

MINUTES OF THE JOINT TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014, AT 6:30 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Chairman Timothy Slocum; Vice Chairman David Schrumm; Patti Flynn-Harris, Liz Linehan, Sylvia Nichols, Robert Oris, Thomas Ruocco, James Sima, Peter Talbot. Staff: Michael A. Milone, Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; Gina DeFilio, Deputy Finance Director, Department of Education: Dr. Greg Florio, Supt. Of Schools; Scott Detrick, Asst. Supt. Of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Director of Business Management; BOE Members, Gerry Brittingham, Chairman; Sandy Bovano, Tod Dixon, Kathy Heilrich, Anthony Perugini, Marlena Sobel.

1. ROLL CALL

The Clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

3. APPROVAL OF APPOINTMENT OF PROJECT MANAGER FOR THE COMMUNITY POOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Tabled to March 18th Town Council meeting

4. PROPOSED FY 2014-2015 OPERATING BUDGET: EDUCATION

Council Chairman Slocum reviewed the procedures for the meeting, noting it is the 2nd budget meeting on the FY 2014-15 operating budget. At the March 12th meeting, Town Manager Milone presented the Council with a summary of the proposed budget. Mr. Slocum commented on the importance of the BOE operating budget, and explained that this budget meeting is not a public hearing, but the public would be allowed to make a few comments and ask questions at the end of Dr. Florio's presentation.

BOE Chairman Brittingham addressed the Council, expressing appreciation for the opportunity for the BOE and Council to meet, review the BOE budget, pose questions, and review concerns.

Dr. Greg Florio, Supt. Of Schools, presented the BOE FY 2014-15 Operating Budget to the Town Council. Highlights of the presentation are cited in these minutes.

The FY 2014-15 budget is presented to include funding of full day kindergarten. There is some enrollment decline, and despite this fact the budget is increasing. Five years ago enrollment was about 5,000 students; today it is 4,600 students; yet the budget has increased \$5.5 million in this time period. The biggest increase is in teacher salaries. Five years ago it was \$26.7 million; and with the large contract increases, following

them forward, the budget would be at \$32 million for teacher salaries this year. This year it is at \$28.7 million, a \$1.1 million dollar change in the five year period. Staff has been reduced in the school system through turnover and retirements, and the district has had more favorable contracts.

Increases in the Budget

Transportation Costs - +\$1,024,000 increase in the contract; the contract will go out to bid next year; this is the 2nd largest budget increase due to the higher contract and fuel costs.

Special Education - +\$871,000 due to increase in tuition and services, plus these are the highest cost students for transportation and delivery of services; these costs cannot be avoided, and to deal with them, something else has to give.

Maintenance - +\$601,200 for building maintenance; there has been \$66,000 reduction in staffing costs; cleaning services are contracted out or these costs would have increased by \$500,000.

Support Services +\$464,000 for secretarial and instructional assistants.

Pension +\$404,000.

One other piece of the budget is funding medical benefit liabilities; it has increased by less than \$400,000 in the five year period; and there are two reasons for the small increases. The small increase result from employees picking up a larger cost of the benefits, negotiation of good contracts, cost controls, and +\$643,000 in employee sharing. BOE retirees pay the full cost of medical benefits. The trust fund has been used to help fund the cost of medical benefits.

Dr. Florio's and the BOE's recommended budget to the Town Council is an increase of \$3.18 million, or 5%. The budget is broken down into the major cost drivers, with teacher salaries and employee benefits costing over 2/3rds of the budget, and funding of full day kindergarten at \$856,000. Dr. Florio stated that \$1.2 million is for medical benefits costs and pension, \$1.1 million to maintain existing programs based on the contracted costs going forward into next year.

Mr. Masciana reviewed the medical benefits trust fund balance with a summary about the trust fund. There are monthly medical claims for PPO and HSA plans, with a high of \$848,000 in one month to a low of \$384,000. The cost of medical benefits in the school system has increased 2.54% annually, and the national average is 6%. Claims average \$614,000 per month since July 2010. Many employees (244) have moved into the HSA plan. Over the same time period contributions to the trust fund have decreased. Since July 2010, there has been \$573,000 put into the fund; claims average \$614,000 monthly. \$573,000 is dictated by the operating budget for fund contributions, and monthly claims have been exceeding the monthly contributions. Next year the BOE will increase medical benefit contributions by \$1,048,000. The trust fund has been

under funded; the balance is at \$1.1 million; part of the new funding for FY 14-15 will be to pay claims; and with the proposed funding the balance would increase by \$500,000 next year without dramatic changes.

