

**MINUTES OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING  
MARCH 28, 2013 2 P.M.  
PROPOSED TOWN BUDGET FY 2013-2014**

President Scott Slifka called the Hearing to order at 2:04 p.m.

President Slifka: Good afternoon we're going to call the two o'clock Public Hearing to order, this is a Hearing on the proposed 2013-2014 FY Budget. Each speaker will have three minutes to speak and we will begin with a roll call please Ms. Labrot?

Present were Councilors: Steve Adler, Shari Cantor, Harry Captain, Leon Davidoff, Burke Doar, Denise Hall, and Scott Slifka. Absent: Judy Casperson and Clare Kindall

President Slifka: Mr. O'Brien has been kind enough to grab the sign up sheet. Our first speaker is Robert Milne.

Mr. Milne: Robert Milne, 3 Osage Road. As a member of this town, I caution anyone who is looking on to this process and considering whether they want to make a contribution to this whole process. The impact that this budget has, obviously through the testimony that I have given year after year, month after month, is disproportionate. It's disproportioned because of the unfair assessment practices that this town has engaged in year after year. I've spoken repeatedly regarding tax shifting, and have clearly, unequivocally without any challenge or any evidence therefore opposed to what I have offered, that in fact wealthy properties are being discounted substantially. Let me give you some examples for you to think about before anyone signs on to this budget. A property August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 a month and a half before re-val, sells for \$206,000. I'm using round numbers. The town decides it's worth \$255,000. Within a month and a half, we go to a re-val, the town increases it about \$49,000. Raises it above the selling price an arms length transaction, and essentially sets aside the reality that this was an arms length transaction, and was purchased for about \$206,000. So it overstates the assessments so think of it in the context that this person's proportion per cap the share of this budget based upon the assessment system, is now skewed – is going to be paying a premium. Let's compare that to another example. I testified and the public should know, the Mayor purchased a property for \$72,500 more than the gross assessment – and the question is, why would the Mayor pay more than the gross assessment? I think he should understand the value of his money, he's lived in West Hartford all of his life, and the likelihood to think the Mayor paid more than what the property was worth, is a little bit of buffoonery. So the question is, why is the Mayor paying more than what the property is worth? It goes to the same simple example, these high end properties and once you get over \$300,000, are being discounted. Anywhere from 10 to 20 percent. Again, another Council person decides to put their property on the market, Councilman Casperson, puts her property on the market for \$565,000 - \$76,000 more than the gross assessment. Aren't you people committed to this town? Why aren't you willing to pay or come up with a system that reflects your commitment because if you are not willing to pay, then how can you stand before these people and ask them to pay a budget increase or pass on any kind of budget increase, that has nothing to do with any per capita or any reality that in fact is unfair assessment system. Even Councilman Doar's street, I've testified repeatedly, a property comes on the market...

President Slifka: Mr. Milne, your time has expired. Mr. Milne your time expired. Next speaker is Linda DiNapoli.

Ms. DiNapoli: Good afternoon. Linda DiNapoli, 214 Mohegan Drive, quick frankly, fellow citizens, it's impossible to put anything on the table here because you come in, they don't give you enough time – it's interesting because if you'll watch video on demand, you will see the Mayor gives a lot of time to people who are of his like. We have a wealth of information from the town itself, Mr. Milne and I, but due to the time constraints we are constantly banged off, cut off, whatever. If they weren't hiding anything they would just let us speak our minds. The real estate assessment system is regressive in structure, favoring owners of high value properties, phased in percentages over the five year period, did not approach 20% per year per Mr. Van Winkle. He made that statement at a previous forum. Many property owners are paying tax of 100% on the revaluation amount, while many higher value properties were paying a low of 18% over the same period. Are you listening Elmwood? All of Mr. Milne's information on this subject is correct and accurate, and we are both willing to explain it to you. Please contact us, we aren't hiding. The West Hartford Taxpayers Association knew this and allowed themselves to be marginalized by the Town Manager and the Town Council and pretty much disappeared from the process with one representative showing up after a long absence. Many of us come here to educate our children and we owe it to those generations that follow, the same quality of school and benefits. Bishops Corner, my neighborhood, and Mr. Milne's in fact, I am very proud of, has been very strong in supporting the education part of the budget. There's a direct relationship ladies and gentlemen, between tax and schools and home values. So, you need to really come in here, get the brief, there will be another budget forum on April 11<sup>th</sup>, unfortunately our Public Relations person neglected to advertise this until I decided that I would get going with her. There's no system of temporary CO's to CO's which allowed some individuals to pay no or way undervalued taxes for years on properties with low or no assessments. The police and fire departments in my opinion, are misusing overtime while wrongfully improving their wage base for retirement purposes all the while, the West Hartford pensions are under funded by 56% according to a number that was published in the Hartford Courant. There is a public employment agency here in West Hartford, and I call that the Police Department private duty fund. They send people over to businesses, homes, etc. and the policy is that they're supposed to bill. They do bill this, but guess what? Nobody collects it, except from the private citizens. I am a private citizen who paid, why didn't BJ's pay? Why don't the other corporations pay? I have FOI'd this information and there are no payments by these organizations up to the time when I FOI'd it.. OK. Those of you who were flooded and trapped by recent storms – why don't' you ride around and check the sewers...sewer drains.

