Buuck provided during his presentation. He was trying to determine what town can be compared to Wallingford. He discussed the number of incidents per capita for Wallingford. Chief Buck explained how Meridan, for example, handles their calls and incidents. He stated that Wallingford handles all the calls that come in, while Meridan has a private ambulance to handle most of their calls, so Wallingford has a higher number of incidents per capita than Meridan does. There was a discussion of cost per incident by Councilor Testa. He used Milford as an example. He mentioned that they pay more per incident than Wallingford does and that their budget is bigger than Wallingford. Chief Buck stated that Milford is top heavy, meaning they have a lot of staff that do not go out on the road daily. There was a discussion about hiring from within the department for positions that come up and then replacing those positions with qualified people. Chief Buck stated that he would hold a promotional test to have the more seasoned fire fighters take to become lieutenants. The money presented to them would be a gap from what they are currently making to what they will make. He would then hire three firefighters to replace the ones who became lieutenants plus hire three additional firefighters totaling six firefighters. Councilor Testa said he thinks the only way to reduce this budget is to cut capital expenditure and not cut people or jobs. There was a discussion about the Fire Department's capital items budget. The vehicle replacement plan was discussed.

Councilor Fishbein asked about the combi tool being a \$20,000 expense. He asked what the tool was. Chief Buck stated that this tool combines the use of a spreader with a cutter. It can cut the pillars of a vehicle if need be. He said it gives you both features of those tools in one and takes up less space. This tool will be in Engine 8. Councilor Fishbein talked about how our income is significantly higher than Milford. There was a discussion about when the fire department in Wallingford will go to a car fire on a state highway who gets reimbursed for that call. Chief Buck stated that the money goes to the volunteer fire fighters. Councilor Fishbein stated that in the Governor's budget that reimbursement will be cut. Chief Buck stated that it would be a loss to the people who receive this money if it gets cut. There was a discussion of how much the reimbursement is.

Vice Chair Tatta asked about the Fire Department hiring and testing methods. Chief Buck stated that the department goes to Human Resources, telling them what they need in a hire. Vice Chair Tatta talked about how the Police Department pay is better than the Fire Department pay. There was a discussion about building maintenance and grounds cost. Chief Buck stated that the \$95,000 for building maintenance and grounds cost is more for repairs and not the day-to-day maintenance. The telephone cost was discussed. Councilor asked about Vehicle and property insurance and why it has not been on the Fire Department budget in the past. Mr. Sena explained that the question

should be directed at the Risk Manager. She asked about the Squad 8 Fire Truck replacement. She wanted to know why the department requested \$350,000 and the mayor only approved \$250,000. Chief Buck stated that the platform of the vehicle won't change. There will be opportunities to increase capability over time. Councilor asked if it was true that the Fire Department has the same number of staffing as in 2012, just double the call volume. Chief Buck stated that if you are just talking about fire rescue then that statement is accurate. They have added the EMT's which increase the number of staff. There was a discussion about Squad 2 and the fact that they have added it for about 6 months already. The truck is not to the specification that they need, and it has been a manufacturing issue. It was a hose configuration issue that is the problem. The question was asked if the fire truck can be sold as is and if they can start the process from scratch. Chief Buck stated that it is possible, but it would not move them forward with a truck any faster. The ambulance revenue was discussed. Chief Buck stated that year over year they have been on an increase, then when you add Medic 3 it has accelerated that pace. Chief Buck explained why they are receiving more money. Councilor said about the health insurance plan. Seeing how the Fire Department has their own health insurance, she wanted to know if Chief Buck knew how much that saved the town. Chief Buck stated he does not know the numbers. She asked Chief Buck to explain what RSI is. He stated that it is an advanced airway technique and that is all he knows about it. He stated that he did not want to do a disservice by explaining something he was not 100% familiar with. The Town of Wallingford offers advanced life support while other towns only offer basic life support. Councilor wanted Chief Buck to explain the incident that happened on the weekend and explain how the staffing works in certain calls. Chief Buck explained what happened with the head on car collision. When accidents like this happen and you do not have enough staff on call, the staff that is on call is spread thinly. That is what Councilor was trying to relay to the public just how important it is to fully staff the Fire Department and Emergency Management Technicians and Paramedics. If calls like this come in during the day usually it is very hard to find mutual aid in other towns because they are just as busy with the call volume as Wallingford is. There was a discussion about the 4-gas meters being removed by the mayor. A 4-gas meter tells you if an environment you are going into is going to explode or not. Chief Buck stated that they have a significant number of meters. He stated that in his other companies he has worked for, they leased the 4-gas meters. There was a discussion about the request in the amount of \$9,300 for mattresses. That cost is for 22 mattresses for the fire houses. Chief Buck stated that they will be looking into getting the mattresses and other furniture if needed soon.

