

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR  
2006-2007 BUDGET**

**APRIL 3, 2006**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**1353**

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President Scott Slifka called the hearing to order at 3:35 p.m.

Present were Councilors Shari Cantor, Barbara Carpenter, Maureen Kelly McClay, Scott Slifka, Art Spada, Carolyn Thornberry and Joseph Verrengia.

Councilors Chuck Coursey and Mark Sinatro were absent.

President Slifka: Mr. Spada could you please read the subject matter.

Vice President Spada: I can Mr. Mayor, proposed fiscal year 2006-2007 budget.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Spada. Mr. O'Brien do we have a sign up sheet?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes we do.

President Slifka: Thank you very much. The first speaker is Judy Aron. As a reminder, you have per Council rules you have three minutes to speak and please state your name and address for the record as you begin your remarks.

Ms. Aron: Good afternoon members of the Town Council. My name is Judy Aron and I reside at 40 North Quaker Lane. You have raised my taxes over twenty five percent in the past five years alone. Allow me to offer some suggestions regarding the budget. Influences on the budget are wage and salary costs, operating expenses especially related to energy and health benefit and pension costs so first of all, I would announce a hiring and wage freeze for the next two years. Eliminate all new planned hires in the municipal and education departments above last year's staff and have no new hires for the next two years.

I would eliminate two administrative positions in each school effective September 2006 or request each school come up with a plan to save \$150,000. \$150,000 per school is \$2,400,000 in savings.

Eliminate vacuum leaf collection. It is a dismal failure because it can never be timed well and I'm sick to death of leaves blowing all over the street and having frozen piles of leaves under snow banks. People are capable of bagging their leaves and putting them to the curb for pick up and removal. This should save us well over \$1 million as well as annual headaches that come with vacuum leaf collection. I would ask that you eliminate collection of holiday trees as well. If people can haul trees to their houses then they can haul them to the recycling center themselves to be chipped and recycled. Otherwise, charge a fee for the pick up. This would save Public Works staff and energy costs.

Save over the half million dollar expense to this town by scrapping the installation of Astroturf ball fields at Conard and Hall. Even though we are getting \$1 million from the State, I do not think it is prudent at this time to make this expenditure. That grant is not free money. It is a result of the State raiding my pockets as well and quite frankly I believe that the State has higher priorities than Astroturfing ball fields in any community in this State.

I think the \$20,000 line item for art every year for the next five years is nice but no new expenditures like this should be started.

Despite a \$200,000 State grant, I think that King Philip Middle School can live without our additional \$300,000 expenditure in the form of bonds for air conditioning. If you have to close school for a day because of overly hot weather then so be it. Since you are concerned about rising energy costs then running air conditioning will only add to those costs.

I would also cut the number of programs offered by Leisure Services in half and raise the rates by ten percent on the programs offered. We do not need to offer over 3,000 courses and in addition I would raise the rates on the golf course and the skating rink.

I would scrap the plan for the library kiosk and instead allow for the functions of that kiosk to be done online at the current library website. \$30,000 is a ridiculous amount of money for this kiosk. Also scrap the three curbside collection boxes that you are planning to buy saving an additional \$17,000. Library books should be dropped off at the library branches like they are now not newly funded receptacles around town.

Eliminate the Quest program in the elementary, middle schools. These children should be challenged in their regular classes and no additional gifted program is necessary if the curriculum is properly delivered. Eliminate full day kindergarten and have a half day program in all schools. No new education program should be adopted this year and any programs that were started with grant money that is running out should be discontinued. I'm sick of having programs started up with grant money only to be picked up by the taxpayer funding when seed money runs out. No later school start times please. It will be waste of extra taxpayer money involved for transportation and staff schedule changes and limit all attorney fees for special education due process hearings. Limitless attorney expenditures are wasteful and give no initiative for the school to mediate reasonably with parents.

My ideas save us over \$4 million and represent some serious belt tightening without compromising the health, safety or essential education. We must be realistic in what we can afford and even though there are great ideas in terms of new programs we cannot purchase them all.

President Slifka: Ms. Aron I let you go a bit over, if you could....

Ms. Aron: One sentence. Let's be prudent and realistic with what our citizens can pay in taxes and stop the spending spree and in addition I would like to say that I believe for myself that Barbara Carpenter and Joe Verrengia should recuse themselves from voting on this budget as employees of this town. They have an obvious conflict of interest here and this budget affects their salaries directly. Thank you.

