

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

**APRIL 4, 2006                      COUNCIL CHAMBERS                      1353**

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President Scott Slifka called the hearing to order at 6:05 p.m.

Present were Councilors Shari Cantor, Barbara Carpenter, Chuck Coursey, Maureen Kelly McClay, Scott Slifka, Art Spada, Carolyn Thornberry and Joseph Verrengia. Councilor Mark Sinatro was absent.

President Slifka: Just by way of a reminder per Council rules you have three minutes to speak. Please state your name and address for the record when you come up and we have one name on the sign up sheet, Jennifer Lopez.

Ms. Lopez: My name is Jennifer Lopez and I reside at 586 South Quaker Lane, West Hartford, Connecticut. I'm the Director at Interval House and a resident of the town. Interval House serves twenty four towns from Avon to Andover and is Connecticut's largest non profit domestic violence intervention program. Interval House is the only domestic violence prevention program that provides services to victims of domestic violence in West Hartford residents.

I am here today to request that the Town of West Hartford assist Interval House with a portion of our cost in the amount of \$7,000 which in the past the town was generous enough to allocate for us to provide these services to the residents of West Hartford. As an advocate at Interval House for the past eighteen years I can say that I have met and assisted many, many victims of domestic violence who turn to Interval House because they fear for their lives and the lives of their children.

I would like to tell you about a journey of one woman who is also a resident of the town. When I first met her she told me that she had been hesitant to call Interval House because her husband had convinced her that nobody would ever believe she had been abused. He had been physically and verbally abusing her for the past three years. She told me that sometimes he kept her up all night yelling and screaming at her knowing that she had to be at work early the following day. He would also hide the keys so she would be late for work. He often told her that because she did not speak any English and he did that if she called the police he would end up being

arrested, she would end up being arrested. She also said that she spent many, many hours crying all night thinking of going to work the next day. I spent many hours explaining divorce and court process to her and supporting her. We also developed a safety plan because she was afraid that when he was served with the divorce papers he would find her and kill her. She did eventually call the police and I'm happy to say that she did not get arrested however, he did. When he was arraigned in the Hartford Criminal Court the Interval House advocates who are housed there provided her with information on the criminal court process, they assisted her in getting a formal protective order. They spoke to the prosecutor on her behalf and kept her informed on the case matters.

She did apply for a divorce and four months later we went to court. Due to fear of retaliation and my past experience we developed a very detailed safety plan for entering, leaving the court and while we were there. Her husband was there watching her every move she made which was very intimidating and threatening to her. He did carry out his threat of humiliating her by telling the court personnel that she was a prostitute and he was ashamed of her. Although not true it was very painful and humiliating. She could not understand how someone could be so cruel. The divorce was final that day. When we left she told me that she could not have made it through the day without someone there to support her. It felt good to know that somebody had made a difference. Unfortunately, her former husband continues to harass her by calling her at work and trying to have her fired. She continues to call us for support and safety planning.

As a resident of West Hartford I have also met other residents who are victims of domestic violence who have the courage to call our hotline. Usually the first question is is the information they share confidential and do they have to pay for our services. They are very relieved to find out that everything that we provide is free and confidential.

In closing, I want to add that it is getting more and more difficult to secure funding for domestic violence. Therefore, we are asking for your support and to please consider this request. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you very much Ms. Lopez. As I had indicated that does conclude the sign up sheet is there anyone who has come in that did not sign up who wishes to speak? Please come up. Again, please just state your name and address for the record.

Mr. Tacy: My name is Bill Tacy. I reside at 17 Craigmoor Road in West Hartford. Ladies and gentlemen you are driving the middle class out of town. In a few years this will be a community of low income people and high income people. Excluding my vehicles, I now pay in excess of \$6,500 a year in taxes to the town. Very conservatively speaking, with a six percent increase in the next five years and a twenty percent up due to revaluation, I will be paying in excess of \$10,000 a year. Quite frankly, I don't think it is worth it and in my particular situation I guess I will have to move out of town where I get more value for money. You need to really take a look at these budgets and make it so that the middle class can stay in this town and enjoy this town.

I read the budget. I know there are all kinds of things that you have very little control over like the cost of energy but it seems to me that, and I'm not even suggesting cutting anything, I'm saying there must be some ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government. We have a lot of talented people in this town, people who have backgrounds in auditing and operational analysis and I'm sure that if they were invited to do so they could probably come up with some ways to better run these particular units and go in and do an operational review and see how things could be done more effectively. Again, I'm not suggesting we cut anything but if I think about in five years when I'm sixty five years old and paying \$10,000 to live here, it is just excessive. Thank you very much for your time.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Tacy. I saw one more hand. Please come up, Mr. Arbuglio.

