

## **MINUTES OF WEST HARTFORD PUBLIC HEARING**

### **PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2010-2011 BUDGET**

**APRIL 8, 2010 LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER**

President Scott Slifka called the Public Hearing to order at 6:03 p.m.

President Slifka: Good evening. We're going to call the Public Hearing to order. This is the Public Hearing on the West Hartford Fiscal Year 2010-2011 Proposed Budget. Begin with a roll call please, Ms. Labrot.

Present were Councilors Steven Adler, Tim Brennan, Shari Cantor, Judy Casperson, Leon Davidoff, Rob Durbin, Denise Hall, Scott Slifka and Joe Verrengia.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Labrot. We're going to proceed to the sign up sheet. As you know, this is the second of our Public Hearings on the Budget and we are adopting the Budget on Monday, April 26 in this room at 7:00. We are going to begin with... Oh, and to all the speakers when you come up it's the...most of you I know we've seen...the usual rules. If you could state your name and address for the record and you have 3 minutes unless you're representing a particular group in which case you have 5 so we'll begin with John Joyce.

Mr. Joyce: John Joyce, 170 South Main Street. Surely this budget process is the classic enigma wrapped in a mystery. How is one to understand how such sincere and intelligent people staffing the educational administration and the Board of Education can go on year after year proposing unsustainable budgets? I wonder. Do you? The administration largely consists of one-time teachers turned principals and then administrators. They have distinct and firm loyalties. They have the cultivated preferential biases that dominate their choices and limit their adaptability. Although aware of the financial crisis these preferences and biases, well-intended and honorable as they are, enable them to deny the very perception of financial peril. We made sacrifices last year. It is time to rebuild, to recoup, to expand. There is no other option. An analogy would be similar to the crisis for pro-American Vietnamese refugees at the time of the fall of Hanoi. Remember the images of families rushing up to the top of the American Embassy to get aboard the last chopper? The chopper is full, yet an empathetic, compassionate airman yells over the roar of the rotary blades one more family of three. You are next in line with your family. There are five of you. You do not want to be separated from your family yet many, if not all, will not survive should they stay. How does one decide? Imagine the prospect of making such a choice. The dilemma is excruciating, agonizing, yet it demands a decision. This is the position of the town's current educational system's budget crisis. The airman raises his voice again. We are lifting off! Quickly! I will take only three more people! The mother decides. The father decides. Karen List is in the role of the mother. The Board of Education is in the role of the father. Heart-throbbing

anxiety, pounding headaches. The airman decides. You, you and you! Council, you are in the role of the airman. Save the administration and the Board of Education from once again having to make a choice that they are unable to make. Do not despair. Trust in the innovation of our community and the best interests of our citizens to provide the best education for its children. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Joyce. The next speaker is Walter Galuszka and we're putting a second sign up sheet out there for those who may have missed the first.

Mr. Galuszka: Good evening ladies and gentleman. I'm Walter Galuszka and I live at 324 Oakwood Avenue in the Elmwood section of town. The reason I'm here this evening is because a couple of weeks ago I saw an article in one of the local weekly newspapers concerning cutting the budgets of the Police Department with regard to the Community Interaction Team and the Bicycle Patrol Unit and also there was some reference to the fact that Fire Station #1 on Prospect Street was going to be closed and I think it's very important for all of us to understand that public safety, police and fire services, are one of the reasons why we all moved here and why we live here, why we do business here, why we invite visitors to our community and without these specialized units and fire support it would be much more difficult for us to feel comfortable and safe here in West Hartford. I'm not going to bore you with specific statistics about the Community Interaction Team but I can say that just by the nature of this unit of three patrol officers and a supervising sergeant they are proactive. They are crime suppression. They sit out there, day shift three days a week and second shift between 3:30 and 11:30 when there are a large number of criminals sifting their way across the town line into West Hartford and they do crime suppression. They are out there observing and stopping street crime whether it's New Britain Avenue, Prospect Street, Albany Avenue, Route 44 or any other area that provides access to our town, these officers are there. They do not respond call to call where they are occupied with what could be described as routine police responsibilities of automobile accidents, medical calls, various administrative duties that they're responsible for doing. They're kind of like the Marine Corp of the Police Department, watching. Through their experience... The officers I understand themselves have between 7 and 9 years police experience. Their supervisor, Sergeant Clark has 13 years of law enforcement experience so they know what to watch out for and they jump on it. I've seen this with my own eyes many times. They have made 1100 arrests in 2008 and 2009 which is a substantial number for four officers and a supervisor. Seven hundred and thirty of them have been felonies, serious felonies. They've seized over \$300,000 worth of cash, stolen goods. They've recovered almost 4500 bags of illegal heroin.

President Slifka: Excuse me, Mr. Galuszka. You've gone over the 3 minute line. Can you wrap up?

Mr. Galuszka: Well I'll make it brief. I think their assistance to other agencies on the federal and state level are something that we cannot afford to reduce. This isn't a luxury. It's a necessity to ensure the safety and the peace of all the residents and businesspersons in our community so please support the continuation of the police and fire budgets, particularly in those areas and I'd like to thank Mr. Brennan, also Mrs. Cantor and let me

see, who else was it? Mrs. Hall who acknowledged my correspondence to them and I'm scratching my head about the rest of you all who didn't even acknowledge the fact that I had sent you a brief communication about the importance of this issue. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Galuszka. The next speaker is Sandra Brook.