President Slifka: Ms. DiNapoli your time has expired.

Ms. DiNapoli: Well, I'm not done. (Talking off microphone)

President Slifka: Ms. DiNapoli you are done, and please sit down. Your time has expired Ma'm. The Council's asking where the police are. (Ms. DiNapoli is speaking off microphone) Ms. DiNapoli, if you don't sit down, I am going to be forced to get the West Hartford Police department. If you don't sit down, I am going to be forced to call the West

Hartford Police Department right now. Mr. Manager, please go summon the Police Department. I'm sorry it's come to this for everybody who is here. (President calls for immediate recess).

2:20 p.m. Public Hearing Resumes

President Slifka: We are going to reconvene the hearing and I regret that it came to that. We will return to the sign up sheet and the next speaker is George Kennedy, and George I'll pre-empt your request by noting you get five minutes in your capacity as President of the Taxpayers Association.

Mr. Kennedy: Good afternoon, my name is George Kennedy and I live at 19 Waterside Lane, West Hartford, CT and I have lived there since 1951 with my parents, and then with my wife and kids. Presently, oh and by the way, I want to commend you guys on a budget – you know we always saying negative things, in terms of money, cuz we're cheap, but at the same time, you guys did a pretty good job this year. Anyway, presently, West Hartford has an absolutely foolish project in progress..the bus way, which I know most of you don't support. In my opinion, the bus way project only started because the State couldn't resist federal dollars. It created jobs – I used to work in Economic Development – what would the cost of one of those jobs be? Astronomical. I believe the same impetus is pushing the proposed Charter Oak project – free State dollars, but not the need and merit of the project. Now those irresistible State dollars are shaping our local decisions, and this is wrong. Remember the World Language program grant? Two years, the grant runs out, and then West Hartford Tax payers have to pay for those extra teachers – which my understanding at one point was, nearly 54 teachers. And do the kids really learn a language in two hours a week? No. Most educators I know have said absolutely not. Don't get me wrong, we need state education support, but we need those dollars directly and for our discretionary use, not specific sweetheart projects determined by the State. As a taxpayer, I ask that you don't support the proposed Charter Oak School Project. We don't need it, and we really can't afford it. The Board of Education – one of their reports, page 133, indicates that over ten years we're gonna have 661 less students, and 240 next year. It says on the bottom line of the first paragraph, "We are projecting we have adequate space at all school levels throughout the ten year forecast period". Why on earth do we need another school? So we can ultimately turn it into a condo? And I'm not being sarcastic – several of our schools have gone that route. Or, sell it, like to Solomon Schaecter. Once approved and built, Charter Oak will require more staff, additional energy costs, and for transporting cross town twelve new busses to transport students which at 60,000 dollars a bus is over \$700,000 plus the annual bond cost. Why? The Board of Education as I said, itself projects 240 students next year and over 600 in the ensuing couple of years. We don't need another school. It was Dr. List who I believe said, "This is the final piece of the educational puzzle"..let's wake up, there is never any last piece of the puzzle in the educational industry. And believe me, it is an industry. I grew up in it. The US educational effort has basically failed our children in terms of test results. The US ranked 25<sup>th</sup> in the world, and doesn't appear to be improving much. Educators are desperate to find the key just keep developing new programs and facilities to see what works. New buildings are not a solution. In the final analysis, they are only a testament to the wealth of a town, and a monument to the administration. Buildings don't teach kids – teachers and parents do. And unfortunately, as a society, and parents, we

don't parent as well as we need to. We don't support our teachers enough, and as parents we don't think to separate the educational wheat from the chaff. We appear to value athletics and feel good programs over core basic educational programs – as an example, reading, writing, and arithmetic. That's what they need. Does anybody as an aside remember the "WHIMP" program – the math program in West Hartford? Well, it was a great program and it's dead! My daughter went through it and my daughter was a really good student – she was liked, and she got good marks, and when we went for the parent thing, and I think it was January – we found out that she was three months behind. My daughter three months behind? Oh what happened? It was just amazing, so I took the bull by the horns, and what did I do? Sat down talked to her, didn't yell at her, didn't do anything like that. I said I will pick you up tomorrow night after school – I picked her up and went to Marholin-Lane and went down to buy a bike and said "Which one"? She picked one out. She said, "Thank you Daddy"...no no, unless that's finished by the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, you don't get the bike. Guess what? The first of May I was buying the bike! This is parental involvement. When I went to high school here, kids that got A's got \$5 and \$10 for it. This was normal. This is how you get kids incentivized. Either that or plain fear, but you get involved. Anyway, thank you very much.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Kennedy. As a friend I was tempted to ask you – did you only teach your daughter subtraction? Thank you Mr. Kennedy.  
Next speaker is Judy Allen.

Ms. Allen: My name is Judy Allen, I live at 25 Fowler Drive in West Hartford and I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding the Town Budget. It might be unusual to hear that I'm suggesting two important increases to the budget and one cost saving measure. The first has to do with the budget for the Town Planning and Zoning division. I would like to propose that money be allocated for continuing education for our Town Planner, especially education about climate change and its impact on Town Planning. I wish you could have been with me last night at a panel discussion on climate change. It was at Yale and Senator Blumenthal was there and two professors from the Yale school of Forestry and Environmental studies. Their message was very clear. We are already in the midst of climate change crisis, and it's happening rapidly. When you and I walk out the door each day, we don't see climate change – that doesn't mean it's not happening. Here in West Hartford, we may not be experiencing some of the crises, but if we wait until we are, it's too late. Weather doesn't care if you are a Republican or a Democrat, the storm comes and wipes you out no matter what. Weather is not discriminatory. Some of what climate change may bring us is warmer weather, so warmer winters, and that might sound good for the snow removal budget, but increased precipitation and rain increases rain runoff, it can increase chances for floods, increase erosion, run off from lawns treated with pesticides, and fertilizers entering waterways, threats to drinking water, greater saturation of our soil, and potential changes to the water table. So that's why I think we need to implement that. My second suggestion has to do with the cost of our electric power. Most of you were present when I, Reverend Carr and Jeff Howard presented information about TransCanada – their relationship with tar sand mining and Keystone XL pipeline. The cost of our electric power needs to be measured in more than just dollars and cents. There is a high cost in obtaining power from a source that exploits people and natural resources. We acknowledge that low cost cheap products coming from places like China that are made from labor

practices that exploit workers is wrong. Foods and products we import from other countries that are labeled "Free Trade" means these products were manufactured, harvested in sustainable ways and the workers created these foods and products that are insured a fair wage. Trans Canada is not Fair Trade – did I run out of time?

President Slifka: Just about – if you could wrap up we'd appreciate it.

Ms. Allen: The last bullet – the cost cutting measure has to do with not using any town money to purchase single use bottled water. The State made a lot of money on that – we're not gonna do that, but maybe enough to pay for the continuing education for the Town Planner. I wrote it out too.

President Slifka: If you get us a copy, we'd appreciate that. Thank you Judy. That concludes the sign up sheet – is there anyone that did not sign up who wishes to speak? If not, then we will close the public hearing and note that there is another public hearing on the budget scheduled for April 11, at 6 p.m. in this same room. Thank you and have a good afternoon.

Public Hearing closed at 2:30 p.m.



Essie S. Labrot  
Town Clerk/Council Clerk

**APPROVED AT APRIL 11, 2013 TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**