Use of the Fund Balance – The last large request to the trust fund was in 2009-2010 and it was a 2.65% increase. \$1,048,000 is the FY 14-15 request for funding medical benefits. The trust fund is not being under-funded; every dollar possible goes into the fund; the operating budget has been knowingly reduced because of the trust fund balance; but there is no balance available in the fund for the FY 14-15 budget.

Full Day Kindergarten – Dr. Florio reviewed the staffing needs for the school system to have a full day kindergarten program. It is the time and opportunity for the community to provide a full day program for its younger learners. 88% of communities in Connecticut provide a full day kindergarten program, and it is time for Cheshire to catch up with them.

Full Day Kindergarten Facts

Staffing needs will be 8 FTE teachers; 8 FTE Instructional Assistants

Minor classroom renovations (Darcey School)

Classroom equipment/materials

Satellite food service to Darcey School

Chapman School would house a full day kindergarten program

Norton School would house a full day kindergarten program

Doolittle School students would attend full day kindergarten at Darcey School

Highland School students – some would attend Darcey and some attend Highland.

\$856,000 total cost; \$15,000 classroom renovations; \$125,000 transportation costs; \$305,000 start up costs.

Dr. Florio pointed out that the budget allows the school system to continue to have good class sizes on the elementary level; middle school class sizes are improving; support services ratios are improving; supplies and materials go further. Cheshire's per pupil spending is \$13,135; State average is \$14,498.

Cost Savings Initiatives – These include special education programs, energy savings contract, improvements and savings taken over time, consortium purchasing, etc.

Excellence by Measure – The Town is getting incredible value when looking at student results, and the public schools are doing a good job educating our children. Student scoring is at 88 on the capital testing level in every grade level.

The requested BOE budget for FY 14-15 is \$62,502,000; an increase of \$3.1 million or 5.0%.

BOE Chairman Brittingham stated that this is now the BOE budget being presented to the Town Council, following a series of public meetings for budget review and

modification. The BOE unanimously approved this budget as presented by Supt. Florio. On a personal level, Mr. Brittingham does not think the budget is enough to fund all the needs of the school system, i.e. maintenance issues put off too long. He has spoken with state legislators, BOE members have attended conferences, and have begged for mandate relief, but this all falls on deaf ears. Mr. Brittingham would like to see the budget increased, is frustrated with the non-stopping state mandates, and their effect on the school districts.

Mr. Perugini was not pleased with the turnout to the BOE budget workshops which were conducted under a new business format with more detailed information. They are all on the BOE web site. He believes full day kindergarten is good for the community. He stated the Town Council and BOE cannot solve the problems in Hartford, and hears more about education funding, mandates without funding, and extra ECS funding to the lower performing districts. Mr. Perugini stated the BOE FY 2014-15 budget is prudent.

TOWN COUNCIL QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

Mr. Talbot asked about the \$41,000 monthly gap in the medical benefits, the fund balance of \$1.1 million, and what the number will be at the end of the year.

In response, Mr. Masciana said through February the fund was at \$1.1 million; there will be four months at \$40,000 gap, or about \$200,000; the fund balance would be about \$900,000.

Enrollment was raised by Mr. Talbot, with 4,600 enrolled students, 22 less teachers, and asked about the teacher/student ratio since 2010 to the present.

The staff ration in 2009 was 12.7 students per certified teacher, and Dr. Florio said this year the ratio is 12.4 ratio.

The initial full day kindergarten costs are at \$305,000 plus \$255,000 for furniture etc. and Mr. Talbot asked if this cost could be a capital expenditure expense rather than an operating budget expense, and moving these expenditures into the capital budget.

According to Dr. Florio, the Council could do this as some of the items would qualify for the capital budget such as the cafeteria equipment.

With regard to the Cheshire real estate market, Mr. Talbot asked BOE member Bovano (a real estate agent) about the negative impact of Cheshire not having full day kindergarten relative to business and the real estate market (home pricing, value, people not wanting to move to Town).

Ms. Bovano said there is a correlation in showing houses in Cheshire which has a great school system. She said people are looking at different factors such as the age of our schools, and Cheshire being one of 14 towns in the state without full day kindergarten. The Town is losing people to other communities.

