

**EAST HAVEN TOWN COUNCIL  
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
MONDAY, APRIL 16, 2018**

The East Haven Town Council held a public hearing on Monday, April 16, 2018, at 7:00PM at the East Haven Senior Center, 91 Taylor Avenue, East Haven, CT 06512.

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

**Item #1**

Roll Call-13 present- 2 absent (Badamo and Butler III).  
Councilwoman Sitnick arrived at 7:40pm.  
A quorum is present.

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*Stacy Grawins, CTC*  
**TOWN CLERK**

**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 218-2019 fiscal year of the Town of East Haven." – Board of Education Side of the Budget

Town Attorney Joseph Zullo explains, for the new members of the Council, these public hearings are for the opportunity of the public to speak. After the public hearing, as is true for any Ordinance, when they make the motion to have the hearing committee report to the full Town Council, if they have any amendments regarding the Board of Education side of the budget, that report is the time to make those amendments. For example, if they decide to appropriate more or less or do something else, that would be the time to make that motion and that report. Once that report goes to the full Town Council, they are really not supposed to amend it the night of the hearing; it can be done but the proper way to do it would be tonight.

**Summary of Public Comments:**

- Michele Delucia- 325 Mansfield Grove Road, East Haven-Mrs. DeLucia speaks on behalf of the Board. She indicates last week she saw the Superintendent give a very responsible budget to the Town Council of 2.57%, which would allow them to only cover contractual obligations. A cut of over \$1 million dollars would be detrimental and lead to cuts in programming and laying-off support staff. As Chairperson of the Board, her vision is to give the necessary resources to support growth and success. To have an underfund budget year after year while being criticized for low-test scores and graduation rates is a contradiction. She mentions the impact a school district has on economic status and development;

she says she has never heard someone say they want to move somewhere because of their stellar Police or Fire Departments. Those Departments are crucial to the Towns but imagine criticizing a Police Department for slow response time if they were only given bicycles. It's more difficult to see what is needed in an education system; they lose students yearly to alternative programs such as Adult Ed. Unfortunately, when they lose the students to that program, it impacts the graduation rates. Test scores are subjective measures in themselves, but could and would be higher if they had the funding to offer the necessary programs not only to those who need remedial help. We are possibly seeing sliding test scores for our top performers due to not having the programs in-house to keep them challenged and motivated. Enrollment is down; students go to schools with what is seen as better facilities, athletic fields, programs but it's a perception because most of those schools are underperforming. Many families who realize the importance of a good education are being put in private schools so they have a better support system and if they could afford to do so, they are moving out of Town all together. If they don't realize funding directly impacts education in this district, there isn't anything anyone can say this evening and for those who don't think they deserve funding due to mismanagement of funds and are willing to sacrifice the quality of education for students as collateral damage, she hopes they are embarrassed with that decision. They need appropriate funding to provide students with the affordances and opportunities they deserve that are required for them to be successful in today's competitive society. She asks them as elected representatives in the Town to show they value the future of the children and the future of this Town.

- Ruziye Yeroz- New Haven Resident- Ms. Yeroz says she is a full time assistant teacher in New Haven; she was a student of the East Haven Adult Ed and her teacher Ms. Laura is there tonight as well. She explains how she and other friends and family members have gotten their citizenship through the Adult Education program and how grateful she is for that. She adds that whenever she needed help with going back to school, she was able to go back to Ms. Laura and other teachers for help. English was her second language so she struggled with computer programs and books and learning on her own, but the Adult Education program helped her to get her citizenship and helped those who needed their diploma and couldn't afford to pay for it or get help somewhere else. She thanks all of the teachers and the people who support the school.
- Casie Pagano-123 Grafton Street, New Haven- Ms. Pagano says she is a former student of the Adult Education program; she graduated in 2013 and still has a great relationship with all of her teachers there. She explains that the school is small and the teachers are able to give the students care. She is going to school for early childhood education and what she has taken with her from classes there is that a relationship with students is very important. She was bullied at East Haven High School so going there made a difference; she felt cared for and safe. Funding wise, she couldn't imagine what the school would be like if they lost their funding. This problem came up while she was in the school and she organized a fundraiser getting almost the whole school to play softball at Memorial Field; they didn't make much money at all but it was because she cared deeply about the school and they deserve the best.

