

Stacy Gravano, CTC
TOWN CLERK

EAST HAVEN TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 17, 2017

In accordance with Chapter III, Section 6 of the East Haven Town Charter, the East Haven Legislative Town Council conducted a Public Hearing meeting on Monday, April 17, 2017, at 7:00PM at the East Haven Senior Center, 91 Taylor Avenue, East Haven, CT 06512.

Chairman Fred Parlato calls the meeting to order at 7:00PM.
He asks all to stand for the pledge of allegiance.

Item #1

Roll Call for Public Hearing #1 - 12 present – 2 absent (Santino and Butler III).
A quorum is present.

Item #2

To conduct Public Hearing #1 to discuss an "Ordinance adopting the Town and Board of Education Budgets and fixing the tax rate in mills for the 2017-2018 fiscal year of the Town of East Haven." - Board of Education Side of the Budget.

- John Finkle-91 Angela Drive, East Haven, CT- Mr. Finkle says he was able to speak at the last meeting and it appears there are communication gaps between the Town Council, Board of Education and Board of Finance. He asks if the Town Council can do something like he thinks they had at one point in time with a Board of Education Subcommittee. He doesn't know if it still exists and if not, maybe they can put something together, and check with the Town Attorney regarding its legality. But they can have a meeting for discussions so that the questions the Council or Board of Finance have in terms of how they make the budget for the Board of Education can be discussed. For example, one topic that came up was the student to teacher ratio; if they are building a budget around 20 because they feel it is correct, maybe the Council feels 22 or 24 is correct or a better number. They can put together a group that can meet on a regular basis so that the Town Council can get a better understanding of their budget and how they do things and at the same time they can take input from the Board of Finance and Town Council. Because once a year they throw a pitch out to the Council and they do their due diligence to the taxpayers and give the Board a budget and then don't see them again until the next year. Another example is when they went before the Board of Finance there was a question about where they were in the process of the school consolidation plan. The Board of

Education was under the impression that it was on the Town side now because there were discussions as to what could be afforded or not, so they were waiting to hear back as to what numbers the Town was willing to put towards the consolidation plan. There was a miscommunication there; they took the first step and closed the schools and now if they are going to continue with that plan there are several more steps. They were under the impression that it was down here with the Board of Finance to come up with the numbers the Town could afford and then it would go back to the Board of Education. Those are some disconnects he feels could be helped by having some regular meetings and it could make their budget process better. He knows they have to do their due diligence and he asks that the Council have the confidence in the Board that they know what they are doing and they appreciate anything the Council allocates.

- Chairman Fred Parlato says he was on the School Building Committee a long time ago when they did a major project with \$13 million dollars around 1991-1992 and the process then was that the School Building Committee took the directive through the Chairman of the Board of Education and they were allowed to advertise for requests for proposals and hire an architect. They basically came up with a plan and when they came up with a figure it came to the Town side and before this Board to determine where the dollars would come from. Maybe this is something they should re-explore; there are some very qualified people on the School Building Committee with great input. He also thinks more communication will help out quite a bit. He adds that he doesn't want to make the subcommittee top heavy, maybe just two people.
- Mr. Finkle says that's fine, just so that if there are questions, their representatives can meet with the Board and ask the questions. To the point with the School Building Committee, he thinks it is a great idea. Maybe even allocating some funds to them for the purposes of engineering work and detailed reports on the conditions of the buildings. Projects can be given to them with some allocation of funds to get the ball running, he has sat on that Committee and people on there have the experience.
- Cathy Celotto-48 S Strong Street, East Haven, CT- Ms. Celotto says she is there as President along with Vice President Michelle Lombardi of the Local 424 Unit 53 Union for the East Haven Board of Education Secretaries. Their bargaining unit is projected to suffer great loss due to proposed budget cuts. The minimum positions that they know of being considered are the 6 Library Aides and the Accounts Payable/Accounts Clerk in the Finance Office. They would like to first come to the defense of the Library Aides; although they work 15 hours/week they are a valuable part of their bargaining unit as well as each school individually. They manage and maintain the school libraries that children visit daily, they assist the children in expanding their minds and imaginations through the power of reading and literacy development; these proposed cuts will eliminate an