Councilor Regan stated that there is about \$2.4 million projected in revenue and wanted to know if Chief Buck had an idea of how much of that was used on town fire fighter services. Chief Buck stated that their revenue is for services provided. There was a question as to when Hunter's ambulance comes in, does the Town of Wallingford respond to those calls. Chief Buck stated that they do their billing through Comstar and Hunter's does their own billing for services. He said it is a net revenue that is coming into Wallingford. Councilor asked if they have any idea if they are breaking even with that or is it a profit center. Chief Buck explained it is not as easy as just breaking even. There are other factors that go into it. For example, the EMT salaries, the fire truck they

are in. They also provide emergency care through their engine companies. He stated that it is a complex answer to be able to give an actual figure. Mayor Cervoni stated that they did operate ambulances at enterprise for a better part of the last decade. What they found was that it is not operating in a self-sustaining method. They then repelled the ordinance that allowed the ambulance to operate as an enterprise. They have explored that as a town. They tried it for several years and it was not an enterprise that sustained itself. Councilor asked about grants for the fire department. Chief Buck stated that there are three grants through FEMA. Assistance to Fire Fighter grants which are often used for equipment, or apparatus. Safer, which is a staffing grant. It works on a graduating scale, to bring those additional personnel in through a safer grant. Fire protection grants that are helpful to the community risk reduction and public education and activities. He stated they will be evaluating those funding opportunities.

Chairman Marrone appreciates the hard discussion that the Fire Department and Mayor Cervoni had about how to best fund the department. He asked if there would be any consideration in reopening one of the closed fire houses. Chief Buck stated that it is something they are looking at. He has discussed with the Director of Public Works one of those buildings. He wanted the council to know that there would be a lot that goes into getting the closed fire station up and running again. The building would need to be refurbished to be utilized. He would have to figure out who or what would be responding out of there. The property being discussed is on Cook Hill, Station 4. There was a discussion on cost per incident and cost per capita. Wallingford is at the low end of both. Councilor hopes that the study will provide incite on the pay scale and services for the fire department.

Councilor Fishbein is in favor of trying for a second time the ambulance enterprise idea. He stated that the prior administration was not in favor of collecting bills. It was used as a source of a service. He discussed the fitness equipment for \$4,500. Chief Buck stated that each station is different in the amount of space and equipment they have. He sees a need for the fire fighters, EMTs, to have that work out equipment on site and work in a good environment to be able to continue that health and wellness. The initial request was to fix equipment. He is also looking to standardize the equipment, so each fire house has equipment.

Fire Marshall:

There were no questions for this department.

Police Department:

Chief John Ventura, Deputy Chief Anthony DeMaio and Executive Secretary Beth Dighello were present.

Chief Ventura gave an overview of his department's budget.

Councilor Fishbein stated that the backup stated the ask of four police cruisers and questioned it because Chief Ventura originally asked for six police cruisers. Chief Ventura stated that after speaking to the mayor, it was decided to cut two police cruisers. Councilor said the ask for police cruisers has also been six. He wanted to know why six. Chief Ventura stated that the ask for six would keep the fleet going. He stated that the year of COVID was detrimental to his department because they could not get police cruisers. A cut in the cars puts the department back multiple years. He stated it is about 1 and a half years to outfit a police car. Body cameras were discussed. Chief Ventura stated that other agencies that use the camera they use have gone to a different vendor for body cameras. The price of the cameras on the backup was discussed. Chief Ventura stated that one company quotes a lump sum and the other company they are looking at costs out over a 5-year period. The backup shows what the cost would be for year one of a five-year period. Councilor asked if there was anything else the police department asked for, for safety that they did not get. Chief Ventura stated he asked for four more police officers which would bring them to a total of 82 police officers. His goal since being chief was to bring that number up to 85, which is optimal. He had a discussion with the mayor and where we are as a town that is not something they can do right now. They are going to try to hire so they have a total of 78 officers. The arrest rate and incident rate were discussed in lieu of needing the four additional police officers. Chief Ventura said that the four additional officers are needed. He went into detail of how the day shifts are run and how many cars are needed for each shift.

Vice Chair Tatta stated even with 85 officers that it would still be lower than what the state recommends. Chief Ventura stated that there is a formula they can use to determine that. He agrees that 85 is still a little low. She asked how many patrol officers there are on any given night. Chief Ventura said the minimum from 4-12 is six patrol officers on the road with one supervisor. Optimal is 12-14 officers assigned to each shift. If there can be six to seven patrol cars out every shift that would be optimal in his opinion. When an incident happens there are multiple officers going to that one incident so it pulls away from other things that might be going on. She asked about their hiring process and how they handle hiring individuals. Chief Ventura stated that historically, he has always used the South-Central Criminal Justice Association. That is a New Haven County asset for testing. They do entry-level testing, certified testing and promotional testing. He said there might be 44 applicants for the whole year from the whole region not just New Haven County, so it is very difficult sometimes to hire people. There needs to be other testing methods to generate more people. He explained how the hiring process is in Wallingford. Councilor asked if the new hire officers starting at \$92,000 would be because they are certified. Chief Ventura said yes, because they are certified the officers can start at step 3. She asked about the police officer at the wishing well and if that is ever coming back. Chief Ventura said that the problem with that is you took that person off the road for a period every day. He said he just can't do it anymore. It is not viable to have one officer there daily. She asked about a satellite location uptown. Mayor Cervoni stated that they can't give up the armory because of the cost of moving the communication tower, so they are going to be presenting to the council a plan to repurpose it, and they have discussed with the police department having a satellite