Mr. Schrumm asked about data on HSA enrollment, and if it is increasing in the school system.

Mr. Masciana reported that 48.7% of total staff is enrolled in the HSA plan. Certified staff deductibles have increased to \$4,000; BOE contribution is still at \$2,000; non-certified staff deductible is \$3,000; BOE contribution is \$2,000. This is expensed from the medical benefits line item in the budget.

In response to a question about half day kindergarten still being offered, Dr. Florio said it is being considered, but there is a very small number of people thinking about this option. It will not change the expenses or cost of the full day program, and the BOE is in the process of reviewing transportation bids.

Mr. Schrumm commented on the frustration on the part of the Council and BOE as it relates to state mandates, when the Town gives more and gets back less. In Connecticut the legislative body of a municipality sets the budget, not the BOE. Regarding pensions, he noted that the BOE cost is for non-certified staff, with certified staff pension coming from the state, with this plan funding in a huge hole.

Mr. Ruocco asked about contributions to the HSA plans, and new employees joining this plan mid-year.

For the HSA plan, Mr. Masciana said the single contribution is \$1,000, family is \$2,000. New employees go into the PPO and join the HSA plan in January of the new year.

The full day kindergarten issue was raised by Mr. Ruocco who said the Council does not have the authority to determine BOE line items in the budget. If the BOE were to receive only \$500 more in its budget, it could fund the full day kindergarten with reduction in other education services. Mr. Ruocco has heard about the relationship of the full day kindergarten to the new common core curriculum, and believes it is a plan to nationalize the public school system, which is dangerous. He hears about both parents working, having difficulty managing their time, while sending children to half day kindergarten. According to Mr. Ruocco the purpose of the BOE and our school system is to educate our children. With both parents working they have to deal with half day kindergarten and private pay day care. If this is the situation, the full day program should be given one more year, as he cannot support a 5% increase in the education budget. There are significant problems in Cheshire with revaluation and shrinking grand list. Mr. Ruocco encouraged people to read the transmittal letter in the budget book. He cited property value decreases, less taxes, lower values, people having flat incomes, bad economy, and he questions spending \$1 million in a year for a full day kindergarten program. Although Cheshire is a town where anything can be done, some things on the Town and BOE side must be reduced.

Ms. Linehan stated her support of the full day kindergarten program, noting she is the only Council member with children in this age group. She commented on a national brokerage firm study which determined that test scores on the elementary level have a

direct effect on median home values, and the difference can range up to \$150,000. Cheshire's high is in the 80/90 percentile. Ms. Linehan said that full day kindergarten is an investment in the community rather than just a budgetary expense. Houses in districts with full day kindergarten average \$50 more per square foot, and home values in Cheshire have gone down. We have a shrinking grand list, and one of the reasons could be Cheshire is not as progressive in their schooling as other towns. Ms. Linehan asked if people are looking in Cheshire and questioning the school system.

BOE member Bovano commented on people looking on the web sites before coming to view houses, and the school system is a major factor, and it impacts home buying decisions. Surrounding towns (i.e. Southington) have a full day kindergarten program; Cheshire's oldest school is +50 years old, and driving through Wallingford and Southington you can see the updating of the school buildings, while Cheshire has done nothing except windows and carpeting.

Mr. Linehan stated her support of the BOE budget, and she will go through the budget line item by line item, doing everything she can to implement the full day kindergarten. She hopes the Council members will look at the impact on home values, and she will provide the data on the research of home values.

BOE Chairman Brittingham talked about the one mandate that does not exist in Connecticut – the requirement to send a child to kindergarten. If a parent does not feel a child is ready for full day kindergarten, they can wait another year. He took exception to Mr. Ruocco's comment about a \$500 BOE increase which could still make full day kindergarten work. Dr. Florio has put out the BOE contractual obligations, and the need to replenish the trust fund. With the demands for the knowledge of the world increasing, Mr. Brittingham said the full day kindergarten program is the right thing to do for the children in Cheshire today and into the future. Regarding common core curriculum, Mr. Brittingham said he has issues with it, the district must comply with it, but children need to be better prepared for first grade with full day kindergarten. He does not agree about home values and common core as they relate to full day kindergarten.

Council Chairman Slocum stated the Council must deal with revaluation and the impact on home values which will be dramatic. Taxes will increase with the Council doing nothing, and Council members have an interest in maintaining and sustaining what we have in Town.

