

MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 1991-1992 BUDGET

March 26, 1991

Conard High School

1338

President Sandy F. Klebanoff called the hearing to order at 7:30 p.m.

President Klebanoff: In an attempt to make our procedures a little bit clearer, the Town Council and specifically its Rules Committee has promulgated a set of procedures which I will take just a minute to read and we hope that these procedures will spell out clearly the way we are going to conduct the public hearing this evening. A sign up sheet was provided and if anyone has not seen it it is here and please feel free to come and sign up. Speakers will be called in order from the sign up sheet provided that only those persons who have not addressed the Council on the issues subject to the hearing shall be called. Unless the Council waives its rules by a two-thirds vote, only West Hartford residents or taxpayers may address the Council. After each person on the sign up sheet has spoken, the President shall call on other persons who have not yet spoken who wish to address the Council. Each speaker shall limit his or her comments to items on the notice of the hearing. All speakers shall be confined to three minutes each except that persons providing the Council with a group's duly authorized position on an issue may speak for up to five minutes. A question was asked yesterday at our first public hearing as to what constitutes a group. I suspect that we will not have an overwhelming number of folks speaking on behalf of bogus groups and so I don't think that will be a problem. We will interpret that in a rather liberal form. Speakers may not yield their allotted time to others in order for others to expand their three minutes. If anyone has a question or questions we will at the end of his or her three minutes have the Town Manager attempt to answer any or all of those questions.

The other thing I do want to point out is that a suggestion was made yesterday and has been implemented as of this evening. Ladies and gentlemen we have a stop watch and Mrs. Cronin, our Clerk, has graciously volunteered to alert me when a speaker's three or five minutes are up. Do we have a sign up sheet? Thank you. Will the Clerk please call the roll.

Present were Councilors Linda I. French, Tom Johnson, Sandy F. Klebanoff, Charles R. Matties, Madeline S. McKernan, Joseph A. O'Brien, Larry Price, Fran Reynolds and Andy Schatz.

President Klebanoff: The first speaker to sign up is Richard Benton. If you would please come to the podium and

give us your name and address for the record.

Mr. Benton: My name is Richard Benton and I live at 14 Rockwell Place in West Hartford and with your permission I would like to address the Council on the subject of the West Hartford Library. Some of you will remember the observation on the university made by the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle. He said and I quote, "the true university of these days is a collection of books". One sees this contention in relation to the Englishman Cardinal Newman's conception of education as an enlargement of the mind. One may realize that classroom learning or learning at home and classroom learning from the elementary grades to the college or university is simply one stage in the total process of the education which produces and enlargement of mind. In other words, Newman's enlargement of mind surely requires the further expiration of whatever subject we pursue in a classroom or at home. It requires the additional reading of many books and periodicals besides the text in which teachers assign our lessons. Some additional reading, such additional reading requires the use of a relatively large library such as public library and Newman's enlargement of mind requires a substantial collection of books and I hardly need mention that the educated citizens, that is large minded citizens are indispensable to a well regulated, prosperous and vibrant society especially a democratic society such as ours. Therefore, despite the present hard times and the budget crunch in our town, an economic condition that prevails in most of the towns in our State and throughout New England as you well know, I urge the authorities and you the Council of our State, of West Hartford rather, to not curtail the present fine services of our libraries. Although our libraries are a good source of entertainment for many of our citizens, that is hardly why they are indispensable. Their indispensable function lies with the opportunity they provide to our citizens to enlarge their minds. So, we would do well perhaps to ask ourselves how much do we as a community care about good books and how much do we spend on other things such as our automobiles and to re-phrase then, the famous words of the learned Englishman Sir Francis Bacon, if conversation makes a ready man or woman and writing an exact man or woman, broad reading should make a full man or woman. I thank you very much for your attention.

President Klebanoff: Thank you for elevating the level of our debate this evening. The next speaker is Bob Curran.

Mr. Curran: Bob Curran, 6 Burnham Drive, affiliated with the Burnham Drive Homeowners Association. I guess you can call us a group. We have been called many things but I guess I can take a group. I have four points to make tonight. First, the group appreciates the change in budget process this year or its perception of change. Whereas in

the past the process was one of perceived as pre-decision and exclusion, this year's process has been one of openness and inclusion which we appreciate.

One point we still feel is missing, though, and that is there hasn't been a lot of talk about the vision for the town or if it has it is one that we have missed and any strategies that would go about in achieving that vision. Now, in doing so this will help bring about a partnership with the residents of the town as we all struggle to make it through these difficult times. I know many years ago we all contributed to the Town Plan of Development and I recall that as a very comprehensive exercise in getting two groups together and maybe we should expect no less from the budget process.

A third point we would like to make is that the recession is one that we hopefully will be short term. We hope that short term decisions won't be made that will have long term negative impacts. We feel possibly we could have made a better call at predicting that the recession was going to come around but hopefully again this is a short term. With that we hope you use terms like down size instead of eliminate. Higher user fees versus cut out. Reduce the scope versus close down. Let's keep the services in place but reduce the scope or magnitude. In this way the restoration of these services, when the economy does improve, will be easier.

In a positive note, the recession has forced the town to review all processes and services. We have been forced to ask ourselves whether everything is needed and are the original objectives of a service still relevant many years later. This review in itself is a positive one with any government as it will keep the town progressive and in tune with the changing times and finally in a recession, a tremendous amount of pressure is placed on the town's Human Services programs. In times like these, the town must provide for the needs of all its residents especially those who are impacted greatly by the recession. It should be the primary mission of this government and if it requires down sizing of programs and higher user fees to achieve this main objective, then so be it. The message must be clear that the human needs of all West Hartford residents must be a high priority in this budget process. Thank you very much.

President Klebanoff: Thank you, Mr. Curran. The next speaker is Allen Hoffman.

Mr. Hoffman: Allen Hoffman, 366 Ridgewood Road. Madam Mayor, Council, I would just like to start my remarks with a quotation if I might from the West Hartford News, September 20, 1990. The quotation is from the Mayor and the Minority Leader and I quote "contrary to what has been stated, we are

Public Hearing  
March 26, 1991  
1991-1992 Budget

not facing major tax increases next year, fiscal year 1991-92." Just as a point of departure, if we take what the Manager has presented to the Council last week, the number given to the Council at that time was 13%. I think anyone in this room including all those seated on the stage would say that is a major tax increase. Putting that aside, what I would like to concentrate on for the remainder of the time that I do have is what the Manager has given to the Council which is a print out called Reshaping Town Services to Meet Residents Expectations, dated March 12, 1991. That was presented to the Council prior to receiving the whole budget.

What is interesting in the budget, in this document is not what is in the document but what is not in the document. What is in the document under history of town budgets is a graph showing the CPI tied into the town side of the budget. Absolutely on target, 4%, 4%, no one is arguing. What is not there is the School side and that is half the budget. Capital outlay increases according to the document town side down 28%. What is not there capital outlay Board of Education up 29%. Revenue constraints include \$3.8 million referred to by the Town as 3.8, that is the loss, the expected loss of State grants. All the School publications include the number 4.8, that is confusing and that makes more problems for more people and the confusion just multiplies. Economic constraints are itemized in the document. What is not there is a total, the total would knock your socks off. It is \$1.7 million. That is a short fall. Last year's short fall almost \$2 million not alluded to.

The missing education overhead \$3.8 million. Discussion took place yesterday at the previous Council hearing whether the Town Council should accept that or the School Board should accept that. My question is not who....

Mrs. Cronin: Three minutes has elapsed. Is Mr. Hoffman speaking for a group?

President Klebanoff: Mr. Hoffman you are not speaking on behalf of a group are you?

Mr. Hoffman: No.

President Klebanoff: Thank you. Believe it or not that exhausts the sign up sheet. Is there anyone who has not spoken who would like to address the Council at this time and if so I will start on my right. Nobody. Perhaps somebody who has already spoken would like to add to their remarks. This is very surprising.

Someone in Audience: Why don't you let him finish?

5.

President Klebanoff: I asked him if he would like to return. Anybody who would like to speak. Well, hearing none, I will adjourn the public hearing and I do thank you for coming.

The hearing adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin  
Recording Secretary

*Legal appeared in West Hartford News March 14, 1991*