office in that front north corner where the dispatch area was. They would potentially staff it at peak hours and some weekends. Councilor asked about the telephone cost and how it went down. Chief Ventura stated that their telephone incorporates the regular telephone system, and then a lot of dispatch items. All the modems and cruisers are on there as well. They are still paying for the fiber connection. The utilities cost going up was discussed. Chief Ventura stated that they worked with the comptroller to figure out cost. The new building being much larger requires a lot more of everything to run efficiently. The custodial expense going up was discussed. Chief Ventura said at the old building they had a bid for custodial work and when they went to rebid it for the new building the cost went up.

Chairman Marrone asked how frequently the police department is fully staffed. Chief Ventura said they have come close but have not gotten there. It has not been for a lack of effort though. Councilor asked how attractive Wallingford is as a town is to work for. Chief Ventura stated that it is better. They have a new building, can hold training classes in the new building. He said Wallingford is regarded as a good place to work.

Councilor Laffin wanted to know if all six police officers wanted were hired, can the academy handle six people from Wallingford. Chief Ventura stated that they are trying. He said in the past they had full academy classes and then had to give seats back because they could not fill the class or lost someone at the last minute. They do not know until the person fills out the form and gets back to you that your request has been accepted. The hope is to run more classes and have them coincide with the testing and hiring process.

Public Works:

Rob Baltramaitis Director of Public Works and Steven Palermo Superintendent were present.

Mr. Baltramaitis discussed his budget and what the department of public works does for the town.

Councilor Laffin asked about the custodial line item in the budget and how DPW cost has gone down but Park & Rec cost has gone up. Mr. Baltramaitis had conversations with the Park & Rec Director about that and he prepared the bid that went out for the custodial services. The bid changed to a small degree to get the services needed for Park & Rec. It also had to do with the fact that it was rebid.

Councilor Fishbein asked if public works is the right department to ask about the Cap N Non account and projects that are in there. Mr. Baltramaitis said that there may be some items in there that are for the Engineering Department of Park & Rec Department. There was a discussion about the town wide paving project. Councilor asked if there is a list of roads that are going to get paved. Mr. Baltramaitis said there never really was a list of roads in the past. There is a list of what DPW knows they are doing immediately.

He said beyond that, roads are on a radar and the reason is as soon as there is a list and they tell people when their road will be paved conditions change. There was a discussion on the downtown parking lot improvement. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that the plan has not been formalized. He said on the administrative side, they need to meet as a group. This line item is the first \$80,000 to improve some of the parking lots that they know desperately need it. Councilor asked when they anticipate this. Mayor Cervoni stated that the pavement parking lots the town owns will be easier to pave than the leased parking lots in town. That will likely happen very early in the next fiscal year. They are working on an improvement plan for both parking lots where the town owns pavement. They will be addressing the adjacent property owners to get their participation. There was a discussion on the Gregory Roadside Walk extension. Mr. Baltramaitis said he is going to have the Engineering Department speak about that because it will fall under their department. There is a line item for \$600,000 for a community pool park. The question was brought up as to what that is. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that that question is for the Park & Rec Department. There was a question as to where an additional million dollars for next year is coming from. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that it is not the first time he has seen a future dollar amount in the Cap N Non account. He is not sure where that money will come from. Mr. Sena stated that to use any money the project must be in the 6-year plan to be able to do that. He said these are possible projects, they do not have to be done. They are on there to show the council that the administration might be going in that direction.

Vice Chair Tatta asked why the DPW budget for custodial services decreased. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that their number is based on dropping the custodial service for Park & Rec based on what their annual expense was going to be. It also reflects new bids that they just opened for January and February for custodial services for the Senior Center, and the SCOW building. She asked if public works budgets for those two buildings and Mr. Baltramaitis stated that they do. The telephone line was discussed. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that they now pay for all the town hall telephones. That changed a few years ago he said. Mr. Sena stated that when the bills would come in, it was easier to pay one bill than try to determine how much each department had to pay. The software that public works will be getting was discussed. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that the item was originally under operating costs on his budget but got moved to a capital item. The system would be cloud-based software where they can start to collect data and have their assets by category. They currently have paper systems for everything and need to be more efficient. The parking lot repairs at the library were discussed. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that it is a reconfiguration of the ADA spaces. The pavement conditions through SCROG were discussed. Mr. Baltramaitis stated that a year ago he had asked for a line item for an Engineering Consultant. He asked for this because he wanted a consultant to come and inspect the 213 miles of paved road to help the town rate them and also come up with alternative pavement treatments to extend the life of the roads.

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Panzo
Town Clerk

Meeting digitally recorded

Joseph A. Marrone III, Chairman

Date

Kristen Panzo, Town Clerk

Date