

**BOARD OF FINANCE
TOWN OF EAST WINDSOR
11 RYE STREET
BROAD BROOK, CONNECTICUT 06016**

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
Wednesday, May 10, 2017, AT 7:00 p.m.**

DRAFT DOCUMENT – These minutes are not official until approved at a subsequent meeting

Regular Members Present: Jerilyn Corso (Chairman) Cindy Herms, Kathy Pippin; Jim Richards, Steve Smith, and Bill Syme,

Regular Members Absent: All Regular Members present.

Alternates Present: Paulette Broder.

Alternate Absent: Danelle Godek

Others: **Interim Town Treasurer:** Gayle Carolus; **Deputy First Selectman:** Richard P. Pippin, Jr. **Selectmen:** Jason Bowsza, Dale Nelson; various members of Town Staff or Department Heads were present in the audience

Press: Anthony Branciforte, Journal Inquirer

1. Call to Order:

Chairman Corso called the Meeting to Order at 7:00 p.m. The Board stood for the Pledge of Allegiance during the Board of Finance Budget Public Hearing.

2. Time and Place of Meeting:

Wednesday, May 10, 2017 at 7:00 p.m. at the East Windsor Town Hall (11 Rye Street, Broad Brook, CT.)

3. Public Participation:

Paul Anderson, 78 Main Street: Mr. Anderson is present to represent the Broad Brook Library Association (Pres). He reported this is the first time he voted no on the budget since he became a resident of town in 1971; he voted no because the budget is short by \$1, which is the amount that should be in the budget to keep the Broad Brook Library in the budget. He noted the Broad Brook Library isn't a new item; it's been in the budget for more than 60 years. Last year was the first time the Broad Brook Library was removed from the budget; Mr. Anderson finds that unacceptable. Retaining the budget line item carries over the budget history, and ensures the library receives a budget request next year. Mr. Anderson reported he will vote yes when the Broad Brook Library is restored as a line item for at least \$1

Jack Mannette, 15 Old Ellington Road: Mr. Mannette suggested it's nice to see that most of the departments increases were fairly reasonable, but the Police Department caught his eye. Last

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Jack Mannelle, 15 Old Ellington Road (continued): year we gave the Police Department 7%; this year the proposed increase is 5.5%. Mr. Mannelle reported the reason it caught his eye – he asked the Board if he asked them what they thought the average salary for a police officer is would they know? Mr. Mannelle offered the following statistics: the top 11 officers, which represent 46% of the officers, receive an average salary of \$94,000 without overtime. The balance of the officers, which number 13, make \$84,000/year. When you look at the reality of the town and look at what we are – Mr. Mannelle reported he is asking the Board of Finance to take a look at what we’re paying the police officers. Mr. Mannelle indicated he isn’t talking down about the officers – they negotiated these salaries - but can a town the size of East Windsor afford what we’re paying? Mr. Mannelle reported he didn’t think so. The top officer makes \$103,000, and that doesn’t include fringe benefits, which equal about 40%. Regarding the 5% increase, Mr. Mannelle reported he is recommending that the Board take a look at the 5.5%. Mr. Mannelle felt it was reasonable to say if this goes to three referendums it will go to 2%. Mr. Mannelle suggested bringing the Police Department from 5.5% to 2%; it’s his personal opinion that will pass. It would be taking \$111,000 out of the budget. Mr. Mannelle advised the Board he has a copy of the officers’ salaries, and where the numbers come from.

Dick Pippin, 37 Woolam Road: Mr. Pippin felt the Board of Finance should take the budget which the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education has worked diligently on cutting every corner looking for pennies and nickels, anything they can get, and send that back to the voters. This is what we need to run the town; it’s really not giving us any progress. It’s getting to the point where we will be hurting the town.

Mr. Pippin agreed with Mr. Mannelle; he doesn’t know what to do. We need public safety. He doesn’t want to be a target like they do. Mr. Pippin suggested sending the budget back to the voters; 2% is not enough to run the town and run it right; the 2% has killed the town since it was brought in under the charter.

Bill Loos, Melrose Road: Mr. Loos agreed with Mr. Mannelle; the 7% increase for the Police Department last year shouldn’t have happened. Mr. Loos doesn’t know why three police officers need to go to a minor accident; he feels the Police Department is overdoing the Police Department response to some of the accidents. Mr. Loos reported he has been a volunteer member of the Broad Brook Fire Department for 60 years; Mr. Loos doesn’t agree with the 5.5% increase this year for this Police Department. Mr. Loos didn’t feel we need the additional officer they are trying to put in; there are 26 officers there now. Mr. Loos referenced Ellington, which is larger than East Windsor. They have 4 State Police officers; their budget is less than \$1,000,000. Mr. Loos reported Ellington has a larger population and a larger area to cover. Mr. Loos questioned what this town is thinking about when we put this Police Department budget together; we don’t need it.

Kathy Bilodeau, 343 Scantic Road: Mrs. Bilodeau agreed with Mr. Pippin; it’s time to put forth a budget to the town to vote on that’s been originally put to the Board of Finance. After working with the Board of Education she noted that many cuts that were made to get to the 4.7 % they originally presented to the Board of Finance. One the other side, Mrs. Bilodeau felt the

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Kathy Bilodeau, 343 Scantic Road (continued): Board of Education is being treated a bit inequitably as they are currently in the budget for 1.55% Knowing that if this goes to 3 referendums and if those fail it goes to 2% that's the rationale she used when making her no vote for the first time since she can remember.

Regarding Mr. Loos, she works in Human Resources and has worked in many businesses and \$100,000 is almost an average salary now for anyone who is considered a professional in any way, and these are professionals who are putting their lives on the line. Mrs. Bilodeau felt we need to keep the services necessary to run the town – education, the police department, the fire department and public works – and look to other areas that could be cut. Mrs. Bilodeau suggested we can't keep looking at tax revenue to take care of things; we need to look at the things that are extra which are wonderful but are extra.

Sarah Andrews, 144 Main Street, Broad Brook: Ms. Andrews reported she is a Mom of a high school freshman, and has lived here for 10 years; her son has been in school since pre-school. Ms. Andrews reported she has ridden the wave of many of the high school parents who have gone to the Board of Education in May and questioned why they were cutting what they were cutting. The parents have given the Board of Education the analogy that families will be moving out of town and she feels the Board of Education is asking more parents to speak up to the Board of Finance. Ms. Andrews reported she appreciates what the Board of Finance does. She is here as a parent to tell you education is important. The high school got a Silver Award this year. They are getting consistency. Ms. Andrews felt that to take money and staff; public safety, the schools, and public works are important. Ms. Andrews questioned what a librarian does; she referenced a couple of years ago the library was shut down, the kinds lost resources for research, books – yes, they still do use books, believe it or not, and taking \$100,000 out of the Board of Education budget, they lose teachers and paraprofessionals. The kids are working hard and succeeding and are putting East Windsor on the map in a good way. Regarding the 2.4% budget, she is hearing from some of the parents that no one wants higher taxes, but maybe if we set the bar higher and say to the community this is our budget. If we can keep the money at this level then maybe we can give you these services; maybe we won't have to cut education, maybe we won't have to cut senior services.

Jason Bowsza, 121 East Road: Mr. Bowsza reported he is also a Selectman. Mr. Bowsza reported that as a member of a Board who has put in many hours since the start of the year he thanked the Board of Finance for their time working through the budget process also. As a former Board of Finance member he understands their place isn't that easy.

Mr. Bowsza reported as far as he is aware there is no additional sworn Police officer; there is a clerical position that was negotiated; there is not an additional sworn Police officer which is a distinction Mr. Bowsza felt was important to make.

Mr. Bowsza noted you hear all the time that salaries are too high, we pay our staff too much but the reality is that until State law changes we are bound by collective bargaining, and no matter what the budget process does we are not going to lower those salaries. To the extent that people

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Jason Bowsza, 121 East Road (continued): are frustrated where that stands they should be voicing that to the people who negotiate those salaries, which is the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Bowsza reported they make no secret of when a labor contract is under consideration, they have meetings every two weeks, they have public participation twice a meeting on their agenda. To the extent that people have feedback as to what those negotiations should include that's an appropriate time to be voicing that. To be venting frustration about what those negotiations include after the fact during the budget cycle is not productive from anyone's perspective.

Mr. Bowsza cited that yesterday under 750 people participated in the referendum; that's the lowest watermark that he knows of. He suggested that puts the Board of Finance in a very difficult position because they don't know why people voted against it, they don't know why people didn't vote at all. He felt people could have done a better job in letting people know there was a referendum; there was also some misrepresentation in some of the numbers that were put out there which is alarming and disheartening. Mr. Bowsza cited he charter speaks to what happens if the budget fails three times and that is the budget reverts to the previous year's budget plus a 2% spending increase, but the charter is completely silent on anything other than a spending increase. He felt that was something important for everyone to keep in mind when trying to figure out where the expenditures are going to be for the next fiscal year. Mr. Bowsza suggested he would offer this, because you don't know why people voted as they did what your responsibility kind of defaults to is to make sure that a budget is offered that's a manageable budget, something that makes sense, something that can be implemented in the event that it should pass, or something that it should be defaulted to at the 3rd referendum. Mr. Bowsza suggested he felt the Board's target is to hit that 2% figure on the money in such a way that it's manageable for the next fiscal year. Mr. Bowsza cite the Board will hear many suggestions regarding potential cuts but the Board needs to put aside everyone's favorite targets and offer a budget that's manageable for the next fiscal year. .

Pat Tracy, 241 South Water Street: Mrs. Tracy reported she has been a taxpayer for over 35 years. No one wants an increase in taxes, so we go out three times and every time we go out it costs \$5,000 for the people to take her name and address and give her a piece of paper to put her dot on it and put it in the ballot, and if you do that three times that's 5, 10, \$15,000. Mrs. Tracy doesn't want her taxes to go up, she is a senior, seniors want everything for free, but she rubs elbows with people every day who have been paying taxes for as long as this town has been around because their grandparents and their parents have lived her in this town and paid taxes.

Mrs. Tracy indicated she wants the Senior Center to go on, not just the center but also all of the services that we have for the seniors. Mrs. Tracy questioned who Mr. Smith was, she then advised Mr. Smith that some day he will get old, if he lives that long, you just don't know. Mr. Smith agreed, noting he's concerned about the drivers. Mrs. Tracy suggested that was another thing, the rides are a big deal, people need rides to go to the doctor and get their hair done, or whatever. Mrs. Tracy noted there are three ages of seniors; there are younger seniors, like her, and then there are the middle ones who are not quite as able to get around, and then there are the older ones who definitely can't drive - they need people to drive them and to get their meals, they don't even cook any more. Mrs. Tracy noted that the baby boomers are coming - Mrs. **Pat**

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Tracy, 241 South Water Street (continued): Tracy questioned Mr. Smith if he was a baby boomer; Mr. Smith replied he wasn't even close – Mrs. Tracy continued that the baby boomers are coming up and they will need services as time goes on. It isn't going to get better; people need these services. Mrs. Tracy felt the town couldn't cut those services.

Mrs. Tracy suggested if we took the \$15,000 we're paying for that stuff for two years we could remediate the stuff in the old schoolhouse, you could have gotten rid of the asbestos - which is a terrible thing – but for \$15 - \$30,000 we could demo some of the building and do a beautiful new center, not just for seniors but for as a community center which the seniors could take advantage of - and use the stage for dances. Mrs. Tracy reported she thought there was a sunshine law to have a vote but she didn't see anything in the paper; it wasn't in the Courant. Mrs. Tracy was advised the referendum was advertised in the Journal Inquirer because the legal ads are more reasonable. Mrs. Tracy reported she knows of the charter which calls for a referendum every time there is a budget. She doesn't envy the Board of Finance's job because they will have to cut someone along the line but we need to think about the future; Mrs. Tracy suggested if we could change the charter we'd have all kinds of money. Mr. Smith said it doesn't work that way. Mrs. Tracy thanked everyone for listening.

Cathy Simonelli, Depot Street: Mrs. Simonelli reported she also voted no for the first time, and it was weird to circle the “no”. She voted no for two reasons: she doesn't see the Board of Finance ever showing what the town truly needs. She feels the people think it's ok to vote this down because we go out to them at such a low percentage in the first place they think that's all we need so they can under-cut us a little bit more and we'll be fine. And we can't continue to operate that way. She thinks that at least once each budget cycle we need to show people what the departments really need to run this town properly. Let them vote it down but at least they have heard it once and then you can start to cut.

Mrs. Simonelli noted the other reason she voted it down was the 1.55% for education which, she felt, being one of the three primary responsibilities of government, was something that was under-funded, and will adversely affect the services they can provide in the school. Mrs. Simonelli noted that as Ms. Andrews said earlier East Windsor was voted 29th best high school in the state, and a lot of that has to do with them and the way they handle the disadvantaged and the economically disadvantaged kids in the district. Mrs. Simonelli noted that the statistics that they were working under for that award were that 40% of the kids are economically disadvantaged, and 25 – 35% are minorities. She suggested the statistics prove those kids need extra help, so we need extra people to help those kids succeed along with the rest of the population, and if they can only help some of those kids then they will not be doing their job. Mrs. Simonelli urged the Board of Finance to put that money back into the budget, and as Kathy Bilodeau said, make cuts in things that are nice to have but not necessary.

Adjournment:

MOTION: To ADJOURN the Board of Finance Public Hearing at 7:27 p.m.

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Richards moved/Smith seconded/VOTE: In Favor: Unanimous

Respectfully submitted:

Peg Hoffman, Recording Secretary, East Windsor Board of Finance.