- Sean Morman- 22 Andys Drive, East Haven- Mr. Morman says he is there to support the education budget, especially for Adult Education. He is currently enrolled in the Adult Education program and is on track to receive his diploma this spring. Not graduating high school is something he has regretted and he saw his two children excel through the East Haven school system with high honors. This past fall his children encouraged him to sign up and it was challenging but with the help of the wonderful staff the hardest part was walking through the door. He has been held back from career opportunities not having a diploma and this program has given him opportunities and a sense of pride and is leading to new opportunities to benefit him and his family and may even allow him to go further with his education. He expresses his gratitude for this program and its staff.
- Jenna Vollono-128 Eagle Street, New Haven-Ms. Vollono indicates she was a resident of East Haven, went to the High School and ended up at the Adult Education Center which was one of the best high school experiences she could have asked for. She made the switch to this program at 17 and ended up going to hairdressing school at the same time. In the same month, she received her diploma and cosmetology certificate. They are the most supportive teachers she has ever had; she went through the East Haven school system for elementary, middle and high school. The teachers guided them through every test and hurdle they could experience. When she heard they might be getting funding cut it disappointed her; they are as deserving of an education as in the high school. She indicates she now owns two salons in New Haven and her teacher Laura DePonte is there tonight and she feels her consumer math class helped her budget and finance her every day bills to her rent and savings and now her house and businesses. She is forever grateful for the Adult Education program for giving her the confidence to get her diploma and further her education in cosmetology. She thanks the staff and hopes they continue funding the program.
- Lina Travers-355 Laurel Street, East Haven-Ms. Travers indicates she was at the last meeting when the Superintendent was going over the budget for the Board of Education and she was a little concerned. She says they are looking for a \$1.2 million dollar increase and \$1 million of that is just for what needs to be done for teacher's increases and all of that. So what are they going to do with only \$200,000, they can't do anything with that. The \$1.2 million dollars is only going to keep them at status quo so what will be used for curriculum or security? The security grants are going to take care of telephone and intercom systems but what about the guards in the schools? They can't say nothing will happen in East Haven, she hopes it does not but every school that experienced it said the same thing. She doesn't know if there is a way for the Town to set aside a separate security fund for guards, but they need to protect and educate our kids. She doesn't think the \$1.2 million and keeping the district status quo is enough anymore.
- Clem Laurello-140 Thompson Street, East Haven- Mr. Laurello explains that he has always been a huge advocate for the children. He mentions great volunteers in Town, Foxon Rec or Marianne Cesare who went to him about a trailer that was in disrepair and that is what our community is made of with many people. He thinks we have gotten away from that and he doesn't know if a \$1.2 million

dollar increase is the answer. His three daughters have gone through this school system; he still has one that is a senior. There are three former Board members on this Council; Mr. Palladino as Chairman has stated that they have ran flat budgets and maybe they can pick his brain a little. He doesn't want to take anything away from the kids or see anyone losing their job but whatever the amount is, he wants to make sure the money is spent correctly. He mentions common questions that come up after following all of these meetings for a long time, which are test scores and property values. His concern is that the mudslinging needs to end in this Town; allegations are thrown around and none of it is warranted and doesn't help anyone in the Town. He says there is a forensic audit right now in the Board of Education, they should be first asking about the \$918,000. The Board of Education came in last year with \$64,000 under budget and that should have been the first thing that was mentioned. He hopes the word corruption stops going around because there is no evidence of it. A common question by this Council is why there was two Finance Directors, and there still is, why? There is an interim Finance Director right now and when Mr. Rizza was Director on both the Town and Board side if he ever gave a job out without going out to bid he would be crucified for it and he never did it. There have been three times it happened on the Board and he doesn't understand how it happens; every dollar and cent counts because it goes back to our kids. Going to the State bid list is not fiscally responsible; the point of going out to bid is getting the best price. He is not making any allegations of mismanagement or wrongdoings; he wants the best for their kids. He thanks Mr. Pacelli for his concern over the past 4 years with school security. We can't ask for X amount of dollars for the kids if it isn't going to trickle down to the kids.