Ms. Brook: Hi, my name is Sandra Brook. I live at 32 Winchester Drive. We have lived there for over 40 years. I think that the Town of West Hartford and the Board of Ed should have the same budgeted monies to spend as they had last year. This coming year they should practice restraint as most of us have had to do including many of the neighborhood towns. Today's poor economy, the many of us that are unemployed and past built-in raises and benefits to town employees and teachers are causing town residents to leave our community due to severe tax increases in the past few years. The Board of Education budget has gone up 61 percent in 10 years. How many of you have gotten a 61 percent raise in the last 10 years? Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Brook. The next speaker is George Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy: Good evening. Excuse me, Mayor. I came here officially. Five minutes?

President Slifka: I'm sorry. I...I forgot to acknowledge it but I thought we had an understanding at this point but for the record Mr. Kennedy is representing the West Hartford Taxpayer's Association so he will get 5 minutes.

Mr. Kennedy: Thank you. My name is George Kennedy. I live at 19 Waterside Lane. I'm the President of the West Hartford Taxpayer Association. I've been a resident since 1951. Avon's demonstration the other day was really impressive. Now look what the Avon Finance Board, which we're advocating we have here, did last night. They did their duty and they reduced the budget by over a million dollars with probably more to come. Last Thursday I attended the Board of Education Budget Forum. What an experience. A Woodstock love-fest. I mean, there was no marijuana or cheap wine smell but everything else was there. After the Chair had said... Afterwards the Chair said that the parents have spoken. Perhaps yes, but we have yet to hear from the rest of the taxpayers. The forum was truly amazing. There were kids singing and dancing, adults testifying that cutting world language would be a major educational loss and, of course, at least half of the audience were teachers theoretically fighting to maintain world languages on behalf of the kids but were they there to retain their jobs? The Board should be ashamed of itself for allowing and facilitating such self-serving blatant pandering instead of objectively seeking all opinions, thereby representing all of the taxpayers. That Forum was nothing but a stage show. It's disgraceful that the Board of Educations allows and facilitates the propagandizing and the use of fear tactics to move their agenda forward. It may be good politics but these tactics are smarmy. Education and our kids are the losers when the Board of Education stifles dissent from its members and pursues utopian dreams while avoiding cost-effective basic decisive leadership. The proof is in the results. However, the Board has successfully created a full employment program with little accountability to anyone and declining results. Tactics like this are not used in the

WTA and I, as President, will not allow them. You may not like our position but we have more integrity. Parents should be outraged that the school administration and the Board of Education use the tactics of duplicity and half-truths. To further insult the taxpayers and the Town Council the Board of Education initial cuts were less than 25 percent in the staff-approved budget. That was not even a cut. Again, it was a slap in the face. Where is the Board of Education's accountability to all the taxpayers? When additional cuts are suggested from staff they usually put programs on the table that are popular with the parents and never address the real costs which are an excessive number of employees and rich benefits - an empire unto itself. And just in from the West Hartford News this afternoon, I'm sure you all read it, a quote - "There is a time for politicking and a time for governing." It goes on to say the no vote was driven by political considerations, not governing considerations. Gee, that's an excellent thought. The only problem is exactly when are the Board of Education lockstep Democrats going to try governing? That no vote took more guts than the gutless yes vote. But then again, if we vote no how are we going to get reelected and that's their job. Over the past 10 years our education budget has grown 61 percent. It represents a disproportionate growing share of our budget. Costs are up but where are the results? The main beneficiaries of the present process are the Board of Education employees, not the kids and certainly not the taxpayers. The Board's agenda fails to balance educational needs and expectations with the reality of the recession and how much the taxpayers can reasonably be expected to pay. Contractual teacher's salaries and benefits are the bulk of the budget. Add tenure, job invulnerability and no compromise union mentality and we have a budget impasse and we, the taxpayers, end up the losers. This year we have a 6 million dollar revenue loss. Next year a 12 million is projected. This year we could face a 6 percent increase. Next year it could be as much as 16 percent. This is unsustainable. To change this same-old, same-old culture we need you, the Town Council, to really represent all of the taxpayers, not primarily parents with schoolchildren. We vote too. Rolling over to Board of Education demands is retarding educational progress. Approving the same tired programs with increase cost each year deflects the ability to seek innovation and staff and benefits realignment and streamlining that we desperately need. Same-old, same-old getting our kids ready for the global world where they are going to have to live isn't working. Just make your budget decisions based on the reality of Town finance and say no to this increase. It is immoral to literally tax people out of their homes. This very country was founded because of the taxation issue. Good schools support home values but high and increasing property taxes will depress home values. As taxes continue to rise our demographic balance will change, home values will drop, new residents will replace empty-nesters and arrive with more children, further increasing the student population. Educational and service...

President Slifka: Mr. Kennedy, you've exceeded 3 minutes. If you could wrap up please.

Mr. Kennedy: Okay. But the...

President Slifka: The 5 minutes. It was 5 minutes. I apologize.

Mr. Kennedy: Okay. But the question - if the empty nesters leave, who's going to pay the bills? Now is the time for the Town Council to tell the Board of Education to reduce

the budget to no increase over last year. There are many areas that can be cut without impacting programs. Passage of this budget will leave the WTA no choice but to mount a referendum which should be charged to the Board of Education budget. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy. Our next speaker I regret I am unable to read the last name but it's a doctor and the address is 34 Jillian Circle.

Dr. Dougherty: Dr. Anthony Dougherty.

President Slifka: Thank you. If we could have you state that again for the record please sir.

Dr. Dougherty: Dr. Anthony Dougherty, 34 Jillian Circle, West Hartford. Pardon me if I stumble through this but I just wrote a few notes here. Thank you for allowing me this time to speak. I've been a resident here of West Hartford for 47 years and I was an anesthesiologist at St. Francis Hospital for 33 years and I probably gave anesthesia to some of your mothers when they had you or some of you. Anyway, I never grumbled for all those years about paying my property taxes even though all of our six children went to parochial schools. I feel that real estate is an asset that doesn't provide current income. The elderly get no raises. They are mostly living on a fixed income and their investment incomes have been hit very hard in the past few years. I attended local schools in a small mining town in northeastern Pennsylvania with a population of 8000. The education was reading, writing and arithmetic and following graduation I went to the University of Scranton and I struggled because my education was just the basics but when I got to the University it was higher math and higher physics and organic chemistry, etc... But anyway, with a lot of study I got through it. Recently I watched the Larry King show on television and he felt along with a psychiatrist there that a lot of our children are being spoon-fed now and most of their time is spent on Pokemon and all these other things plus the computer and watching the Board of Education the other night one of the people there said that oh, we have to provide an extra two hours for studying for these students that can't study when they go home. Well I think that's a lot of bull and a lot of it has to do with the parents. I think the parents should help their children study when they go home. I know I did with my kids so... I've been watching the budget increases in the other towns, especially the school budgets, and it seems that most of these towns are trying to keep it down around 2 percent increase over what they had last year if not less. In fact, Manchester I think yesterday they said that they're increasing it only by 1.6 or 1.8. I'm not sure of the figures. You're our town leaders. You're elected to make tough decisions and you can't keep passing on expenses to the residential property owners. I can't remember ever seeing a Grand List of the top ten payers in the town. I watch the Council and the Board of Education on Tuesdays when you have your meetings and I try to watch it all the time.

President Slifka: Mr. Dougherty, I'm sorry. You're a little over the 3 minutes. If you could just wrap it up. I'm sorry, Dr. Dougherty - my apologies.

Dr. Dougherty: I watched the Board of Education meeting the other night and I came away feeling that the Chairperson of that meeting was very arrogant when she was talking to the minority and also there was a Chinese member of the Board of Education who sort of said well, it's my turn and she...the Chairperson says, "You'll wait. It's my turn." And I thought that was a little off. You know? Anyway, thank you for the time.

President Slifka: Thank you, Dr. Dougherty. The next speaker is Francis Arbuglio.

Mr. Arbuglio: Okay, sorry. My name is Francis Arbuglio. I represent my brother also too who lives at 31 Grassmere Avenue, West Hartford. Speaking about this new budget you people are going to come about I'd like to offhand if you people emphasize the 1.5 percent tops at the most cause people are out of work. People having a hard time...seem to be having hard times. Us too the assessment of property - at least postpone it to 2013. I mean, you can't keep hitting people's pockets like this. People are just struggling, trying to keep aboard. I'd also like to make a suggestion that why these Town Meetings aren't broadcasted on the town radio station because people can't afford cable TV. I mean, they're struggling now as it is. I think people...residents pay tax in this town, they should know really what's going on. Okay. Thank you very much for this time.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Arbuglio. Just so we're clear, cause we are on TV tonight. If I could have Mr. Van Winkle clarify, I believe the town radio station such as the one that exists is really for emergency purposes and transmits only emergency messages in case of a catastrophe and it doesn't carry programming but thank you for the suggestion. I assume I was correct, Mr. Van Winkle? You're nodding? Okay. The next speaker is Kathy Wilson.

Ms. Wilson: Kathy Wilson, 39 Montclair Drive. I've lived in West Hartford for 33 years. My children, now adults, went through the schools. Many of you already know me as an advocate for high quality education...continued high quality education in town. I'd like to talk tonight about a lesson that I took away from the debate about world language in the schools and whether to keep the program or not in part or in whole. I was originally skeptical back a number of years ago when world language was reinstated in the elementary schools. It was taken away when my kids were in elementary school back in the early 90s and I was skeptical about it because it was grant funded and I knew the grants were going to end and that's what's happened and now the town is on the hook to pay for it and I thought well, maybe this does have to be cut because we simply do not have the money to fund this. Then I listened to the parents who came to the podium to talk about the program and the value that they believe that it brought to their children and I listened to the teachers who talked about the science that indicates that world language not only gives children the skill in the language and the global perspective that learning about another culture provides but it also improves their academic achievement in other subjects so I changed my mind and in changing my mind about world language I began to think about the other programs that are often characterized as frills, not just on the education side but on the town side - the brick sidewalks, the planters, the fancy street lights, Quest, music programs, all-day kindergarten, etc., etc., etc., and this is the conclusion I came to. I don't think these things are frills and I think characterizing them

as such is a huge mistake for a town to make. Most towns in this state...every town in this state offers basic services - fire, police in one form or another, basic services like that. The thing that distinguishes West Hartford is not the basic services we offer but the other things we offer. It's what makes this town special. It's what attracts people, new people who come here who choose West Hartford, people who came from California, from all over the world because of the education in West Hartford, because of things like Blue Back Square, another thing that was characterized as a frill when it was being debated a few years ago. These things are investments in the strength of our town. They're not frills. They're the things that attract people here, that make this town a special place to live in. Now my husband and I are both retired now. We could basically live anywhere. We choose to stay here for the same reasons we came here in the first place. This is a great place to live. These things that we spend money on, these so called frills, are investments in keeping this town attractive, in keeping our brand, if you will, strong and without new blood, without the new families coming into this town everybody's property values will fall and West Hartford will go the way of so many other intermarrying suburbs that lose confidence in themselves, lose the confidence of their residents... It's the kind of civic pride that we have in this town that shows in the way we take care of this town and in the way we fund our schools that keeps this place strong and keeps it a good place to live and I'd like you to support both the education budget and the town budget for those reasons. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mrs. Wilson. The next speaker is William Tacy.

Mr. Tacy: My name is Bill Tacy. I live at 17 Craigmoor Road in West Hartford. Mr. Mayor, esteemed Council Members, fellow taxpayers, I am here to discuss the proposed budget for the Town of West Hartford. First let me praise the Town Manager for managing town services efficiently and effectively. Expenses have been controlled while at the same time providing a high level of services. In fact, in my opinion services are better than they were when I moved here in the 80s despite all the things that have been done to try to...that were perceived to be cuts. They actually improved the process in my opinion. At that time the town budget and the education budget were about the same. Today the education budget is far higher than the town budget and the difference is accelerating each year. This is in spite of any material improvement in results. The education budget is too high and has been for some time. A few years back I stood here before you to suggest the use of a citizen's audit. Since then others have stood here suggesting the same. The response has been one of disinterest. This year consideration was given to having a paid audit but was rejected over costs. I have been in the audit profession for 39 years. During that time I observed that every successful company performs internal operational reviews or, when needed, have contracted with outside consultants to perform this function. Some companies have used a variation of the operational review process. They have called it reengineering. The difference is that with reengineering the review is largely performed by those responsible for the process and the people that actually perform the function. Reengineering requires the use of audit resources but the difference is the auditor acts as the facilitator and the employees drive the process. In conclusion, to the Board of Education I would say this - please find innovative ways to cut costs this year and use audits in the future to find ways to use

resources more efficiently and effectively. To the Town Council I would say reject the budget as too high and send it back to the Board of Education. To the Town Manager and his direct reports, keep up the good work and thank you for a job well-done. That's all.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Tacy. The next speaker is Mary Fleischli.

Ms. Fleischli: Good evening. My name is Mary Fleischli and I live at 28 Brunswick Avenue. I am the President of West Hartford First, the organization that supported the budget in the last two referendums. First I want to commend you for all the work you have done on this year's budget and especially the executive summaries, benchmarks, comparisons to other towns and all the Budget Forums. All of your efforts have made me comfortable with the budget and that the increases, while unpleasant, are unavoidable, mostly driven by pensions and health insurance costs and contractually obligated salary increases. I don't see any additions or fat. You've already instituted hiring freezes and cut much from the budget last year and I continue to see cuts being made this year as well. To reduce the cost of the current budget services would need to be cut even more and I do not support more cuts. Just like many West Hartford residents I bought a house here 11 years ago because of the great educational system and I'm happy to say that the educational experience has exceeded my expectations and while I moved here for education I also want to say that I appreciate the many great town services that West Hartford has to offer and that make it such a nice place to live. The quick-responding police and fire departments that are involved in our community, the Elmwood Community Center, Leisure Services and the excellent libraries. So I come here tonight requesting that you continue to preserve the quality education system in our town, our safety and the level of town services. When I see cuts proposed to the police department or a proposal to close the Prospect Avenue Fire Station those are ones I do not support because they will impact public safety. I also do not like the recommendation to close the children's section of the library at 6:00 P.M. instead of 9:00 P.M. Just two nights ago I was there with my son, helping him with his homework doing a research project and I was not the only parent there with my child. There were quite a few of us there so I ask that at least if you do close it early you wait until 7:00 P.M. or 8:00 P.M. so that working families are able to help their children do their research. As I look through all the budget options on the web I did see a couple of proposals that did not cut away at the core of the things that make West Hartford a great place to live. The first was to charge people a tipping fee for their additional garbage bin. That would allocate the additional tipping cost the town has to pay to the households that have a higher utilization and would save the town \$67,500. The second option that I saw that I could support was to reduce the number of polling places, saving the town around \$20,000 but other than that I did not see many cuts that didn't cut away at what makes West Hartford a great town so with those two suggestions I am here to say that I stand fully behind the budget and I ask that you do as well. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mrs. Fleischli. The next speaker is Linda DiNapoli.

Ms. DiNapoli: Linda DiNapoli, 214 Mohegan Drive. Good evening. I'd like to start out by saying in the long time that I have been here testifying I really have to applaud Mr. Adler for at least making an effort to respond to something that I brought up. Unfortunately I put him in the position where he actually had to since I mentioned his name but I thank you, Mr. Adler, and I certainly hope you can find out where all that money is, that ANRG from Suffern, New York we're supposed to be collecting on the zoning from years ago. And that brings me to a department where we can save money - zoning. All we have to do is have people in the department who read the book, who apply the laws. They have cars. They're out there every single day. The violations are outrageous and they're all over town - high end, low end, middle end. Apply your own zoning laws. I was told when I asked a question in the Zoning Department we'll sell you the book for \$20. I bought it. I found the answer to the particular question. What did the town do to assist me? They changed the law so that it was very narrow and a violation only occurred between the hours of 2:00 and 5:00 A.M. which meant I had to get up in the middle of the night to go out to check to see if these violations were still in place. Is the town prepared to have a zoning officer go out in the middle of the night to check these things? I think when you change laws you have to think about the impact it has not only on your citizens but on the people who work for the department. Additionally I did request from Mr. Van Winkle, who responded very quickly, and I thank him as well for the formula on the assessment increases. What I have not yet received from him is an answer as to why they don't apply in my case with the houses that I own. I am paying more than... My assessments are higher than 20 percent on both of the houses so if we could get everybody to pay their fair share, which I am more than willing to pay, we will have enough money to fund good schools and I can stand here and tell you with certainty, good schools leads to good property values, leads to people continuing to come. All you have to do is look and see the average property value for Simsbury, Avon and West Hartford and compare them and you will see that it has a direct correlation to the schools. Relative to the Prospect Avenue Firehouse, the New England Fire Rating Bureau determines whether that will have an adverse impact on public safety. I have been asking this question since September 23, 2008. The Town Manager has never provided me with an answer so I don't think a citizen can come up...I can't...and make a statement as to whether it has an adverse impact or not. If it doesn't, then it should be considered as a cost-saving matter. What we see here this evening, ladies and gentlemen, is politics playing out. Okay? It's pure and simple. It's not a discussion of the budget. We have one group playing against the other. It's happened year after year. Let's all try to work together and do something innovative and different and solve the problems. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mrs. DiNapoli. The next speaker is Gary Muldoon.

Mr. Muldoon: Gary Muldoon, 94 Ledgewood Road. First of all I'd like to say I'm for the best education you can have. Yet, those three programs that stick out to me - the language program, the all-day kindergarten and the Quest program yield almost nothing as far as I'm concerned. It's all... It's just basically babysitting, extra work and introducing kids to a language. That to me is not really adding that much, especially when you consider the cost. That's way too expensive and something has to go here and those three programs... We have cut all-day kindergarten by the way. We did it before in

the 90s and we instituted an ABC program which was very effective. It helped the kids that were at risk. As far as public safety is concerned, yeah, it's important but we can't be crazy about it. I mean everything, you know, you just can't sit and say don't put a price on public safety because like I don't think those bicycle patrols are a very effective way of patrolling the streets of West Hartford and we have... When you tell people we have 90 full-time firemen people say, "We do?" That's a lot of firemen and we don't have that many... We had 75 house fires last year. Only 150 fires. And even using them as like a secondary...what do they call it? First responder. I don't think that's an effective way. It's a very expensive way to do things like that and we've got to look at a better way and as Mr. Slifka said one time, our public employees aren't getting rich and they aren't. They're not getting rich but according to studies people in the public service do 25 percent of the same job as people in the private sector so that being said everybody should be on a 401K plan. We shouldn't be giving out these great pensions and things like that, you know? Because a 4 percent raise this year I think is too much and again, and I said it before, between 2001 and 2008 we raised taxes 40 percent. That should... You know? And it still didn't do anything. And now we're going back to raising taxes again. It's just way too much at this time to tell you the truth and that's what I feel. I just think it's too much. Four percent is way too much. We're going back to what we were doing before. I mean they say everything's okay, we have a AAA bond rating, that's... everything's fine, AAA, but we keep on cutting services. And that's another thing. We're cutting services while we add these programs that my kids didn't even have. My kids didn't have these programs in school but now I can't have the leaf collection or the bulk pickup? Not even once a year! Other towns, by the way, have some of these things but they don't have all-day kindergarten and world language programs and, you know, Quest programs and things like that. Okay? Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Muldoon. That concluded our first sign-up sheet. I'm asking Mr. O'Brien to go pick up the next one. Okay. Moving on to the top of sheet #2 the first speaker is Maria Roja. Button please.

Ms. Roja: My name is Maria Roja and I live at 34 Argyle Avenue and I have been here in this town for over 40 years. It's... I want to be very clear that I am not against education but I am also very concerned about the increases that we have undergone as taxpayers in this town in the last ten years. I don't know about too many other people, but I am a single homeowner and my salary was cut by 6 percent last year as were my benefits and that kind of thing too. Everyone seems to be passing and I mean the town level, the state level, the federal government level, passing the buck to the taxpayer. My question is where are we supposed to get the money from? The other thing is again I don't disagree that we need quality education but I think we need to get our educational expenses under control and that involves making some tough decisions. And I disagree with some people that support some of the programs, especially the world language program. My kids went to the school systems here too. They got a decent education without all these additional very nice programs. However, we can't afford them. We cannot continue to sustain the percentage of increases every year on taxes. I don't like being forced out of my home because I can't afford to pay the taxes. I had hoped to retire here and that's not going to happen if this continues. The other thing I would like to say

is these are going to be tough decisions, no question. And I don't like the idea that it's young families against older people. We need to come together, put our heads together, work to find ways that are effective. If that includes a citizen's audit then maybe we need to really look at that. Impartial people coming in to look at ways to save money. I think we're all on the same page that way. Thank you for your time.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Roja. Next is Elliott Check.

Mr. Check: Elliott Check, 1059 Farmington Avenue. Good evening, Mr. Mayor, Council members. Thank you for the time. Most of us have to differentiate between what we want and what we can afford. Last Sunday a car pulled up in front of my house to look at a car I had for sale. Ron, don't worry. It was the old Volvo. It won't make a difference on the taxes. A guy gets out of a Bentley with a hot blond to look at the car. The car and the blond were both gorgeous. I wanted both. I quickly came to my senses and realized I couldn't afford the car, I couldn't afford the blond and I couldn't afford the divorce that would go with either one. The Board of Ed wants it all. A bipartisan group of individuals went through the Board of Ed's budget and presented pages of ideas to the Board. These ideas were by and large dismissed out of hand. The Board tells us that preschool is self-funded but when questioned further it turns out the numbers don't include benefits or class space. The response now is that to be self-funding the fee would have to rise from the proposed \$7000 for full-pay students which represents a 30 percent increase over last year to \$12,000. The next question to arise is for those who are not fully funded or on full-pay where does that funding come from? Where else in the budget is it not what it appears to be? This past Tuesday the Board of Ed agonized over the budget, debating over what to cut and what to keep. It was a great show. After about two hours all they could find to sacrifice in a 126 million dollar budget was \$24,600, 0.2 percent of the budget. There was no mention made of a \$5000 magnet scholarship that's been in there for years. It's been brought up for removal before and all it is is a scholarship of taxpayer dollars. It's a nice idea but if it can't be afforded why wasn't that brought up for the cuts? The Board tells us we must give them all they want to keep our school performance up, yet we are at the bottom of our DRG annually in performance. Avon, Simsbury and Farmington outperform us annually on the test scores and a good number of our schools are on the AYP list for poor performance. We are seeing realtors start to comment on their blogs that buyers are starting to forego West Hartford for better value and lower taxes in towns like Glastonbury. Mr. Van Winkle has presented some very scary numbers for the future to the Council and Board at liaison meetings. The economy is not looking good, unemployment is persistently high, a town not used to seeing any foreclosures is now seeing three a month, business bankruptcies are at the highest level since the early 80s, corporations are moving jobs out of state and taxes are going up across the spectrum. None of this bodes well for the budgets. Mr. Mayor, Council members, the Board of Education has refused to face the problem glaring us in the face. It is now up to you on the Council to bring them back to reality. Please do not approve this budget. The town cannot afford it. One last point. Some of the Board members are complaining that last year they had a zero budget. What they are failing to mention is that on top of that zero budget they added the ARRA money which kept them funded at the level they wanted to do. In that year they did virtually nothing to rip into

the budget and look for areas where they could make cuts instead of bringing it down to the last minute for the annual dog and pony show which they held. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Dr. Check. I hope Mrs. Check was not watching. Next is Leslie Warner.

Ms. Warner: Hi. I'm Leslie Warner, 26 Glenbrook Road. This is my least favorite thing to do. I don't like public speaking so I'm just going to throw out some bullet points. Listening to Maria, I had my fourth idea. I'm going to start with it. Last year I was sitting at one of the I guess the town speak-outs over in the auditorium and sat next to a very nice woman I would say in her late 30s to early 40s and we were chatting about things, about problems in the economy. Her husband had just been asked to take and agreed to an 8 percent pay decrease. I turned to her and said it won't ruin your life, will it? It's not easy but it can be achieved and she said yes. She had two children in the school system. Lots of us have had to make difficult choices but it's not going to uproot our lifestyle necessarily. One of the things that caught my eye in the newspaper I guess the day before yesterday was one of the thoughts that they decided to cut - the maintenance worker was laid off for a savings of \$77,500 which included benefits and salary. I am shocked that a maintenance worker would cost that much money so with my little mind's thinking then wouldn't that be something good to outsource? I'm sure we could get a better value at a cheaper rate. The next thing also in agreement with George, the fact that it's a six million dollar deficit this year which is projected to be 12 million next year - how do you really think you're going to address that? That's a serious outcome. I think the unsustainability of this budget is something that you should look at now, not later. And then just...I'm not a complainer. I've always been very practical. I had a 40 percent drop in income this year. I'm an independent sales rep. I sell in Connecticut and Western Mass. and yes, I do sell on the gold coast. It's not pretty. All the reps in New England also had a similar decrease. I'm not complaining. I am self-employed. I was a saver. Lucky me. But that's what you all have to do too. You have to employ that the good times are not going to go on forever and we need to do judicious spending. And to wrap it up on a little humorous note, my two sons who are now 32 and 37, hard to believe, my older son said to me, and he happens to be pretty good with money, he said, "Mom, Suze Orman's just like you." Bottom line is I was teaching my children and ran my household that way before Suze Orman ever became popular and it's just common sense. Thank you for your time.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Warner. The next speaker is George Graf.

Mr. Graf: My name is George Graf. I reside at 625 Park Road where I've lived for the past 22 years. I will be brief. What I've observed in the past 22 years in this town and other municipalities and the state and the federal government is that no jurisdiction can ever solve its budget problems by raising taxes. This is because taxes begets more spending, begets more taxes, begets more spending, ad infinitum. We've seen this in this town, other municipalities and certainly in the State of Connecticut and at the federal government. Therefore, if you're really serious about dealing with this budget problem, which is not just a temporary thing but a long-term thing, you're going to have to get serious about cutting spending and that means not just laying off a few non-unionized

people or selling off a piece of property or some other budget gimmick. You're going to have to get serious about the things that are really driving the spending in the town. The final thought I will leave with you is this - the taxpayers cannot simply be the automatic ATM for the town. You've got a budget shortfall, dun the taxpayers. Don't have enough this year? No problem. dun the taxpayers. I think you've kind of run out of that option. One of these days you're going to put that ATM card in the machine and it's going to come back and say invalid. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Graf. The next speaker is Pam Trusilla,...Torsiello, I'm sorry if I misread that.

Ms. Torsiello My name is Pam Torsiello I live at 100 Van Buren Ave. I've been a resident for 22 years and I represent I think some of the busy parents who don't...can't get to all the meetings. I know Tuesday night I actually had four places to be so I had to pick and choose and I actually have two places to be tonight but I chose this. I do support the budget. I know that it's tough. I have a mom who lives in town. She's a single woman, fixed income so I know that we are all struggling with... I know I'm somewhat underemployed, shall we say. I'm not unemployed but I'm not as fully employed as I usually am so I understand the struggle that we're all under. I do think the town has made an effort to try to make cuts. I'm sure there's more that can be cut here and there. I think the citizen's audit is not a bad idea...some of those ideas. But I do want to say that I support the budget. I support the education budget in particular. I support the Town Services budget. We've reduced consistently over the years our per capita per student spending. We were number one at some point and we're quite a bit down on the list in the state. I think we have an amazing education system. I think, you know, we're cutting some programs and maybe that's the way it has to be but I think there's a real loss when you have programs, you cut them and then you have a huge cost when you go to reinstate those programs. There's always a learning curve and an expense associated with that so I hate to see this let's have half-day kindergarten, let's have full-day, let's have half-day. Let's come up with what's the real program and keep it. And from that perspective I'd like to see a longer term view as opposed to this year to year referendums that happen at graduation when people just are not focused on that. I'm hoping that this pendulum of testing will swing the other way. I don't like what's happening. You know? We look like we're a failing town when, in fact, we're not. We really are very diverse and we have terrific programs but the testing that's required by the federal government isn't being...we're not given the money to support that testing and I can't wait to see that go away. Our kids hate it. It makes us look like we're failing and we're not and the funds are not being supported by the state and the federal government so hopefully that will change. Library hours - my teens go there very regularly. They play sports so they go after 6:00. I would hate to see that cut every day of the week, that's for sure. Is there anything else? I guess... Look forward. I think the big thing is... I think the biggest expense you have is salaries and that's a union negotiation and I think that's something that's sort of fixed three years at a time or five years at a time or something. Can we look eight to ten years down the road and really think about what the budget should look like ten years down the road so that we know that those union expenses aren't something that we can't fix? There must be some way to start to deal with that long term. And as for

increases in taxes over time everything is increased and my college president said to me 25 years ago...to us, "The cost of your college education is about the cost of a new car." And you know what? It still is. Everything kind of goes up. Some things go up a little bit more. Investment income goes up one year, it goes down the next but overall the cost of a college education when I went was about \$9000 or \$10,000. You could get out and buy a Ford Escort for about the same price and now, you know; you're not looking at something too different so sort of keep it all in perspective so I do overall support the budget.

President Slifka: Thank you. The next speaker is Michael Cass.

Mr. Cass: Good evening. My name is Michael Cass. I live at 151 Whiting Lane and I just would like to lead off my remarks by offering my sincere thanks to every person sitting around this table here. I really appreciate the hard work you've been doing the last few years and the hard decisions you've had to make. Mr. Van Winkle, in particular I think you've been doing a terrific, terrific job. I don't know how anyone else in this room or in any organization could possibly find a way to squeeze nickels and dimes out of our budget the way you have sir and I thank you for that. I defer also to your expertise on that as I do to you ladies and gentlemen here. Similarly, I defer to the expertise of our school board, also volunteers like you folks who put in many, many hours of uncompensated time to try to make the best decisions that they can possibly. When I first moved to this town it was to get married and hopefully start a family. We were delayed in that effort but fortunately we were eventually successful and I am now proud to say that I have three wonderful children who are all thriving in the Whiting Lane schools. Having said that, my wife and I spend a lot of time and effort trying to assist the teachers with various shortfalls in fundings and supplies. We already pay for extra curricular activities that our children are involved with. I don't have a problem with that and we operate on a single income. We're not particularly wealthy. We just have to work hard and pinch our nickels and dimes just like everyone else does. With regard to the value of the real estate in town I think one of the things that I have appreciated is that because of this town safeguarding its educational system the value of our real estate has gone up dramatically over what it cost us in 1992. To the extent it's fallen I don't think it's fallen very much. I think it's a testimony to the value of supporting our school system. With regard to the other comments about what other school systems have done and their success or failure rates in terms of their students I don't think that's a fair comparison. People in Farmington and Simsbury and Avon do not have the broad number of students coming from the wide variety of economic backgrounds that we do have in this town. All of that adds to the color of our town. It's one of the reasons we want to stay here but I think it's really a great mistake to get to the point where our schools are in such a position that they can no longer offer an educational program that causes people to move to this town. I heard Mr. Kennedy from the Taxpayer Association talk about several people on his street who were intending to sell their homes. I figure one day I'll be in that position intending to sell my home. I know that if the educational system here is supported all my hard work and effort in maintaining that property and trying to be a good citizen in this town will pay off for me and my wife when we retire to hopefully Cape Cod or someplace of that nature so, in conclusion, I just want to say again I thank you all for your service. I know that there

are very, very difficult decisions to make. I trust you to make those. I don't have any particular agenda or suggestions or cuts in any of these programs. I don't pretend to have the time or the ability to analyze these things the way you people do and give so generously of your free time to do. I commend you for that and I wish you good luck and I hope... I also want to say one other thing. It's quite a shock to me that I think for the first time in my experience I actually found myself agreeing with something Mrs. DiNapoli had to say, but she said that she was in favor of quality education in town because it supports our real estate market and I know Mrs. DiNapoli is a real estate agent. I agree with her, and I think that's something that we have to keep in mind. I also want to say that I've been very impressed with some folks speaking on perhaps the other side of the issue with what I see as their increased level of civility this year. Frankly I've been upset by some of the things that have happened in past years and I hope that we can all look at us as we're all American citizens, we're all struggling with a recession and we all hope that we can get through this and keep our town and our own personal finances so thank you very much.

President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Cass. The next speaker is Angela Martin.

Ms. Martin: Oh, sorry. Sorry. I'm Angela Martin. I've lived at 24 Cobbs Road for 20 years which is hard to believe. My husband was born and raised in town. My in-laws have lived here for over 50 years. I'm a fiscal and political conservative. I'm an Independent voter and I fully support this budget. I believe it's essential in hard times to continue to invest in our schools and I'd like to particularly focus on the school budget which I very much fully support. It's the key reason that families move to West Hartford in terms of our schools. We've heard at a recent Board of Education meeting about the trend of residents actually moving from states as far as California specifically moving here to West Hartford because we have the essential arts programs that their schools have lost. For my husband and I, our largest investment is our home but it's only worth what someone's willing to pay for it. Someone who's going to move in not because they like my wallpaper but because they love our schools and they love our town as much as we do. It's this circle of life that has sustained West Hartford for a very long time. I agree with the earlier speakers that this is a podium that should not be used in a negative manner but one for consensus building and for conversation. We are all in this together and these are tough times. I urge residents not to force a referendum. This costs our town tens of thousands of dollars, money we don't have to cut budgets that are among the most cost-efficient in the state. West Hartford is 97th out of 169 Connecticut towns in per pupil spending. If someone stops you at the grocery store or the gas station and asks you if you want to pay less taxes the obvious answer is yes, but I believe that that comes at a terrible price. It threatens the schools and the town that we have worked so hard to build and sustain and my in-laws have worked so hard to build and sustain. It undercuts the value of our homes which for all of us is our primary retirement fund. There's no, you know, surprise money waiting for us somewhere. I urge this Council and my neighbors to look at our education and town budgets not with a short-term view but with a long-term one. We need to tread water for a few years and that's what we need to do. On Cobb's Road we're doing it with a little patience, a little perseverance and a lot of pasta and PB&J. Thank you very much.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Martin. That concludes the second sign-up sheet and Mr. O'Brien is going to look at the third one.

Mr. Barishpolsky: Good evening. My name is Boris Barishpolsky. I live at 131 Hyde Road in West Hartford. The budgets which we discuss right now mostly come from our taxes so...and we're paying these taxes, just everyone who lives in this town, so I would like to attract your attention to the assessment issue since I recently learned. As I understand, in the assessment done by the Assessment Office based on two kinds of data - deterministic data and human-generated data such as fair market value. I learned also that fair market value for the same houses were lower and very far from the realities. Well fair market value of the houses established can be determined plus/minus 5 percent then the net assessed book value is a deterministic parameter calculated as a 70 percent of fair market value. Then why the houses of \$750 K and up net assessment is way off of reality number? It could be shown that the average house with a fair market value of \$400 K and lower, such phenomena here. This is only one of the examples. Woodpond Road houses \$750 K and up. This is gross assessment which... fair market value which could be calculated. This is the real price for the house. This is gross assessment, 0.7 percent. And this is book value which we would tax it. Taxes are applied so you can see the big difference here. You can't find this in the average house with \$400 K and lower. That's not right and it has to be fixed. Another thing which I would like to point out about the education and Board of Education budget - it's through the roof. You should understand that quality of education never corresponds directly to the price we pay for this education and if you look into the list of schools in Connecticut then the West Hartford schools just going lower and lower on this list so people should think years ago when the West Hartford education was very good. Now it's not and we have to face reality. We have to fix this education, not because pouring money there but changing how it is applied just to our children. That's what I want to say. Thank you.

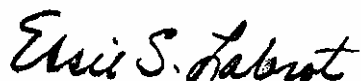
President Slifka: Thank you, Mr. Barishpolsky. As I said, that concluded up our sign-up sheet for the evening. Is there anyone who did not sign up who wished to testify? Please come on up and state your name and address for the record.

Ms. Roufail: Minou Roufail, 11 Seymour Avenue. I'd like to thank you all for all your hard work on this budget, an unenviable and difficult task. I am here to express my full support for the education budget and also to remark about some things that I read in the West Hartford News today. I missed the last Public Hearing. It was at 2:00. It appears to have been a summit of the West Hartford Taxpayer's Association and I'd like to remark on a few comments that were made at that meeting. While I'm quite familiar of this rhetoric of the education budget being a slap in the face, I'm struck by how personally this was taken. West Hartford is not a personal fiefdom and the Board of Education does not serve at the pleasure of a lord. This is a dynamic town that is changing and evolving and the education budget responds to that. Mr. Kennedy's suggestion that we combine our energies both pro and anti-budget folks, to review, evaluate and develop educational goals and policies, to develop cost-effective and results-driven educational programs and budget, that really sounds good except I think there are competing visions of what education in West Hartford should be, and I would suggest that one of those visions or

one of the most vocalized visions is rather static and reductive and crabbed one might say. No frills one might call it. On the other hand there is a kind of forward-looking vision that was suggested to me by the latest draft mission of the Board of Education which I admit in part is ambiguous enough to project everyone's ideal onto it but I think that's part of the point. I think it was the scope and the optimism and the determination to aspire to an expansive and modern and service-oriented education system in West Hartford that I completely support and applaud. Further, you know, people don't... I don't know if people appreciate how good we have it here in West Hartford with the West Hartford Public Schools. I've spoken to people in other districts, some quite wealthy, and, you know, I've heard parents that are just in anguish over their kids and services that their children may need and just wistful, you know, about a district that would actually be responsive and work as energetically as the West Hartford Public Schools do to service every child. Now this city has become very diverse. There are lots of demands on the education budget. We cannot... We must spend money. I mean education is labor...a human capital intensive enterprise. It is not comparable to a profit-oriented industry and I certainly hope that the town will rally this time behind the education budget because it certainly is vocal during the process and very vocal in its support of the expansiveness and the richness and the optimism and the high aspirations of education in West Hartford. Thank you very much.

President Slifka: Thank you, Minou. And that concludes our sign-up sheet and those who put their hands up. Is there anyone else who did not sign up who wished to speak? Okay, seeing none we thank you all for being here and that concludes the Public Hearing.

Public Hearing adjourned at 7:14 p.m.



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Essie S. Labrot  
Town Clerk/Council Clerk

/sab

**APPROVED AT MAY 11, 2010 TOWN COUNCIL MEETING**