Mr. Oris noted that the Council has much to deal with, and the quality of the education system is critically important along with the effect on property values. People move to Cheshire for a quality school system. He has met people who knew about the quality of the school system, but never visited the school buildings, and were shocked at how old and non-modern they were. If this fact was known before purchasing a home in Town, they told Mr. Oris they would not have bought in Cheshire. Mr. Oris stated that we owe it to our kids to provide them a top notch quality education; knowledge is power; and these kids need to be smarter today to find a good job. As a huge education supporter,

Mr. Oris said we must do things in a fiscally responsible way, improve the quality of our infrastructure which is not being dealt with properly in this budget. We need a five year plan to modernize our schools; roof work is common maintenance, not modernization. Full day kindergarten is important to Mr. Oris as children need a good start. People want this program, and he has heard nothing to suggest this can be done more fiscally down the road. The program is being done in a fiscally responsible and appropriate way; no new buildings are being constructed; as it is going into existing buildings. Because he supports a budget that allows full day kindergarten or investment in our schools, Mr. Oris said it should not be mistaken that he is fiscally irresponsible, as it is fiscally irresponsible to kick the can down the road. We need to focus on some of these things today so they do not become a bigger taxpayer problem later on. Mr. Oris has some detailed questions for the BOE budget line items, and will meet later on to present them to the BOE members and Dr. Florio.

BOE member Ms. Heilrich, Chair of the Curriculum Committee, clarified that common core is not a curriculum; it is a set of standards formerly called benchmarks; and they are not new in Cheshire. How standards are taught is up to the administration and teachers; full day kindergarten is not day care; and parents will still need before and after school care. The full day program allows children to have recess, play time, get to know friends, teachers and time to learn throughout the day. She has realized this time is needed in the school day. There is no mandate to send a child to kindergarten. The Town and BOE must follow State mandates and rules. The full day program has a cost of \$856,000.

If this money is not funded, Ms. Flynn-Harris asked Dr. Florio if there will be a state mandate for full day kindergarten.

Dr. Florio would not be surprised if this were to happen as few towns do not have the full day program. It has been discussed in the past and could be pushed forward.

Ms. Flynn-Harris asked if the BOE would go forward with the full day kindergarten program if they do not get their budget fully funded.

In reply, Mr. Brittingham said that full day kindergarten will not affect existing programs. If the money is not there the district still has good existing programs, and full day kindergarten has been a year's worth of effort for the BOE to make it work within the existing infrastructure.

Dr. Florio commented on a good point being the lack of dialogue of what can be done and not done with the funding the BOE gets. There needs to be a continuous dialogue between the Council and BOE to discuss things and how to move forward.

Ms. Nichols stated she was, at first, opposed to the full day kindergarten program, but has become acquainted with the education of her young grandchildren (from Brazil) who speak two languages, have had robotics classes, dancing, drama, reading etc.. Her grandchildren from Georgia are academically behind these children. Ms. Nichols said

she is in awe of the children's ability to pick up myriads of types of information and what they give back. She has changed her opinion about young people and the need for early intervention and supports the full day kindergarten program. She has some questions about the test scores, and her personal opinion that we rely too much on these scores, not giving children the individual attention to develop on their own. Her challenge is funding money in the budget. She has had dialogue with some BOE members and administration, and will continue to do so. Ms. Nichols commented on everything being done in a fiscally prudent way, making sure every line item in the BOE budget is a necessary one. She has concerns about the BOE putting another equally important program "on hold" because of the full day kindergarten proposal and the funds requested.

It was reaffirmed by Mr. Brittingham that there things he would like to see taught in the school system such as world languages. As for sacrificing anything because of full day kindergarten, he said nothing is being sacrificed, nor is the BOE taking its eyes off the rest of the budget.

Mr. Perugini also stated nothing is being sacrificed for full day kindergarten. There is no three year modernization plan; if the BOE budget was short \$800,000, they would look to other areas of the budget such as painting, carpeting replacement.

Chairman Slocum asked if class size was not the only concern, and there was funding in the budget for the 8 teachers and instructional assistants, how would the money be managed if it rose to this level.

Dr. Florio explained that when the feasibility study was done those were the projected numbers. Now the district is getting actual enrollment numbers from the kindergarten registration. There may be some differences from the projection and registration. If it was a matter of increasing class sizes a modest amount, but getting the program, he could live with 7 teachers. The average primary class size is 17 to 18 students, sometimes up to 20.