Mr. Arbuglio: I am representing myself and my brother here tonight. Our names are Joseph and Francis Arbuglio. We reside at 31 Grassmere Avenue. Good evening Town Council members. Taxes are out of control. Good evening to all West Hartford residents here tonight. We are facing the burden of higher taxes in this year's budget. My brother and I would like to state to this Town Council spending has gone out of control on the education and the town budget.

What are you doing to our senior citizens and disabled residents here? You are putting more tax burden on their shoulders which they cannot afford. They are on fixed incomes for the rest of their lives. Many of our senior citizens and disabled residents will have to resort to reverse mortgages on

their homes in order for them to live in their homes and keep their independence or they will lose their homes. What a terrible shame all because of not properly controlling our expenses to run our town.

To our Town Council members is this how we treat our residents mentioned above? If these residents were your parents how would you feel as a Town Council member with this tax budget before you tonight? Down the road our town is paying out \$400,000 to fix a decrepit a University parking lot into three new playing fields at the UCONN Asylum Avenue campus with a ten year renewable lease on this property. Instead, this money should be used for paying our town budget and keep our town services ongoing for everyone and the rest of this money should go for the educational budget.

Our town lives well above its means in many ways. Sports fields will not generate enough income to help our tax budget in line. Donations or money should be used here even paying for the renewable lease not our tax dollars. I do have an idea here. Area businesses have not had their taxes increased in many, many years. It would be something if they would be kind enough to donate money to help us with these sports fields at the UCONN University and we would publish their names and the contributions they make in two town papers, the West Hartford News or the Life. I think this would be a great idea showing that they like doing business in our town and they are willing to support our sports fields.

As elected officials accountability and responsibility is before you. This is your obligation to keep our budget in line and stop wasteful spending here. Cut back these taxes immediately to control our expenses and our tax budget now. I thank you for this time.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Arbuglio. Again, we have concluded the sign up sheet. Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to the subject matter of the hearing? Mr. Jones please come up.

Mr. Jones: David A. Jones, 1795 Boulevard. First, as always, thank you to the Town Council, a fine group of civic minded volunteers and I genuinely as I told you many times I greatly appreciate all the time that you give to this community. A special thank you to Barry Feldman for twenty plus years of dedicated service to this town and I think we all know that we wouldn't be where we are today without all the work that Barry has put in.

I fully appreciate that yours is a very difficult job. You have people like me who come in, questions, concerns and realistically no real solutions whereas you guys have to actually put the pencil to the paper and make the tough decisions. I'm sure we probably agree that any erosion of services in West Hartford would adversely impact the quality of life in our town for years to come but I do also feel that large increases in our property taxes can do the same over an extended period of time just as when you have pollutants released into the air, the pollutants released in any one given year probably have a very minimal impact on the quality of life on this planet twenty years hence. But, the cumulative effect of year, after year, after year, after year of pollutants going into our environment does have a radical impact. I think the same is true of these large tax increases. In any one given year, the tax increase probably is not going to greatly impact where we are twenty years down the road but if we do it year after year, after year, after year, after year we will reach a point in time where we have a real problem.

In the past six years, the property taxes in West Hartford have increased about fifty percent. That's double the increase in personal income for the State of Connecticut and it is actually triple the rate of inflation. Now, let me state clearly. This is absolutely not a criticism of the past six years. In fact, quite the opposite, I think you guys have done a tremendous job. I think this town is in as great a shape as it has ever been and I'm sure if I had an opportunity to analyze expenditures and lost revenue from state and federal governments, and unfunded mandates, and changing demographics in West Hartford and a variety of other things I would probably agree with most of what you have done so don't take this as a criticism of the last six years. It is instead intended to be a warning for the future. If this relationship between the rate of inflation and property tax increases continues into the future, what you are going to find is in eighteen years a family whose income just manages to keep up with the rate of inflation, and that would be a lot of families that just manage to keep up with the rate of inflation, you are going to see the percent of their income that goes to property taxes double meaning if a person currently pays five percent of their income for property taxes, I use that just as an example, in eighteen years, with the trend we have now, that would increase to ten percent of their income.

All I'm saying to you is there has to come a point in time somewhere along the way where one Town Council has to grasp control of this for the future and you are all smart, dedicated people. I know you will do your best. I

know it is a very difficult task but just think about where we are going to be twenty or thirty years from now if at some point in the near future we don't get hold of this. Thanks.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Jones. Again, we have concluded the sign up sheet and is there anyone else who wishes to speak to the subject matter of the hearing? Okay seeing none, we will close the public hearing. Thank you all for coming out.

The hearing adjourned at 6:16 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin  
Town Clerk/Council Clerk