President Slifka: The next speaker is Cecile Enrico.

Ms. Enrico: Good afternoon. My name is Cecile Enrico and I am talking in the capacity of Executive Director of Interval House. The address is a P.O. Box 340207, Hartford. Interval House is a domestic violence organization that provides services to victims of domestic violence to twenty four towns in the Greater Hartford area. Interval House is the only domestic violence prevention and intervention program and shelter that provides services to West Hartford residents.

In the past, the Town of West Hartford has allocated funds which were highly appreciated. Last year we found out without warning that the town

decided not to provide funding to Interval House. That is why we are here today asking that you consider funding us again as you have done in the past. Due to a volatile economic climate we are in need of additional funding to remain in operation and to provide quality services. Therefore, we are asking the Town of West Hartford to assist us with a portion of our costs in the amount of \$7,000 so that we can continue to support and provide services to the West Hartford town residents.

Interval House's annual operating budget is \$1.5 million and less than fifteen percent goes to administrative costs. In this past year 379 West Hartford residents have utilized many of our services that we offer. They include the following: 3 use the shelter, 58 used our hotline and in person counseling, 5 used the satellite office in Manchester, 98 used the satellite office in Simsbury and what that is is really they provide civil court advocacy and in person counseling. Three were assisted with civil court advocacy assistance. In our Criminal Court GA 14 in Hartford there were 211 and assistance in the Criminal Court in GA 12 there was one. In addition, 123 attended our support groups.

Over the past year, 514 West Hartford residents have contributed financially to Interval House. Interval House was founded by a significant number of women who lived in West Hartford and some still reside in this town. We recently started an emeritus board and seven of the fourteen members live in West Hartford. The Town of West Hartford has always considered Interval House to be a very important organization and a significant cause that truly saves lives and we are asking for your support. Please consider this request. Thank you. Let me just pass this letter.

President Slifka: Ms. Enrico we have to go in the order of the sign up sheet but I believe your person is next anyway.

Ms. Enrico: No, I had, I'm sorry, I had put down two people that I thought would sense if they talked after and one is here. Lisa is not here.

President Slifka: So Lisa Holden is not here. I'm going to guess that you are Ann Mikulak okay please come up.

Ms. Mikulak: Good afternoon. My name is Ann Mikulak and I'm very pleased to be speaking to you today. I am a resident of West Hartford, recent retiree from the Department of Children and Family State of

Connecticut where we interacted a great deal with the Interval House and where there were a number of cases that dealt with West Hartford individuals.

I thought upon leaving the State that I wouldn't be as busy in referring people to Interval House but as a happy retiree I use a lot of the Leisure Services in West Hartford and I'm a swimmer at Cornerstone Pool. There have been a number of occasions when women who are swimming there and know I'm on the Board have asked for advice and I have made referrals.

Most recently, to show you how critical it is and how we are constantly having the issue of safety in domestic violence, I heard from an individual who owns a restaurant here in West Hartford Center on Saturday that a woman who works at a local bank here, her boyfriend was threatening her and threatening her at work and the women were very concerned about that at work. As it turned out the individual attacked her, she lived in Hartford, attacked her in her home and killed himself this past weekend but the point is it could have happened very easily at the bank here in West Hartford so this is an issue of safety not only for the women and children but for all of the residents in West Hartford. It is something that we need to do. That was an extreme situation but there is also a lot of education that needs to be done in the schools and Interval House provides a lot of education and a lot of other services.

I would strongly recommend, especially on the issue of safety that you look at providing resources for the Interval House and I thank you very much.

President Slifka: Before you step away could you please state your address for the record?

Ms. Mikulak: I live on 116 Lancaster Road.

President Slifka: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mikulak: Thank you very much.

President Slifka: The next speaker is Bill Gorman.

**Mr. Gorman:** Good afternoon members of the Council. My name is Bill Gorman and I reside at 35 Lemay Street. This will be a short one. My son moved to Raleigh, North Carolina nine years ago. He was...

**President Slifka:** I'm very sorry to interrupt. Ms. Enrico we were wondering if you could stay for a minute until this done. We are going to have a question for you but not part of the proceeding. Thank you very much. I'm sorry to interrupt Mr. Gorman. I apologize. We will start you over again.

**Mr. Gorman:** I will start again. My son moved to Raleigh, North Carolina nine years ago. He was employed by the Hartford Whalers and he moved south with the hockey team. He purchased a house in Raleigh the year after he got there in the city of Raleigh. The house was in a new development, it had paved roads, sidewalks on sides, concrete sidewalks, two car garage with a concrete driveway big enough to handle the two cars. So then the tax bill came.