The concept of implementing full day kindergarten on a phase-in basis was raised by Mr. Slocum.

This would not be an effective thing to do, and Dr. Florio said there would still be transportation of some kids on a half day basis. If the feedback is 50% of people wanted half day this would be looked at. The BOE cannot do a lottery because it would mean transportation of kids all over town and the program would be difficult to implement and the community is looking for a full day program. He believes the 125 number is conservative.

Mr. Slocum asked for the amount in the BOE CNR account.

Mr. Masciana said the balance is \$250,000 without a refunding request in this budget.

Mr. Slocum asked about there being a way to pay for full day kindergarten with CNR money. He commented on property taxes paying 80% of the town operating budget, with the budget taking bigger bites each year. He must focus his attention in these areas. The Council is looking at enormous pressures on the budget and crunching the numbers. They take the matter seriously, understands the merits of the full day program, but Mr. Slocum cannot give it full support at this meeting.

A question was given to Dr. Florio from Mr. Oris about maintenance and repair numbers, \$1,075,874, and a 7.36% increase from the prior year. This is an area of concern as we need to address what is done in our buildings. There are capital improvements and normal maintenance, and Mr. Oris thinks more could be done to address the maintenance areas. In FY 12-13, \$1.769 million was expended which is more than the FY14-15 request. Looking at prior years the numbers have been reached, and Mr. Oris questioned whether the proposed budget has enough funding for maintenance.

Dr. Florio said "no". Our school buildings are aging. He is hopeful and appreciative of the energy services upgrades. Usually an emergency maintenance situation is not replacement of lights, but underground water or electrical lines, which are things getting old. One-third of the maintenance line item is for the cleaning contract, not repairing buildings. The cleaning contract has increased over the last few years because of reduction of staff used for cleaning buildings 8 or 9 years ago. The contractor continually increases the contract costs.

Chairman Slocum discussed the minimum \$1 million trust fund increase and whether it is to basically meet the monthly claims payout.

Dr. Florio hopes the increase will allow the operating budget to cover liabilities, no longer relying on the trust fund as has been done in the last few years. With luck, claims will be lower, and the trust fund is built up. With bad claims, the fund would be depleted. The budget request was based on what is 100% of projected costs from next year, and cover them out of the operating budget.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Marlena Sobel, BOE member, stated her support of the BOE budget as presented. As a school parent, she asked the Council where it sees Cheshire in 3 to 5 years. She said now is the time to think ahead to the future and the role education will play. We can be fiscally responsible and conservative, penny wise and pound foolish, or look to the future and think about the growth of the community. She commented on full day kindergarten being a small part of this, the education system is doing a great job, but when this stops, we will not be able to get it back.

Chairman Slocum stated that the Council is future oriented, proud of our Town, and works on all pieces of the Town, giving consideration to the services provided and associated costs. All matters are taken seriously. He stated the question posed is not

entirely fair and infers some Council members do not have a forward thinking view of the town.

Jeff Natali, 512 Cardinal Lane, stated that 90% of the districts in Cheshire's 21 school DRG has full day kindergarten. He suggested each Council member visit Darcey School and observe the half day kindergarten program which is 2.5 hours daily. More time is needed for children to learn; Cheshire's test scores are behind other districts; and we need to look at the future of the town and the quality of education. Out of 189 families registering for kindergarten, only four want a half day program.

Ann Donnery, Principal, Darcey School, read a statement into the record, citing four elements for kindergarten – plan, depth, rigor and pace, with each of the elements as they related to a full day kindergarten program.

Kristen Pannone, 403 Dryden Drive, early education teacher and parent of two young children, commented on the “easy button” and understands the perspective for the Council to be financially and fiscally responsible, appreciating this as a resident. She has concerns about the kindergarten classrooms, the absence of the sand table and early literacy and sensory skills...due to the demanding curriculum. Ms. Pannone stated that Cheshire did not choose to adopt common core; the children deserve full day kindergarten; they deserve conversation; and it is disturbing to see the lack of conversation at the Council meeting. She asked that the BOE be given the funds to make a decision on full day kindergarten, noting it is joint decision with the Council, because the children are the future of Cheshire.