integral part of the school literacy team. What will happen to the Library? As school enrollment rises absorbing the library into individual classrooms may not be an option. In addition to the library duties they perform they also provide support to the school secretaries; each school is staffed with a minimum of 1 secretary with the exception of the Middle School and High School. If the secretary is out sick, takes a lunch break or leaves early, the library aide is there to cover the position and ensure the office of the school does not go without a staff member present who is knowledgeable of the students. Without library aides, it is more likely that a phone call be missed or vital personnel may wait outside the building until someone comes along. Not only do they act as support staff, they ensure the children enjoy many events throughout the year including the Book Fair which helps raise the money the schools use for reading programs. In defense of maintaining the Accounts Payable Clerk, the Finance Office is an extremely important part of the district and should the office take another loss, it would not only be a loss for their union but also for the district. The office has gone from a staff of upwards of 7 down to only 4. Cutting that position is not well advised because they mainly handle accounts payable and act as support to the payroll account clerk; a full time accounts payable position handles all of the bills for the district. Together they ensure proper and timely payment for the entire district. Maintaining the position ensures competitive pricing and preventing overspending while maintaining a relationship with vendors. She reminds everyone that the Secretarial Union is a vital part of the school district, unfortunately the union has suffered over the years and is currently at a bare minimum and should not have to suffer any more losses.

- Patrick Madley-351 Strong Street, East Haven, CT- Mr. Madley says Mr. Parlato made a good point at the meeting last Thursday by saying that they are there not just to serve the kids but also the taxpayers in the Town of East Haven; that is exactly right so whatever decision they make, it is up to the Board of Ed. to make the best of it for the kids. He has been on the record before saying that for many years the Board of Education has been very top heavy. He personally does not favor the increase they are asking for; he thinks the increase of \$300,000 is enough. He doesn't favor the layoff of teachers, secretaries or para's; he thinks the Board of Education needs to do due diligence for once and cut at the top. The Board of Education has functioned for many years without some of the positions they have now. At the last meeting there was talk about some of the money the Council had given that was to be paid back; he believes Mr. Parente made a good point in saying that has already been absorbed into the budget. He doesn't think it should be paid back; it was spent on the kids or for payroll. Since 1999-2000 the Board of Education budget has grown by \$17 million dollars so over the course of 17 years it has grown by that much and what do we have to show for it; no new buildings, not enough of an increase in test scores to justify

the cause so to keep throwing money at a cause that is not working is doing non-due diligence to the taxpayers of the Town. The Board of Ed needs to do something on their end, it's not fair it comes to the Council who has to give them a budget and they are the bad guys for not giving them the right amount, it's not right. He says he has the budgets with him from 2013 onward, some Board of Ed. proposed budgets and some that were approved and he notices for certain line items that they go underfunded for several years. This was pointed out by some Board of Ed Members, Patti Lewis who used to be the Business Manager and Jim Farrell who is the current Business Manager; so if these items are being pointed out and not being corrected he has grave concerns. There has been a political witch-hunt going on with the Board of Education and some members of the Council against the Business Manager and it is not necessary. He took a look at the budget and it's clear as day as to what is going on you just have to take the time to go through it; you need to look at the prior budgets to understand what is going on. He doesn't think it is right to attack a Business Manager whether it is because of party affiliation or not. Before Jim, there was Patti Lewis who was pushed out because the Board of Ed. blames the business administration and Finance Director when things don't turn out to be right but the Board of Ed. is where the buck stops. One last point is that he is all for safety especially after what happened at Sandy Hook but he doesn't understand when the SRO's turn into armed guards, he doesn't remember it being discussed at a Board meeting and he doesn't think it is right at this point in time for that to be factored into a budget when the Board of Ed is facing much more important things than that. He asks them tonight to vote in the best interest of all of their constituents, not just the kids or the parents but everybody as a whole because at the end of the day that is what they are there for. He trusts they will do the right thing, he asks when they deliberate and discuss how much to give the Board of Ed, they don't give them what they are looking for, give them a reasonable amount but not everything because next year they will be right back asking for more and that \$17 million over 17 years will turn into a lot more. In the next few years there needs to be a new school built somewhere in Town because the schools they have now are 50-60 years old.