- Theresa Penkrat-42 Charnes Drive, East Haven- Ms. Penkrat says every year she sits and watches them turn down the Board of Education budget and she goes to every meeting and watches them cut out programs for the kids and security and it is sad. She thinks the Town Council and Board of Education should work as a whole. She has two kids in the schools; her son will be a junior next year and her daughter is in 1<sup>st</sup> grade at the Academy and at least East Haven High School has guards but her daughters school does not and neither did the other schools when her son was there. The Board of Education wants an increase and if they don't get it, they will start taking things away and they won't be able to get security in the schools. They need armed SRO's in the schools and if they don't get the budget and they can't afford it then she thinks the Council should put it out there for the children. She has been on PTO's/PTA's and goes to every meeting. She is seeing Town cops moving out of East Haven because they don't want their kids in East Haven schools. She understands they have a qualm about the Board of Ed and mismanaging money but there is a new superintendent that she thinks will do something for the school district. She thinks they need to give the \$1.2 million and if they don't want to give them the extra for SRO's they need to put it aside for them somewhere else.
- Loni Troge-46 Sanford Street, East Haven- Mr. Troge indicates he is a business owner in East Haven and he went to get his citizenship in East Haven and he thanks the teachers and Principal Joe Ferraiolo. He owns a cell phone business and has been given this opportunity since coming here and he tells other people about it also. He thanks everyone for this opportunity.

- Juliana Vrekai-46 Sanford Street, East Haven-Ms. Vrekai says she is paraprofessional at Deer Run School, she moved to America in 2007 and she was a student at the East Haven Adult Education. She did not know the Adult Education Program existed, she lived in Wallingford for a while and had finished High School in her country but it was hard coming here and not knowing English. She moved to East Haven in 2011 and learned about the Adult Education School in 2013; she couldn't get her high school diploma from her country so she was trying to raise a family and become something without being able to show anything that she had. She explains that she went to Adult Education and received her GED in 2013 when she had two children, which she was able to bring and use the daycare program there. In 2015 she went back there and went through their citizenship program. She praised the teachers for the devotion and for their further assistance when she applied to Gateway as they helped her fill out her applications and she then continued onto SCSU for her bachelors in Mathematics. She mentions various programs within the Adult Education program that helped her continue her education such as the ESL, mathematics, sciences, etc. She encourages them to give any money that they can to this program because it is an asset and it would be sad to see any funds cut.
- Lorena Venegas-73 George Street, East Haven- Ms. Venegas says she is on the Board of Trustees for the Hagaman Memorial Library but she is there tonight as a parent; she has two kids that go to Momauguin School in the 2nd grade. She loves the staff and administrators there and the Superintendent Erica Forti. She wants to make sure they fully fund the budget for the Board of Education and then some. She mentions the Board of Education having the biggest expense for the Town and people being concerned about the mill rate. She says they need to make sure they value education and make it better so they can bring in new families because where she lives on George Street, there are many abandoned houses and they need to fill them with families. She mentions Mr. Zullo who helps their school out on field day and they appreciate it all but their kid's need more than they get right now. In past budgets that were funded, they already lost programs; they used to have summer reading programs and they don't anymore so the reading and math skills built up throughout the year are lost over the summer. She believes in accountability and transparency in everything and she may not know what the salary levels should be for everyone in the budget but she loves the teachers and administrators. She discusses after school care being expensive and the Town being an alliance district because 60% of the students receive free or reduced lunch and we should do more to get out of that statistic. Each year the grants we will receive are unknown. She asked the principal of Momauguin what they needed and lists the one bathroom/toilet that serves everyone, cracked tiles, the boys bathroom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, unusable cafeteria tables as well as desks and chairs. She mentions the buildings looking the same as they did when she went in the 80's and the need for all of those enhancements as well as a playground for their school. She asks the Council to visit the school and to fully fund the budget and then some.
- Maryann Pellegrino- 90 Gerrish Avenue, East Haven- Ms. Pellegrino says she is on the Board of Education and is there to address something said earlier by one of the speakers. They do not currently have two Finance Directors. They have a

Finance Manager and she is in charge of day-to-day financial operation of running the school system and paying the bills and keeping up with the things that need to be done normally. Then they have a Director of Finance that oversees the larger structure of the buildings; he works with all of the Departments on large collaborations and focuses on streamlining to make them more fiscally responsible. He is overseeing the things of the Board, she indicates she personally has no fiscal ability as far as dollars and cents; she is an educator who loves to teach and is devoted to the needs of the children but she couldn't balance a budget so they have someone who can do that and keep them in line. She says he has been keeping them in line and he is doing wonderfully but if he was trying to pay bills at the same time and do the normal things that have to be done to run the school system he wouldn't be able to devote so much time to the operation of the school system and they are doing much better. They don't want to burden one person who can't do both of these things at the same time.

- Donna Richo- 67 Charnes Drive, East Haven- Ms. Richo says that she looked at the budget being presented versus what we spent last year and it is encouraging that many of the positions that have been overfunded and unfilled have been moved out of this budget. She thinks they are working in the right direction. She gets a little upset because to her education is from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade; early childhood learning is costing us too much money and is taking away from what we should be doing in education. She thinks they will ultimately get to where they need to be and only have X amount of dollars. It's unfortunate we don't have input as a Town in terms of personnel; we can't get involved in contracts but we need to over on that side and this side. She says they have a tough road to go and she appreciates all of them and looks forward to keeping an eye on the Board of Education.

### **Item #3**

Councilman Robert Parente makes a motion to adjourn Public Hearing #1.

Councilwoman Louis Pacelli seconds the motion.

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

### **Item #4**

Roll Call for Hearing Committee-13 present- 2 absent (Badamo and Butler III).

### **Item #5**

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

Attorney Zullo explains that this is the Council's opportunity to take into account what they heard from the public and at this point they would make the report to the full Town Council as to whether or not they wish to see the Ordinance go forward as written as presented to them or if they wish to make any amendments to it.

Council comment:

- Councilman Nicholas Palladino indicates he would like to comment on a few things brought up and provide his input as a former Board of Education member and as a Town Council member. The first thing that was brought up was someone living in New Haven that came to East Haven and got their citizenship and that it was free; nothing is free, the taxpayers of East Haven paid for someone that lives in New Haven to get their citizenship. That's great that they got it but he, as a taxpayer, doesn't want to pay for New Haven people to come and get citizenship in our Country, let New Haven who gets their taxes. Another person came up that was proud that she finished her education and bought a house and started two businesses, but they were both in New Haven; they didn't come back to our Town and say East Haven did all of this for me so let me give back to my community, they took what we gave and took it out of Town so that didn't help us any. As far as the comment about State bids, we all know the State bids are the lowest and best deals and we never go wrong taking a State bid. As far as the security, SRO's, that is great but they should talk to the Board of Education about that; they have nothing to say. Once they allocate the funds, the Town Council has zero to say how they spend the money or what they spend it on. As far as the para's; they are the backbones; underpaid, overworked and abused. They started a union, which didn't help them much because the top rate he thinks is about \$16 or \$17 per hour and yet we start custodians at \$25/hour. The custodians clean the schools and para's teach the kid's education. As far as funding the money for the kids and making them graduate, they can throw money at them forever but if the administration is not doing their jobs and making teachers do their jobs, they can give them all the money in the world and nothing is going to change. As far as before school and after school programs, parents have to take some responsibility; he had two children in the school system so his wife stayed home to raise them and they sacrificed without new cars and vacations and parents have to sacrifice; he has a problem with parents walking around with new cars, jewelry, etc. and their kids are getting free lunch. The Town is responsible with educating them and he thinks that is what they are doing so his opinion is they give the modest increase the Mayor has presented; it's more than enough and there's no reason they can't make it work. As far as the buildings/bathrooms, etc. it's the Board of Education's responsibility so say it needs to be fixed not the Town Council; they have nothing to say about how they spend their money because of State statute and they can't change that.
- Vice-Chairwoman Linda Hennessey indicates that she understands the Adult Education has a wonderful program as everyone spoke on tonight and she says congratulations to all of them and says they don't want to see anyone get hurt by not funding enough or getting too much funding in one area and not another. As one speaker said, they want to put their money where it counts and that is education. Everyone is concerned about the personnel and the benefits and she

thinks they need to take a look at that; they need to look at the personnel they have and do they need what they have or do they need more. Everyone seems to say that now that they are taking on x, y or z they need more money, but why? If you are a teacher and took an oath to teach, why does everyone want more money? If it is your job to teach, then do your job and if you are to take on more responsibility, then that is what you need to do. We need to give the money where it is needed and that is education; maybe we should add more educational programs and maybe we don't need more administration. Someone else expressed concern about the health benefits; maybe they need to look at that. At the previous meeting she asked if the Superintendent was told why she wasn't going to get the money requested; she believes there has to be communication so they understand what they are asking for and what they are and aren't getting. Between the Board, the Mayor and the Town Council there needs to be communication, like Councilman Palladino said once they give the Board the money it's theirs and they can't say anything after that which is why it is their job now to say what they can or can't get. She hopes what they do receive goes to the right direction; when people talk about the building, they can teach their child in any building it doesn't matter where they are, their job is to educate and they don't need a fancy building to do it. Yes they need some upgrades but her recommendation is to take the money they receive, use it well with one thought in mind- education.

- Chairman Mckay indicates that he has been on the Town Council for 20 years now and has been through a lot of budget processes and he still has a mother in Town that is concerned about her taxes; she doesn't have any children in the school system now, she has great grand children. Someone brought up the façade of the schools, Tuttle School was done over and that school is beautiful because they kept the beauty of it as well as the rest of the Town. We have to worry about the inside of the school as far as who is educating our students. People brought up parents working, they have to work in order to pay their taxes but if we go up on our mill rate and our taxes, it is only going to cost people more money and people are going to only have to work harder. Where do we stop and say enough is enough, we can't raise the taxes any more before it becomes unaffordable to live in the Town of East Haven. People are saying they are cutting everything but they aren't cutting everything, they are just trying to maintain now. Since he has been on the Town Council since 1997 they have given the Board of Education \$17.2 million dollars; they never cut it. Four years when he was on the Town Council under April Capone's administration, they flat-lined for two years and gave a total of \$1.9 million dollars in the four years she was in office. Since 2011, they gave \$1.3 million dollars to the Board of Education in those years alone. Superintendent Erica Forti talked about the money going to salary and benefits but in the Police Department and Fire Department it's going to salaries and benefits; all Town employees have



contracts and they get raises every year and they can't stop it because they want to keep the people working. Someone mentioned the police officers moving out of Town, well they are getting raises all of the time too, they just got a new contract. He mentions Guilford going up 2.5 mills and there are many empty houses; Madison's education system is terrible right now and their graduation rate is just about as low as ours right now. The Council is trying to keep it so that people can afford to live in East Haven, he would love to give them more but how many people are we going to force out of Town because they can't afford to live here anymore. He says they got elected to watch over the Government of East Haven, which includes Education, Fire, Police, Public Services, etc., and they do a good job. People should come to their Town Council meetings the first Tuesday of every month; you can count on half a hand the people who come when they are running a \$92 million dollar budget every year.

- Councilwoman Loria Jaffe reiterates the fact that they can't attract young families to a Town with a high tax rate; they wouldn't be able to afford to come here.
- Councilman Robert Parente says there are probably 3,000 or so line items in the Board of Education budget and they have gone through every department, program, event, sport, etc. and tonight for some reason there is one group of people that seems to have been baited and told they are being cut and that is upsetting to him. He is sorry one group was told to show up tonight because they are cutting adult education; that was never discussed amongst them or a thought process. He says he loves the building and built it himself and has a very deep place in his heart for that school as well as Pathways which is not there anymore because he was personally involved in it while paralyzed and in a wheelchair. It's terrible that there are many line items in the Board of Education budget and the best to come up with was to get the message across that they are cutting the adult education program.
- Chairman McKay says he even wrote a note asking if we are cutting adult education because it was brought up tonight.
- Superintendent Erica Forti says she did not mention cutting Adult Education in her presentation Thursday night. She says that may however be a result of her asking administrators to publicize that there was a public hearing tonight for education and if they had interest in students or parents wanting to advocate on behalf of the Board of Education that this would be the forum to do so. Clearly, Adult Education represented themselves tonight, but she doesn't think it was the result of being threatened with a cut.
- Councilman Parente says he appreciates that and it shows the compassion of one segment in the 3,000 line item budget that say don't cut us because we are worth something.
- Vice Chairwoman Hennessey adds that when you look at the budget and the amount of schools and staff and amount of people that aren't here, she feels bad

that the Superintendent doesn't have the support. Where is everyone, they should be there behind her and standing up for everyone.

- Councilman Joseph Deko says the large group of people who came was for the Adult Ed, so he looked through the proposed budget by Erica and on page 39 it looks to him as though adult education was cut by \$19,971.
- Superintendent Erica Forti says that is because of a reduction in State grant funding and their match has to be a certain percentage of that. Once State funding is reduced, the general budget gets reduced automatically.
- Councilman Deko says but ultimately it is being cut, not as a result of them but he wanted it to be known that there is money that will not be in their budget next year for whatever reason.
- Chairman McKay asks about the grants they will be getting from the State this year.
- Finance Director Richard Huot indicates the last page of the budget shows all of the grants; last year, current year and what they know about for next year.
- Chairman McKay asks about the alliance grant, was it applied for already?
- Superintendent Erica Forti says the application for 2018-2019 wasn't released yet and they just received funds amount a month ago for 2017-2018.
- Councilman Louis Pacelli says he was on the Board of Education and what was mentioned about the security, there are a lot of simple things that can be done. They should be advertising meetings with the Police Department. He went to a meeting a few months ago, the Police Chief was there and nobody knew about it. There are free State Police programs where they will come down and give an evaluation on security. Another simple thing is to move the guard shack to have visibility of all of the gates. And they can get advise from parents and concerned citizens who come to the meetings; take their advice and work with them.

Councilman Palladino makes a motion to recommend action as it was presented.

Councilman Parente seconds the motion.

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

#### Item #6

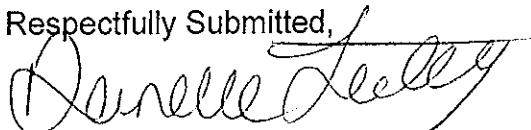
Councilman Palladino makes a motion to adjourn.

Councilman Parente seconds the motion.

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

Meeting is adjourned at 8:27PM.

Respectfully Submitted,



Danelle Feeley, Clerk, East Haven Legislative Town Council