Jeff Summers, 1765 Musso View, stated that 80% of the budget comes from Town taxes, and asked if the cost has been calculated per citizen for \$856,000 for full day kindergarten.

Chairman Slocum replied that the continued problem is the revaluation of all the town properties, and the impact on the taxpayers specific to the individual properties. He informed everyone that the Town Manager is delving into these numbers. 9,200 households in Cheshire were revalued, and there is no cost per household. The Council looks at the whole budget and a specific answer is not available at this time.

Nicole Raccio, 526 Oak Ridge, is an educator and parent and stresses educational reform, stating more initiatives will be called for next year for higher standards for children. The question is what Cheshire will do to maintain a top notch education system; students exceeding the standards; and she asked the Council's willingness to engage in conversation with Dr. Florio about education issues to move things forward. Ms. Raccio wants to see conversations happening and asked if the Council is willing to have them.

In response, Chairman Slocum informed those present about the 10+ budget workshops/meetings, the BOE holding meetings to arrive at a budget, and the fact that the public seldom engages in the process. All these meetings are open to the public;

there are numerous conversations; and there are ex parte conversations with Dr. Florio, Town Manager Milone and other elected officials talking to town staff. The Council needs to be informed; is being informed at this meeting; and Mr. Slocum said it is disappointing for people to think there is no discussion. The Council must also hear and listen, and no action will be taken at this meeting. Action on the budget takes place after getting through the entire budget process.

Megan Beardsley, 109 Old Lane Road, parent, educator, taxpayer, parent and person raised in Cheshire, going through the school system, kindergarten in the neighborhood schools, asking the Council if it is aware of the difference in kindergarten today. She commented on children spending 40 minutes each way every day on the bus, almost as much time as spent in the classroom, school days lost when there is delayed opening. Asking for full day kindergarten is not asking for day care, and she said this is an ignorant standpoint, assuming parents want something free for their children, and is also down grading teachers in the classrooms. Ms. Beardsley stated her support for full day kindergarten in Cheshire.

Dr. Joseph Kulas, 1761 Tuttle Avenue, parent of school children and pediatric neuro-psychologist stated he has spent 14 years working with school districts, special education students, conducts research on the benefits of additional education. He said children develop their identity in school within the first three years, and children are expected, earlier and earlier, to do things which are difficult for them such as reading skills, or they will fall behind. Providing kids with kindergarten and first grade enables them to learn to read and develop, and without reading they do not become students. He sees kids who feel badly about themselves; a high percentage are suicidal because they do not believe they are good students; and Cheshire should spend \$800,000 and give its children the magic wand to learn how to read and feel good about themselves. Dr. Kulas said there is a fairness issue involved, as some parents pay for full day kindergarten while other children do not have this advantage. He came to Cheshire for the school system, and believes the Council and citizens will be able to find the money to fund the full day kindergarten program.

Dr. George Sprengelmeyer stated his agreement with the statements made by Dr. Kulas. As an educator and musician, high school to college level, he consistently deals with the mind set of students, and believes they can do anything they try to do. He asked about dealing with education budgets, deciding what is most important, what is cut, etc. and said \$850,000 is a small amount of money in the Cheshire budget. The idea of full day kindergarten should go into the "need" category; it benefits the lives of children; and is just as important as filling pot holes or getting snow off the roads. He stated the Council and BOE should find somewhere else to cut the budget.

In response to the comments made, Mr. Oris said if the Council approves the budget for the BOE and Town Government, the average tax increase would be \$235m with some higher and some lower.

Alesa Tessier, 50 Beaverbook Court, is proud to be a Cheshire resident, and hear the budget process, with support of residents for the BOE budget. She said \$856,000 is the cost of implementation of full day kindergarten for the first year, and subsequent years the cost will be lower. In the first year there is a \$305,000 cost. Given what has been stated and heard, Ms. Tessier asked what Councilors need to know from the tax payers.

Stating that he and the Council know people are passionate in the community, Mr. Slocum said he would encourage people to attend public meetings and hearings, learn about what other departments need and their budgets. The Town has pension obligations, police and fire departments, town departments, maintenance, and many other issues related to town government. The average tax increase would be \$235, but it could be lower or higher. Chairman Slocum requested people pay attention to all of the town budget deliberations.

Councilor Oris asked people to be more consistent about coming to Council and budget meetings. He noted people become passionate about one issue and come out about this issue only. The general public should be more active in our government, become familiar with the overall process, and the Council could interact more with the public, and create dialogue. It is a two way street, with the Council getting an appreciation of what people are looking for and what they want, with appreciation on both sides.