- Chairman Parlato says he won't defend anyone or give an opinion but he has been on this Council for 22 years, he was here when the total budget was less than \$20 million dollars and from that time Education has changed and we know that. They don't make an opinion on how the Board of Education spends their money; they don't have the liberty to do that. The only control they have is the Board of Education's budget, once they sign off on it, it is theirs. He won't allow this Council to make a personal attack on anyone. The enrollment has been dropping but special needs have been increasing; there is a balancing act. They have enough confidence in the people on the Board of Education that the money

they give them will be enough; they have to pick and choose their priorities the Council won't dictate it for them. Their main concern is what the taxpayers are able to pay and he says Mr. Madley is one of the few people to come out and take the time to go through a budget for that many years to come up with the figures he did.

- Mr. Madley adds that his focus in school was on life span and adolescent development and he is right that there are more needs now than there were 10, 20, 30 years ago. For the benefit of the Board members behind him, he emphasized not cutting paras because they are critical to the development of the kids. He knows the Council doesn't control their functions but he wanted to say it because some things are going around with the public saying Council members are trying to control Board of Ed functions
- Michele DeLucia-325 Mansfield Grove Rd, East Haven, CT (Board of Education Member)- Mrs. DeLucia says every year they do increase the budget they request and if any of them have looked at their budget they would see the big line items are the increases in contractual obligations in health care and salaries. She says those must be paid, they have to be met. So when people talk about not losing para's and librarian aides yet cut their budget. They have to pay the bills to keep the lights on; they have to pay all contractual obligations so the money that is left is honestly what is going to directly affect our children. We have to cut programs yet at the same time are being asked to improve academic performance. They have to cut teachers and increase a class size which is a contradiction to what they are being asked to do; she takes offence that they don't spend the money wisely. They work on putting together a budget based on what was spent last year and what the increase in contractual obligations will be; they don't ask for fancy items they aren't asking for smart rooms or remodels yet they all come up with an arbitrary number and say this is what you are getting so use it. She would be fine with that if they actually went through it and said they think they can cut this or that because they are forced to make the decisions when nobody wants to cut paras or increase class sizes or cut teachers. They are not top heavy, there is one principal for every school but they don't even have one in Overbrook because they couldn't afford it so they had to transfer the Assistant Superintendent to oversee the program so there is someone there that is certified. When people come up and say they are spending frivolously, she isn't sure if they don't know what they are speaking about or they are somehow misinformed but it doesn't make sense. She is sure most of them are intelligent enough to realize the increase has to do with inflation and cost of living so the budget is going to be more money yet every year they are accused of overspending, but they are underfunded and she can't say that enough. They tell them what they need to operate as is, status quo. They are criticized for not making academic enhancements and changes yet they have to cut programs.

- Councilman Parlato says he senses her frustration and his frustration is that the Superintendent and her staff were here at the last meeting, and they closed two schools, he asks if she knows what the total was for those line items that were zeroed out for the total operation of Hays and DC Moore School. He says the total that didn't need to be spent on those schools and was spent somewhere else in the Board of Education budget was \$1,106,886. He says he asked the Superintendent where everyone went; they didn't lay off a janitor, maintenance man, nobody went. There was no reduction at all.
- Mrs. DeLucia says they couldn't cut the teachers and they only closed 1 school because the other was being used by an outside organization.
- Councilman Parlato says he thinks the Assistant Superintendent belongs at Overbrook because she is doing a good job and multitasking and doing more with less; he thinks she enjoys being there, he took a tour of it and was very impressed with the job her and her staff are doing. It's not a question of underfunding them, there's only so much money to play with. He would love to say that we didn't lose \$1.4 million dollars in tax revenue in the coming year because our grand list dropped \$45 million dollars in a reevaluation year.
- Mrs. DeLucia says there is a direct correlation of the decrease in home values and our school system.
- Chairman Parlato says he has seen homes in his neighborhood go up for sale one day and sold the next. In a lot of ways it is because East Haven is affordable and people knock our school systems but 5 of his children graduated from the system and a lot of people that graduated from East Haven are very accomplished.
- Mrs. DeLucia says she went to East Haven and her children are there, but people who can afford to move and value education are moving their families to other districts and that is affecting our home values; there is a direct correlation and it's one of the most important factors when people look at homes. We live on the shoreline in prime real estate area, why are we less valued than Madison or Branford, it's the school system.
- Chairman Parlato says not necessarily, he has been here 77 years, geographically we are a challenged Town, and we don't have the tax base. We have to fight for a \$5 million dollar fund balance yet Branford has \$23 million, theirs is 3x the size of ours.
- Mrs. DeLucia says she is happy we have a fund balance but our teachers and students won't have anything.
- Chairman Parlato says if she is aware of the Mayor's presentation a few weeks ago, we brought our indebtedness down to an astronomically low amount so we are geared to do something but right now we can't.
- Mrs. DeLucia says this was senseless because minds are made up and they have been made up before hearing any of this. They all have a fixed mindset and

maybe in a way they are somehow validated in their ideas but if you look at the statistics and research, you will see the impact of a school system that prospers and what it does to a Town; there's no arguing with the numbers.

- Chairman Parlato says he is not arguing that more money going into the school system should help them, it should but it doesn't work all the time.
- Mrs. DeLucia says it should but not when they are getting less and less and not enough for daily operations. They are not top heavy, they do not have many administrators at all, and our Superintendent is paid in the mid-range for this area. Nobody is making extraordinary salaries.
- Chairman Parlato says they are getting what we can afford, if they can't afford to stay here it is unfortunate but he can't ask the taxpayers to give more money than they can afford. They are giving the Board of Education what they can, considering the amount of revenue in the Town.
- Mrs. DeLucia says as a taxpayer she would be happy to pay more in taxes if she was getting something for it. She says yet they keep mentioning this fund balance/surplus/extra money.
- Chairman Parlato says they received a two-tier increase in our bond rating because of the fund balance that dropped our expenses for the year in what we pay for debt services.

Item #3

Adjournment of Public Hearing #1.

Councilman Nicholas Palladino makes a motion.

Councilman Richard Anania seconds the motion.

Voice vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain. Motion carries.

Item #4

Roll Call for Hearing Committee - 12 present – 2 absent (Santino and Butler III).

Item #5

Hearing Committee report to the full Town Council to recommend action on Public Hearing #1.

- Town Attorney Joseph Zullo explains that as a reminder of the budget process, on any Ordinance the Council has to recommend that Ordinance or any part of it to the full Council for a vote; they have to recommend something as part of the Ordinance. The Ordinance as written out provides funding in the amount

proposed by the Mayor of \$47,710,357.00 and if anyone is inclined to offer an amendment of more or less this would be the time by a motion and second and vote. If they wish to recommend as recommended to them, it goes on as a full report to the Town Council to recommend action.

- Councilwoman Lettieri-Morales asks if now would be the time where they say how much money they are giving.
- Attorney Zullo says it can be amended at the final hearing, but if they are so inclined to amend tonight, the Finance Director would have to make the recalculations and a new Ordinance would be presented with those changes. They are not required to do it either way; those are the options they have.

Councilman Nicholas Palladino says he would like to make a motion; he knows the Mayor recommended a \$300,000 increase but because of the security situation and the way of the world right now, there is no reason why we shouldn't have armed security in our schools to protect our children.

He makes a motion to raise the \$300,000 increase by \$100,000 with the hope that the Board of Education will utilize the money for security.

Councilman Robert Sand requests a caucus.

Republican and Democratic Caucus's begin at 7:41PM.

Republican and Democratic Caucus's ends at 7:56PM.

Councilwoman Lettieri-Morales seconds the motion to raise the \$300,000 by \$100,000.

Roll call vote: 1 in favor (Palladino) – 11 oppose- none abstain.

Motion fails.

Councilman Robert Parente makes a motion to approve the Mayor's recommendation and recommend action to the Full Town Council.

Councilman William Richardson seconds the motion.

Roll call vote: 10 in favor- 2 oppose (Palladino and Lettieri-Morales) - none abstain.

Motion carries.

Item #6

Adjournment of Hearing Committee.

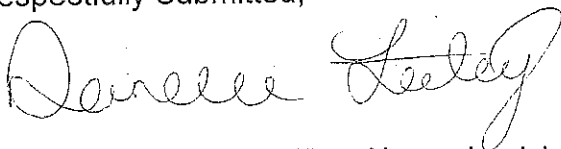
Councilman Parente makes a motion.

Councilwoman Susan Archambault seconds the motion.

Voice vote: all in favor-none oppose-none abstain. Motion carries.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:01PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Danelle Feeley". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Danelle Feeley, Clerk, East Haven Legislative Town Council