The house is about 1800 to 1900 square feet. For the first tax bill he received it was for \$1730. That was in 1998. The second tax bill in 1999 was \$1730. The third tax bill the 2000 was \$1730. I called my son yesterday to get this information and he sort of blasted me for asking for such information in such a short period of time and he could not find the figures for 2001 or 2002 but in the year 2003 it went from \$1730 to \$1802. Now comes 2004 it is \$1820 and in 2005 it is \$1820 again. That is a tax increase in eight years of \$90.00 or you want to percentage on it it is 1.05 percent. I think the Council members have to learn to say no, no, no. There is an old song and I don't know where the words come from but it goes something like this, no, no, a thousand times no, I rather die than say yes. Thank you.

**President Slifka:** Thank you Mr. Gorman. Let us know next time we will bring a piano to accompany you. Next is Philip Meister.

**Mr. Meister:** I didn't know I would have to follow an act much less a hard act. Ladies and gentlemen of the West Hartford Town Council. My name is Phil Meister, I reside at 964 North Main Street and I'm also President of the West Hartford Taxpayers Association. First, I want to wish you, Barry, good luck on your retirement and your further endeavors. I know that you have worked long and hard in the vineyard that is West Hartford to make it

bear fruit and I thank you for your long and loyal service to our community. I also want to express gratitude to you on the Council and the Budget and Finance Committee for the tireless unpaid efforts you have made on behalf of the town. I'm sorry that scheduling conflicts made it impossible for me to attend the Budget and Finance Committee meetings this year. I appreciate the labor that you have lavished upon West Hartford.

Damon Runyon once said the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong but that is the way to bet. If we had to bet on the future of West Hartford what would be the swiftest or strongest force on our future? We could look at our real estate market and see that houses are selling at almost double the selling price they sold for in 1999 when we did our last revaluation. New housing is going up every day. People want to move to West Hartford and yet more houses are on the market for a longer period of time than they were before. Interest rates are going up as a result of the Federal Reserves rate increases. Will houses be affordable with tomorrow's mortgage rates?

We could look at the commercial sector. New businesses are coming to West Hartford. The construction around the Center heralds the coming of Blue Back Square. Corbin's Corner is having major new renovations. Every natural food store on the planet has made West Hartford its home and yet a West Hartford Center merchandiser told me this week that her rents are going up and she doesn't know if she can make it. The yield curve is inverting which is a harbinger of a recession. Businesses are uneven. Will people continue to spend on tomorrow's paycheck?

We could look at education. Our schools continue to provide a good education and an opportunity for our students. My son is one example. He graduated from Hall High School last year and now attends Dartmouth College. He had a chance to excel because of our schools and yet how many will have a chance to follow in his footsteps? Scores on standardized tests have not been going up. Gang activity has been implicated in our middle school and we are not as competitive with the schools in our ERG cohort as we once were. Will our students continue to be accepted at tomorrow's finest universities?

Last year I was unable to make my presentation in person but I did present written remarks. My presentation was based on Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point, How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* and as

you can see in this year's remarks I see each of the pillars upon which this community stands, our real estate market, our business climate and our educational institutions are at a tipping point that can send them and West Hartford one way or another. If I had to bet on what was the strongest and swiftest force that will tip these institutions one way or another, my bet would be on the cost of government and what we expect our citizens to pay for it. Revaluation is coming next year. The burden of taxation which will be made ever higher with every dollar we spend will be shifted from the business sector to the residential sector. If government spending goes on at the current rate and phase in is adopted by the Legislature, beginning in 2007 and until 2012 we will have double digit tax increases on residential real estate in West Hartford. That process will put such strains on our institutions that their very fabric will be tested.

The Grand List is growing but it is unrealistically...

President Slifka: Mr. Meister I have let you go quite a bit over so if you...

Mr. Meister: I just have another paragraph.

President Slifka: Okay go ahead. I'm just letting you know.

Mr. Meister: This proposed budget while keeping the status quo does not address the urgent needs of our near future. More sacrifices must be made and not just of the taxpayers. George Bernard Shaw once said to be in heaven is to steer, to be in hell is to drift. Let us take some initiative now to steer our ship of state to safer waters rather than drift with the status quo over the falls of a fiscal disaster. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Meister. Next is Carmela Gleed.

Ms. Gleed: Good afternoon. My name is Carmela Gleed and I live at 62 Grove Street. The yearly tax increase is just too much. I would like to buy a cashmere coat but that expenditure keeps going to the bottom of my list. It is time to look at this budget and to make some cuts. For example, last year \$3,500 was spent at Webster Hill School for a fancy, colorful walkway. That expenditure was totally unnecessary. There were yellow school warning signs before approaching the walkway and a traffic cross guard was also stationed there. I hardly ever see this fading colorful walkway until I

am very close to it. The regular broad striped white crossway would have been more than efficient. That \$3,500 could have been spent elsewhere.

At the Board of Education's last hearing, public hearing a woman said any cut in the education budget would damage the children but I say the yearly tax increase will do damage to the elderly. At the last West Hartford Taxpayers Association meeting, a West Hartford resident who teaches history in East Hartford said the children in her class do not have enough books to go around to all the students yet here in West Hartford we have all the bells and whistles. Where is the happy medium? Let us remember that some of West Hartford's children go to private schools and some are home schooled.

I skimmed through the education budget that must be at least four inches thick. We have sixteen schools, seventeen principals and eleven assistant principals. Three of the eleven assistant principals are at Conard and three assistant principals our at Hall High School. Do we really need three assistant principals to the principal? It will cost us yearly \$3,284,948 for principals and assistant principals.

Last summer Barry Feldman was quoted in the Hartford Courant saying the Council members are the policy makers. You are the policy makers so I charge you, the policy makers, with the awesome responsibility of setting a fair budget to all citizens of West Hartford, the children, the workers, and the elderly. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak my mind.

President Slifka: Thank you Ms. Gleed. That concludes our sign up sheet. Is there anybody who did not sign up who wishes to speak? Please come up. Please just state your name and address for the record.

Ms. Holden: Good afternoon distinguished members of the West Hartford Town Council. My name is Lisa Holden and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. I am also a resident of West Hartford. I live at 25 Burr Street right across the parking lot.

I am here today to ask you to continue to support the work of Interval House, a domestic violence program that serves our great town. Allow me to explain a little bit about CCADV. CCADV is a statewide network comprised of eighteen domestic violence programs. Our member programs located throughout the state provide comprehensive direct services for

victims of domestic violence including legal and community advocacy, counseling, shelter and other support services. In addition, CCADV addresses domestic violence statewide through education, legislative reform and public policy. CCADV and our member programs are committed to ending domestic violence by changing the social conditions, beliefs and social actions that perpetuated abuse against women and children.

Today Cecile Enrico, Executive Director of Interval House shared statistics about the number of West Hartford residents served by her program. Interval House serves twenty four towns and is the largest domestic violence service provider for victims. What you may ask yourself is whether domestic violence is really a problem in the great State of Connecticut or the great Town of West Hartford. Last year CCADV's eighteen member programs served over 52,000 victims of domestic violence in this state. Over the past five years we have served 227,000 victims. These are not duplicated numbers.

Unfortunately state and federal funding has not grown incrementally with the increasing numbers of victims who are seeking our services. Over the past three years Interval House has seen a decrease ranging from ten to fifteen percent in federal and state funds that support child advocacy and civil court advocacy. The State Department of Social Services that funds the sixteen shelters in Connecticut has not increased their funds believe it or not over the past fifteen years. Although we did get a modest increase last year during the Legislative session that was to help us accomplish the task of having more staff available at night and on the weekends.

Domestic violence occurs in every town in Connecticut including West Hartford. The best way for West Hartford to address domestic violence is for you to continue to fund Interval House at your highest possible amount. A town that commits to zero tolerance of domestic violence is a town that is dedicated to eradicating one of the worse forms of domestic terrorism.

Lastly, CCADV and Interval House work very closely with the West Hartford Police Department. Chief Strillacci is a true ally and in his role with the Connecticut Police Chiefs Association he has been instrumental in working with us on important issues impacting domestic violence victims such as the need for orders of protection when the courts are closed. Chief Strillacci and CCADV had supported a bill this year that was passed unanimously by the Judiciary Committee.

Please assist Interval House continuing to provide much needed services for your most vulnerable victims. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you Ms. Holden. Again, we have completed the sign up sheet. Is there anyone who did not sign up who wishes to speak? Seeing none we will close the public hearing. There is another one tomorrow night at 6:00 o'clock right here in this very room.

The hearing adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin  
Town Clerk/Council Clerk