Rob Brocato, 1146 Wolf Hill Road, thanked the BOE, Dr. Florio, and teachers for being in the top 10 in education for student spending. He grew up and was educated in Cheshire, and said there were budget cuts when he was in school. Mr. Brocato said he is a mentor in the area of technical education for high school students. He asked about the importance of full day kindergarten, the money to be spent, and said it is for the children and the rest of their lives. A \$235 tax increase is okay with him. Mr. Brocato asked if there is a mission statement for the Town, and commented on higher buildings, special laws for the pool building, Cheshire changing too much in the wrong direction, and the sad infrastructure of the high school.

Lin Glynn, 95 Bellamy Road, parent of former Cheshire students and teacher at Darcey School, spoke for the Darcey School Team and their support of the full day kindergarten program. Ms. Glynn described a "day at Darcey" for a child...reading, writing, science, social studies, arts, and some interaction and play. She commented on teachers doing the best they can to meet the curriculum demands and needs of the children, and said the children deserve a better educational program.

Ruth Ratner, real estate broker, informed the Council and BOE she showed a family from Westchester NY 16 houses, and in a follow-up e mail to her they spoke about the full day kindergarten, the need to have the program, and the importance of the quality of the public schools in their decision. Ms. Ratner noted that young families are looking at many towns. Although Cheshire is known for its education it does not offer full day kindergarten, and it is important to young families/home buyers. Ms. Ratner commented on Cheshire being known for its education, but one of the town's

weaknesses is that it does not have that life style destination which other towns have, and which people are choosing. There is no Town Green in Cheshire, an area to park and spend time shopping, restaurants, eat with a friend...and this is a weakness. She asked the Council to approve the BOE budget to include full day kindergarten.

Councilor Talbot discussed the "incremental value to implement full day kindergarten". The proposal is a cost of \$856,000; there was talk about moving some of the costs to the capital budget; this would reduce the cost to about \$600,000. Mr. Talbot noted that 1/10th of a mill is \$264,553; 2/10ths of a mill increase is about \$50; and to implement full day kindergarten is \$50 per household, \$4.17 per month, 13.7 cents per day over one year. Mr. Talbot stated that Chairman Slocum's point is well taken that we are talking about \$235 tax increase for the average taxpayer. Some people will have lower and some higher taxes -- \$500 to \$800 up to \$1800 a year.

Councilor Schrumm commented on the average \$235 tax increase, noting that on South Pond the increase will be \$732 in one year; on Squire Hill the increase is \$466. These taxes are \$732 and \$466 every year the people live in Cheshire. Mr. Schrumm stated that one of the reasons we are seeing full day kindergarten in Connecticut is the declining enrollment, leaving space in the school system for the program. With a \$5 million addition for full day kindergarten we would not be having this discussion. Enrollment is going down, continues to go down, and this is why the program can be done for \$856,000. If enrollment goes the other way and increases, as real estate agents encourage families to move to Cheshire, the Town would be looking at a \$5 million addition. Mr. Schrumm reported that the per student spending over 5 years has increased just short of 20%, and the BOE budget has a spending increase of 27% in 6 years. According to Mr. Schrumm there is room in the BOE budget for full day kindergarten.

BOE Chairman Brittingham pointed out numbers/statistics, and clarified that the BOE and Council do have many meetings. The meeting tonight is the only official meeting between the Council and BOE, with the focus spent on full day kindergarten. His focus is the increase, and reiterated the contractual obligations, replenishment of the trust fund, and full day kindergarten as the main BOE budget issues.

Mr. Brittingham thanked the Council for its time to meet with the BOE.

Council Chairman Slocum announced the upcoming budget meetings/workshop and invited the public to attend and participate. April 1st public hearing on the Town Budget; March 18, 20, 24, 25 budget meetings; budget meeting following the April 1st public hearing; April 7 and 8 budget meetings. The meeting schedule is on the web site. Two important meetings are the April 1st public hearing for discussion on the entire budget, and April 8th the Council vote on the budget.

5. PROPOSED FY 2014-2015 OPERATING BUDGET: Employee Benefits: Pension, Medical Benefits, Heart & Hypertension.
Postponed to later meeting.

6. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Nichols; seconded by Mr. Oris.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk