

MINUTES

WATERTOWN TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

SWIFT MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARY
MONDAY, MAY 11, 2009, 7:30 P.M.

PRESENT: Elaine Adams, Chairman
Gary Bernier
David Demirs
Richard DiFederico
Richard Fusco
Carl Mancini
Raymond Primini, Vice Chairman
Paul Rinaldi
Thomas Winn

ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Karen Baldwin, Superintendent of Schools
Charles Frigon, Town Manager
Frank Nardelli, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director
Audio Technician

1. Call Meeting To Order

Ms. Adams, Chairman, Called the Special Meeting to Order at 7:33 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Ms. LaForme, Clerk, executed the Roll Call

3. Public Participation

Ms. Adams: I want to explain what tonight is all about, the Special Meeting of the Town Council. The Town Council is going to set a recommended budget to Public Hearing. At the Public Hearing and a vote of the Council we're looking at May 19th, which is a week from tomorrow night over in the Swift Auditorium, at that point in time public comment will be heard concerning the budget. After the Public Hearing is closed, the Town Council will have a Special Meeting. At that point in time all public input and any other staff input will be considered. The Town Council will then vote on a budget to put to referendum. Again, tonight is just to get us to that point, to the Public Hearing, so it will be next Tuesday, will be the actual when the numbers are set to go to referendum, the votes will be taken that night.

Gina Calabrese, 132 Apple Hill Drive, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Calabrese: I am requesting of the Town Council that this evening, when you recommend the percentage increase for the Board of Education and for the Town, that you also let the public know how these percentages translate into an increase in the mill rate and what exactly that means for the average taxpayer in terms of dollars and cents. I believe that the public needs to know very clearly how they will be impacted by this increase. Thank you.

Dave Minnich, 319 Thomaston Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Minnich: I guess at this time of year we are confronted with the same challenge all the time, every year, which is what budget is going to be approved by the residents of our community. We all know we have a challenge this year with the revaluation and its impact, and I'm told that the average residential home is going to be increasing 16%, so any revaluation, change in assessment, that entire 16%, they may pay more, that's the reality of how we arrive at what's a fair valuation for each of us to pay for taxes.

I have followed both the Board of Education and the Town Council's process this year and I must say that all of you have spent a lot of time on this, and I certainly commend you for the effort that you have put forth. I do offer a suggestion as a means to arrive at a number. And it is more of a concept than the numbers cause I don't have the math in front of me, but I disagree with the 2.25% for the school as was arrived. I understand that the school is suggesting with the changes in things that have occurred since they put their budget together that they could live with this current cut in this year coming up with 2.96%. I understand and I do stand corrected that a part of that has some staff reductions in it to get to 2.96%, I'm not sure of that, but my suggestion is to add back to the 2.96% if there is staff reductions on the school, add those personnel back into the budget. If there are any new people that aren't currently, or new positions that aren't currently here, my suggestion is to take those away. But I go one step further and that is that in this economy in terms of trying to get this budget passed, I suggest that the amount of dollars that would be associated with a wage freeze for all of the school staff, which I spoke to the Superintendent today, is approximately \$600,000, that that be reduced from that number, so once again on the math I have is whatever that 2.96% is, add back whatever staff has been taken out to get that, and subtract the approximate \$600,000. I heard the Superintendent last time at the school meeting that you had before with the Finance Committee, and I certainly do agree with her that there has to be some even bargaining so to speak, and certainly one of the issues that I understand to be a concern on the part of some of the staff on the school side, well if we agree with this, then I want to be sure that no one is going to be leaving the school district because of the budget, and I do suggest that that is a very viable option to not have anyone leave, and contingent all that on the first vote so that is if there is a wage freeze that was passed then the school board (inaudible) there would be no staff reductions because of it. However, if the vote doesn't pass on the first time, then everything is back on the table again. Everyone is a winner. It is my understanding that what the school board has suggested is essentially within the 2.96% number and I don't know how they arrived at that, but I certainly (inaudible) the people that helped to put that together that's a good number.

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My comment on the Town's side which I'm not sure what you're going to do about it, cause it's an issue you already know about but the road program is devastated and this Town cannot continue to go on year after year with putting no money or virtually no monies in the roads, and it is the same issue that we also bring up on the school side with regards to the two turf fields, one we have and one we're about to have is there is no money put aside into replacing those in the future. Those are my comments and I would only suggest that the only way people are going to approve this whole budget when it is presented to them is that if they feel it's fair. And people that are in our Town, and we all know this, we don't have to say it, people in the private sector are not receiving pay increases in the sum (inaudible) their own job security. This is a suggestion to move all the contracts out one year. Thank you.

Nadine Savage, 629 Linkfield Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Savage: Whether or not you guys know it or not, this has been the topic of conversation in almost every parent meeting, not just PTO groups, but girl scout meetings and anytime there are a few parents together. I understand that there will be a separate public hearing for the budget but there's a few things I'd like you all to think about between now and then. You were all elected to serve and represent everybody in Town, not just those who want no increase in budget or a lower increase, it's everybody who pays taxes in this Town, and by lowering the Board of Education's budget from what they presented at 5.9% to a lower amount, those people who want the budget at 5.9% have lost their voice forever, not to mention the devastation that this decrease would cause to our school system. A parent recently reminded that last year before we went to the 3 school renovation you wanted a commitment from the parents, and you asked them to commit the school increase and the budget increase, not only for last year, but for all the years to come in which we would be paying the bonding on those schools. By lowering the school board's budget and their recommendation, you aren't giving the parents a chance to prove to you in what they said last year in being committed and continue to support the town and the schools and provide their commitment to our education system. By decreasing the budget, those who want it at the 5.9% have lost their voice forever, but if you leave the budget at 5.9%, those who don't want an increase always have the opportunity to go to referendum and vote no. And if you leave it at 5.9% everyone can go and voice their opinion and let it be a democratic decision among the Townspeople as to whether or not they want an increase in this budget or they don't want an increase in the budget, but if you leave it where it is both choices can win in terms of being able to voice their opinion.

Katie Gordon, 115 Guernseytown Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Gordon: I'm here to share my concerns for the Watertown School District. My older son is in first grade and my younger son will be starting kindergarten in just over a year. And I want what I suspect all of you want, which is a really sound education for both of them and for all the children in this town. I think that the Board of Education presented a lean budget when they came in at 5.9%. It sounds like an increase but when you look at what that really provides for our students, it was bare necessities. That budget reflected corrections for past under funding of the education budget. Anyone who drives a car knows that unless you pay for oil changes now, you're going to pay higher maintenance costs down the road when the big ticket items go because you didn't take care of them.

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\$15,000 for maintenance of all their school facilities just doesn't seem sufficient. If we let these facilities fall apart now it's going to cost us more money in the long run, we've learned that with the bonding issue, we should learn from our past situations. We've all seen the (inaudible) and what has been neglected, let's not be penny-wise but pound foolish. The budget presented by the Board included minimal funds to support existing programs and services. Frankly our students should have books that reflect the current state of the world, accurate information All of our students should have access to materials to help them learn to read. These expenditures are not optional but rather desperately needed funds. Many of last year's third graders faced significant challenges (inaudible) 26% didn't even meet proficient. That (inaudible) goal and how to (inaudible). Our teachers are working really hard but we're not there yet and they need the resources and the manpower and the tools to really help our kids succeed. What the district needs is a literacy specialist to help kids in the primary grades. Statistics show that if they haven't caught up by 3rd grade, chances of catching up by senior year are so hard without really intensive intervention. We owe it to our kids to intervene now while they're young before the problem grows bigger, for them and for the district. The Superintendent and the Board of Education couldn't even request that desperately needed resource because they were trying to maintain the low increase. Now we have (inaudible) the budget that already did not meet significantly demonstrated by our children. How can you allow this to happen? As parents we must let our voices in the Board of Education be heard. And I need you to hear us (inaudible). Certainly times are hard for some of us. How much harder will they be if we can't count on our children being well educated, if we don't provide them today with what they need, how are they going to contribute to our economy, in our Town, in our State, and in our Country when they get out of school? Teachers buy books for classroom libraries and they buy more since the Town hasn't provided them with resources. How much more can we ask them when we, as parents of these children, have not yet stepped forward to declare that education is our first priority. Estimates are showing that the increase is something like \$2.00 a week for the average household. If we can put aside a cup of coffee, or the stop at McDonald's, then we could pay for an education that really matters. I agree with Nadine when she said at least give us the chance to vote for it and let our voices be heard, because we want more for our kids, not less. Please join me in supporting the Board of Education's original budget proposal, insist that the money be restored to the education budget. I described the budget challenges to my first grader who just turned 6 and he said "mommy, if I tell all of my friends, and they tell all of their friends, then everybody would understand how important it is". He said "maybe we could make a video of students trying to work without a teacher, so that people would see how hard that would be for us to learn". He said "mommy, maybe we could have a website so people could learn about it". I think that all of us have ideas about what's important and I think that we need to listen to everyone. A 6 year old can't vote, but we all can, so please give us the chance. The best leaders have a vision beyond the current crisis, to what we want for our schools in the long run, and if we under fund them now, (inaudible) that problem continues to grow, it doesn't go away.

Sarah Galpin, 25 Shelter Hill Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Galpin: I stand here tonight as a product of the Watertown Public Schools, I'm also a first grade teacher at John Trumbull Primary School, my first year teaching in Watertown and I am very humbled to have had the opportunity to do for children in this generation what my teachers did for me. I want to continue serving children in our community. Like most of our Town residents I'm all too familiar with the struggle this Town faces just passing a budget year to year. Every year we are confronted with voting upon a financial plan that supports education and every year it is extremely difficult to pass this budget for a number of reasons. The budget gets trimmed to the leanest of lean and we just about survive on bare bones. How (inaudible) have we become? Yet teachers continue to strive to provide children the best possible instruction under these circumstances. But how can our children become successful, contributing members of society that we try to mold them into if they are not provided with the ample resources and support they need. We are doing our future a severe injustice by even considering any cuts to faculty and staff. By asking the Board to cut their budget to reflect a minimal increase thereby forcing them to consider looking at staff reductions, it's not a sensible way to keep this Town moving forward. It is not practical to think that students will continue to receive the same level for individualized and quality instruction with class sizes increase dramatically due to these cuts. Teachers pride themselves on their ability to meet the needs of each student. An increase in students reduces the attention that teacher is able to give to their students, thus decreasing the value of their education. If our mission in Watertown is to be a world class educational leader, and a centerpiece of a dynamic and growing community (inaudible), meeting the diverse needs of each student, through (inaudible) parents and community as a whole, establishing high expectations and providing differentiated instruction, guidance, and resources necessary to meet these high expectations, then it is our duty to pass a budget that can financially support us and the faculty and staff and the resources and the materials it takes to meet this mission. I believe that the Town should present the 5.9% budget increase to reflect what we need to the public and let the Townspeople vote on it instead of cutting it to a measly status even before it's presented to the Town. Let the public understand, however, that the 2.96% increase that Superintendent Baldwin proposed merely allows us to continue functioning with just the essentials. We need these increases to survive at our current levels. Thank you for your time.

Jean Ouimet, Plantsville, CT

Ms. Ouimet: I'm a health teacher at the High School. I'm here to address what the current budget is going to do to our health curriculum. Currently there's Barbara Shultz and I and we have worked very hard in the 8 years since I've been here to develop a really comprehensive curriculum. The purpose of our curriculum is not merely just to give the kids the facts, because if that were so, certainly one year of health would be enough. The goal is when the kids graduate, they have the skills to become healthy, young adults.

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This goal (inaudible) comprehensive program every number of years, not just one. We teach the lessons developmentally appropriate and what we teach at 9th grade is different from what we teach at 11th and 12th grade, and by the time they graduate from 12th grade the exit assignment senior year that is required, they can't graduate unless they do it, is that they have to develop a personal health maintenance plan in which they develop a plan of how they are going to stay healthy in the physical area, the mental and emotional areas, and the social area, and they have to look at family health history, they have to personalize it, they have to make it comprehensive, and that they are able to do after having had health from the 9th grade and in the 11th and 12th grades. We have specific concrete activities that are designed to help the kids not only to know what the facts are, but to work on their attitudes, their communication, and start changing their behaviors. As we all know a healthy child can be a better worker in school. Some of the concrete activities that we do are teaching the kids to communicate assertively, and today in my Grade 11 class we did that, and they did role playing and they did what it's like to communicate positively, assertively and aggressively; the assertive way being the better way. Some hands on things that we've done, team restaurants where they develop a team restaurant using all of the nutritional guidelines that we teach. We do problem solving relating to risky situations. We do critical thinking relating to helping the kids to assess how we can reduce violence at Watertown High School.

All of our discussions are occurring in a safe, non-judgmental environment. We encourage all of the kids to be open minded about differences, opinions, ways of thinking, and other differences. Now the needs of the students are many because in all of our discussions they ask questions, they tell us about different things, the needs are varied and relating to drugs, they tell us what kind of drugs they're taking, (inaudible) sexuality, depression, relationships, abusive relationships, we teach how, you know what is a healthy relationship and what is not a healthy relationship. The Freshmen concerns are very different from the Senior concerns, that's why it was difficult to shorten the program. It is our goal that students develop the skills the make healthy decisions, set goals, and lead healthy lives. Like I said, the curriculum needs to be extensive, multi-faceted, and meet the needs of all the students. And because there are 2 of us, I would say that Barbara and I, we get to know probably 95% of the kids because in the years that we have them, there are very few kids that we do not have at least once, so we enjoy getting to know the kids and at graduation there is rarely a student that I haven't had. We work really hard to help these kids succeed because it is a graduation requirement, and also just because we believe in that and not only in passing, but helping them to be mature adults or young adults with integrity and a sense of purpose.

We collaborate with parents, I call parents many times during the marking period to let them know how they're doing, talk with special education staff, administrators, other staff so the comprehensive nature of the program is really important. In addition in the 8 years that I've been at Watertown High School I've been advisor to STAD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) and (inaudible) myself, other staff members, other student members have organized many school wide and grade level assemblies so that in addition to teaching my 6 classes, I coordinated several assemblies.

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Last year we had our annual Day of Reflection and it was on drugs, moonlighting alcohol safety and safe roads and there was a program for the 9th and 10th grade which is called the Impact Program, and it's the Hard Truth for Grades 11 and 12, they were separate programs, multimedia programs, there as a mock car crash held out in the field and then the whole event was coroneted by a school-wide picnic with hot dogs and hamburgers, Frisbee throwing and a lot of fun. The staff as well as the students gave a lot for positive feedback. That's just one of the programs out of the 8 years that I've been here. Another program or another need that really needs to be addressed is the whole area of bullying, which continues to be a problem so programs activities in that area are a real need for us. Thank you.

Sue Frohock, 95 Barnes Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Frohock: Basically I understand the meaning of the ballot. The only reason I'm speaking tonight is because I understand the Town Council Finance Subcommittee is planning to recommend the 2.25% increase to the Board of Education's budget, rather than the 2.96% increase that Karen Baldwin and the Board demonstrated last week to the Town Council, as the minimum amount required to keep the school system running at its current level and avoid future layoffs, which by the way, we went through great effort and increased risk to get to in an effort to work with the Town Council by slashing their original budget in half. We understand there's a public meeting on the 19th regarding the budget, but we're very concerned that based on the past history with the Town Council, whatever number is recommended tonight will be the final number, if not cut further, that goes forward to a vote. Before making your recommendation to the Town Council I'd just like to say the following briefly. I understand that these are tough times and it may look like being heroes by keeping tax increases low in an economic downturn. I get that. But trust me when I tell you that you will not be seen as heroes by the parents of this Town when you recommend a percentage that begins by cutting the basic services provided to their children which is what the 2.25% increase would do. I know you've heard it before, but you need to understand that once we start down this path of eliminating teaching positions and BEST programs, which will occur if we recommend less than the 2.96% to go forward, it will be very difficult, if not impossible to regain in the future, based on our past budget experiences. Are these really decisions that you are going to make about our children's future without even allowing the public to have a single vote? As Tom Lambert mentioned at your last meeting, we used to have so many programs in our schools that most other schools in our DIRG currently offer, but we've allowed them to be gradually cut away each year thinking we can replace them in better times. As you know we've yet to regain any of them. Where are all the teachers we've lost since 1994? This is a defining year for Watertown. We need to stop this cycle of cutting and keep what we have in tact during the difficult times, and hopefully begin to rebuild our educational system when times improve. Just as we (inaudible) to rebuild our school buildings. Don't you want to live in a Town that people are proud of, rather than one that's known for its budget woes and continual cutting of services? I promise you we are working hard as a parent community to become better educated about the needs and spending of our school system and we will be there to support this vote when the time comes. Please give us this chance to vote before cutting into our children's future any further, and move forward with a 2.96% that was requested from the Board and Karen. Thank you.

Janet Packer, 81 Inverary Drive, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Packer: I appreciate that there are diverse viewpoints on the budget and I thank you for the opportunity to express my viewpoints. I am 1000% behind the 5.9% budget increase presented by Superintendent Baldwin and the Board of Education this Winter. It is obvious to me that the needs are real, the requested funding to keep our school system moving is exactly what we need to keep going in a positive direction. I ask that you accept the Board's recommendation for this increase. I admire and appreciate that Superintendent Baldwin and the Board of Education have put forth a no frills budget and justified for all of their expenditures. They are the educational experts in our Town and they know what is needed in order to fulfill the mission of the Watertown school system. You might say you don't want the proposed tax increase that you feel is beyond our Town's capacity to pay, but the important point here is that that judgment is speculation. How do you know how taxpayers will vote? I do not want you, as our elected officials, to thwart the democratic process based on your perception of what type of tax increase you think the taxpayers of this Town will bear. I believe we have much more support for education in this Town than you have expressed. Case in point, the referendum in August, and of course the vote for the school renovation project. I reiterate, put the Board of Education's proposed budget on the referendum and let the voters speak through the democratic process.

Heather Macchi, 200 Eaton Street, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Macchi: I come here today to voice my concerns about the Watertown budget cuts for 2009. I am a student at Watertown High School and a member of the weightlifting team. Although I am not old enough to vote (inaudible) should be heard. If the budget is not passed it will affect the learning quality for the students from Pre-K to 12th grade. Teachers will be cut from the school system. Students will not realize the one on one learning experience as they deserve. At Watertown High School one of the cuts that will be made is Mr. McQueeney, one of our P.E. teachers. (Tape #1, Side A ended – may6 have missed some) re-established and is our coach of the weightlifting team and the assistant coach of the football team. He is always there to help us when we need it. Teachers like Mr. McQueeney do not deserve to be cut, so please concentrate on passing this budget or we will lose valued members of the Watertown educational system.

George Lyman, 3 Bowers Street, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Lyman: I just want you to know that I appreciate all of your efforts, I know you guys volunteer, I know the Board of Education is volunteer and the hours you put in I do appreciate, but I really would like to encourage you to vote yes, or to allow the taxpayers to vote yes on the budget as originally presented by the Board for Education. I know it's a tough decision and you have to make those every day, but I'd really like to see how the taxpayers would vote on that. Thank you.

Kevin Killeen, 430 Northfield Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Killeen I'm speaking extemporaneously so I doubt I can do as good a job as some others have and really I'll keep my questions and thoughts very brief. It's my understanding that the Town Council and numerous other community members have asked the Board to look into concession talks with labor organizations, and I guess that's part of the fabric of the economy in which we find ourselves in, but I struggle with this because I know that the Town employees have already received their 3.5% increases, that's a little bit upsetting since I've served on the Council and the Board I know how budgetary processes go on the Council's side, I know how money is moved from the General Fund through the Council, and I also realize that some of what we see going on right now is a bit disingenuous, and the reason why I say that is because we're trying to move forward, we've seen that we've had conversations, meetings, ad nausea, and the Board has extended itself line item by line item. We've seen meetings in which the financial (inaudible) Town Manager wasn't in attendance to answer critical questions of ours. We found that a little unsettling for us.

Ms. Adams: Just for the record, Kevin, (inaudible) when we have the Budget Public Bearing that is when all staff both on the Town's side will be there and I believe, Karen, you're going to pull out everyone there also to be able to answer questions of the public, that is the time for public comment and questions (inaudible) Public Hearing.

Mr. Killeen I appreciate your comment, but I was referring to our subcommittee meetings but

Ms. Adams Well just for the record again, Kevin, the Town Manager and Finance Director do not go to, and have really no valid input into a Board of Education and Town Council Subcommittee meeting.

Mr. Killeen (Inaudible.)

Ms. Adams And never have, right, they've never gone.

Mr. Killeen That's not true, but . . . that is not true and besides that it's certainly your opinion and you're certainly welcome to it, what I wanted to (inaudible) is the 2.25% increase has been bandied about, or recommended by the Subcommittee, so since you did have access to our line item budget, I'm just wondering based on your assessment, where do we cut? Thank you.

Marcia Moriarty, 41 Pine Street, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Moriarty: I'm President of the Watertown Education Association. I am here on behalf of the Watertown Teachers in Education Association requesting that the education budget be restored to the 5.9% original budget with no staff or program cuts. I am very serious about this, I come every year before you, it seems like I want to ask, like has there ever been a time in good times when you said let's reopen our contract and give them something? It's never happened in this Town. Over 30 years I've been here and over 30 years I've fought to keep every single teacher in tact every year. It's really getting to be painful.

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On February 22nd the Waterbury Republican printed our contract items with huge false salary increases, as you may recall. There was a big chart, half a page. The real truth is that all teachers in this system have given back their 2.67% step increase that was already guaranteed them for next year, they gave it back in negotiations. We saved the Town nearly \$500,000, \$453,000 approximately if I'm correct on the number. We also increased our share of the health insurance costs, saving the district nearly \$800,000 for the next 3 years. The Watertown teachers recognize these tough economic times. Back in October when we negotiated, and many of you sat on that negotiating team, we agreed to concessions at that time with this wage freeze. We agreed to smaller raises, not 3.5%, but 3.25%, more health insurance co-pays, and no step increases, and no arbitration costs. That was so important to this town. No, let's do it without arbitration costs. Well you know what? In hindsight maybe we should have gone to arbitration. Our contract was unanimously approved by the Board of Education and the Council which had members on the negotiating team every single session. Our contract was then filed with the Town, which it's supposed to be done, and not one person objected to it for well beyond the required 30 day period. This is a legal contract, bargained by all sides in good faith. We fought to avoid arbitration as a cost to the Town. We gave back 2.67% which was already guaranteed us, we gave it back. The teachers did not cause this economic difficulty, but we have already given back to the Town, thus contributing to the solution. During a recession children just don't get bypassed. We still have to educate them. Everybody that's a teacher in this room knows we are working harder than ever during a recession; doesn't mean the needs of our students get bypassed. How can we attract good teachers with a contract that means nothing? That we can open up on a whim and say okay, you know what, let's go after once again the scapegoats, the teachers. Every year it comes down to this. I don't want to see one of my staff cut. And one of the people at the head of the Thomaston Taxpayers Association said recently "if we don't get our house in order this is going to be a ghost town". Well I can see that here in Watertown. How many people are going to come here without strong schools? How many people are going to come here and choose to move to Watertown when every year it's this annual fight from about January on, through August mind you. People with children will look for a good school district which will pass their annual budgets and realize this annual fight to the finish is just ridiculous and the students and the teachers and the schools and the programs are the scapegoats for any economic problems that happen in this Town. The Watertown teachers deserve far better than this and it's about time we start to stand up for ourselves.

Richard Mazzamaro, 1055 Guernseytown Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Mazzamaro: Our budget process started when Karen Baldwin was hired last August and we were at a meeting at the High School, I think it was October, and she mentioned she was already meeting with principals. I said my God, budget season already. Right after Christmas, right in January, we had a budget workshop, 4 budget workshops to discuss line item by line item our budget and what we're going to do in these trying times. We understand how difficult it is. I'm a taxpayer, everybody on the Board is also a taxpayer in Town so we understand what it's like to pay taxes.

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We presented a 5.9% increase with a lot of data, pie charts, chart after chart, table after table, describing every single dollar that was being requested. We were then asked to come back, and Superintendent Baldwin came back (inaudible) illustrate for us what a \$1,500,000 decrease would do to you. Pie chart after pie chart, graph after graph, data upon data for you to look at explaining where we'd be. She came in, the Board came in and said 2.96%, again more data, piles of paper and piles of information. I'm hearing 2.29% now and I guess the only question I have for the Council and I don't know, maybe it's planned for tonight, could you show us how that number was arrived at? We have done nothing but give data upon data, meetings since January and we just ask, I'm hoping that somebody can show us and illustrate for us how 2.29%, I understand it's not written in stone, but how is the Council coming to this decision? I haven't seen the data that's been presented by the Board. I guess that's my only question. Thank you.

Heather Messina, 264 Pond View Drive, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Messina: Thank you for your time. I know these times are trying. Watertown has taken a hit for way too many years. I'll keep this brief. Surrounding towns, at the last meeting we tried to compare surrounding towns; I could tell you that surrounding towns, we're not asking for what surrounding towns have, we're not asking for foreign language for 7th and all 8th graders, we're not asking for media specialists in every school, we are not asking for a book budget for those media centers, raised from zero to anything. We're asking you to please keep the programs where they are now. Please at least, at the very least, put forward the 2.96% increase for the Board of Education, give us a chance to get that passed, we can do it. Thank you.

Kim Petrozzio, 6 Dunrobin Lane, Watertown, CT 06795

Ms. Petrozzio: We are all too well aware of the challenging times that we are in and perhaps there are more to come. I'm certain that there's no one in this room that has to juggle their finances on a weekly if not daily basis. I know that every day of my life I have to make choices of what I can afford, what I need to cut, what I have to tell my son no, I can't afford that this week and other changes in my finances that I have to make to meet the needs of my family. However if you look around this room and after all the comments you've heard this evening it seems pretty obvious that we're all in agreement, that we've come so many times before to implore you to allow the residents of this community to vote upon this issue, let us make this decision, don't make the decision for us.

Karen Baldwin was hired for her expertise and experience and therefore we look to her to develop a responsible budget that meets the needs of our children and our community. I believe she has done this at the 5.9% recommended increase. We don't expect that her efforts should be micromanaged or estimated to be outlandish or irresponsible or to continue to ask her to go back and keep grinding out that budget to find ways to cut the expenses to get it at a minimum level which only supports the basic needs of our services and eliminates teachers and important services for our children. Our children are the future taxpayers of this community. They deserve more.

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I would hope that you, as a Council, will allow the people to make the decision, allow us to bring it to a vote. Anyone who has listened to the presentation by Superintendent Baldwin clearly understands that the 5.9% budget increase is exactly what is necessary to support the operations of our schools, and not what's being recommended at this point. It's time to really listen to the residents of this community. Please don't put up blinders to all of us that (inaudible) before you, night after night. Our teachers spend more time with our children per day than we do as parents, and they deserve the funding that's necessary within our schools to provide for and educate (inaudible) children. I'm certain if we're all creative we can search within our pockets and come up with the \$6.00 per week to support this 5.9% budget increase. I'm sure we can all forego a few dinners per year, a few coffees per week, a gym membership if that's necessary, or eliminating extras within our family. Everybody here who stands before you tonight has said that they will do that, and if it went to the community we can assure you that the budget would pass at 5.9%. I implore that you restore the budget to 5.9% and let the people make this decision. Please don't make this decision for us. This is a very challenging decision, but it's one that should be ours.

Matt Terzigni, 86 Barnes Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Terzigni: I remember being last year at a meeting, similar to this, all these students came, we all spoke and we said pretty much the same thing I'll say now. When we look at this budget cut at the High School, we see our education being cut. I'm a Junior at the High School. I remember going through all my years here, just always thinking about the budget, what's going to happen next, what can happen next. Last year at that meeting I thought well it can't get worse than this, we can't buy new books. I remember showing books to you that had mold in them, books that were completely ripped and we brought them to you, we showed them and nothing much happened. We ended up getting our budget approved which made us happy at the High School. This year I've been to all these meetings cause I videotape them and I see the Superintendent at the last meeting here where she showed us the 2.96%, I believe that's pretty much as minimum as she can get without cutting people. At the High School we bond with our teachers throughout the year. My teachers here at Swift, I still talk to them. To see them lose their job or to get cut is kind of devastating. I don't want to see them go, I don't want to see them lose their jobs. It will affect the education here. If we end up cutting the Unified Arts program here, that will crush a lot of kids. My best friend is not an academic smart kid, he is a technical kid, he does wood and metals and stuff like that. At the High School he's continued that, he does independent studies in it. That's what he goes to work for, he works now doing that; to see him lose that opportunity because we can't pay for it, would be, I don't know, gut wrenching. I don't want to see all these programs get cut, I don't want to see teachers get cut. If we let this go to a vote, let the Town of Watertown decide what happens with our budget. All these people here, 98%, 99% of them are all going to vote yes. This show of support should be enough just to put the 2.96% to a vote. That should be enough to show how our Town does support this budget, our Town will pay the extra. Thank you.

Ms. Adams, Chairman, Closed Public Participation at 8:23 p.m.

4. Discussion and Possible Action concerning Finance Subcommittee Recommended 2009/2010 Budgets

Ms. Adams: At this time I'm going to ask Gary Bernier, the Chairman of the Finance Subcommittee, to give the Finance Subcommittee's report.

Mr. Bernier: Let's do the easy part first. The Subcommittee has recommended for the Town's side a zero increase and we have a \$1,400,000 increase to the capital for bonding of the schools. Those were discussed and quickly came to a consensus.

On the Board of Education budget, throughout the Subcommittee meeting there was a broad range of thought processes from maintaining a 1.5% through 2.96%. In all candor based on the last time we met with the Board of Education there appeared to be some open areas, possible concession discussions, potential additional cuts. We certainly did want the Board of Education to continue to pursue those and it was with that in mind that we came in with a 2.25% recommendation. We most certainly wanted the message to be that we are hearing the Board of Education and we certainly do not want to see our education slide, but equally we wanted to make sure that the Board of Education and staff continued to progress towards the final answers. This is a recommendation to go to a public hearing. I heard from all of your some discussion about \$600,000 coming out the Superintendent's office. I had not heard that from the Superintendent or from the Town Manager. We certainly want to provide the best education, we certainly want to provide the best services for the Town that we can, this is an extremely difficult year and all I'm looking for and I will commit right now that once those figures are in I'm not looking to cut this any further. If anything, what we want to do is just make sure that all the rocks have been turned over and we're at that point. I'd also like to make mention that Karen Baldwin and her staff and the Board of Education did an excellent job coming from a 5.9%, 5.1% (inaudible). The 2.96% came back predominantly with information that is more current than when they did this and to the best of my knowledge, very little actual base time has occurred. The health insurance was a significant savings. A few retirements that could not have been predicted earlier really made up a large portion for this, so 2.96% was what the Board of Education and staff came to us with. The message of 2.25% is simply that we do hear you, we want to proceed with any concessions or potential additional cuts that were discussed. Once those are in place, we most certainly will take that into consideration at the Public Hearing, at the Town Meeting and go forward.

Ms. Adams: Does anyone from the Finance Subcommittee, Carl, Rich, or Rich want to add to what Gary has said before we get into a motion and discussion?

Mr. Mancini: I'm the only person on the subcommittee who didn't vote for the 2.25% the other night. It's not that I said it was too high, or I said it was too low, it's because we didn't have the numbers from the negotiations with the different unions. So that night I said I could not support a budget without knowing those numbers and I will vote the same way tonight, cause I can't vote for a budget without knowing all the numbers. 1.5% was presented the other night and I voted against 1.5% for the same reason, I didn't have the figures. I didn't vote for 2.96%, I didn't vote for 2.25%, I didn't vote for 2%, I didn't vote for the 1.5% so that's where I stood the other night. I could not vote for a budget without knowing the numbers from the unions.

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MOTION: (Mr. Bernier, sec. Mr. Fusco) I make a motion that for the purpose of going to Public Hearing, we set the following:
0% for the Town Side.
\$1,400,000 for Bonding
2.25% Increase for the Board of Education

Discussion: **Mr. Rinaldi:** At 2.25% will we be losing teachers?

Mr. Bernier: I would tend to say yes.

Mr. Rinaldi: How many?

Ms. Adams: I think for tonight, what the Council needs to do is put a number to public hearing and at the public hearing we would have all staff available to answer questions on whether or not this would be the budget that would be recommended to referendum.

Mr. Rinaldi: I understand that, but at 2.96% (inaudible)?

Mr. Bernier: (Inaudible) there would not be, no.

Superintendent Baldwin: Yes there are.

Ms. Calabrese: Yes, there are.

Mr. Bernier: My understanding is that there was potential staff reductions if the health care savings were not real. Those numbers have been firmed and actually they're a little on the conservative side, if anything there will be a little bit more savings from what I understand. My understanding is with that being a fact, that 2.96% there is no staff reductions at all. Is that correct?

Superintendent Baldwin: That is correct. The 2.96% is achieved through use of the ARIA funding, the American Recovery & Investment Act which again we hope to hear more explicitly from the State Department of Education this week relative to our intended use of that money. It's also through some deductions in special education tuition contingency costs which is risky in some ways. As you mentioned, Mr. Bernier, the retirement savings that we were able to achieve is almost \$100,000 in future retirements, so overall the 2.96% keeps us whole, maintains programs and services, allows us to move forward with our improvement work in terms of public education and meeting the needs of all (inaudible).

Ms. Adams: I think that's one of the things too, when we spoke last Tuesday, that it was your, everything you did, especially with the ARIA money was just evolving, you were trying to get the most up to date information and so we hoped that by the 19th you'd be able to clarify just what the dollars can legitimately be used for; it's still a work in progress here.

Mr. Primini: At the last budget subcommittee meeting I remember hearing that the mill rate for 2.25% for the Board of Education be 23.03?

Mr. Bernier: That's correct.

Mr. Primini: And 2.5% would be 23.08? Was it for 2.96?

Ms. Adams: You mean with the zero increase in spending, just the \$1,400,000 along with the Board of Education increase of 2.96%?

Mr. Primini: Right, and I know the 2.25% was 23.03 and 2.50 was 23.08, so 5/100 of a percent.

Mr. Nardelli: 23.17 would be the mill rate at 2.96% for the Board of Education. I have an extra handout here.

Mr. Primini: I just want to clarify this, at 2.96% we are not looking at any lost positions?

Ms. Adams: Right.

Mr. Primini: 2.5% between 2.5% and 2.25% (inaudible) would be looking for what in positions? A ball park at least?

Superintendent Baldwin: Around 7 to 9.

Mr. Primini: If we move to 2.25%?

Ms. Adams: (Inaudible) the one . . . the two look identical.

Mr. Bernier: They are identical.

Mr. Nardelli: Yea, I handed out the 2.96%.

Ms. Adams: Where's the other one?

Mr. Nardelli: (Inaudible). Which one were you asking about?

Mr. Primini: The 2.96%, that's the one I have here.

Mr. Nardelli: Right.

Mr. Primini: The question I'm raising here the difference, the overall tax increase with a 2.25% is 2.96% comes out to 14/100?

Mr. Nardelli: Yes. The difference between the 2.96% and the 2.25%, the difference in the mill rate is 1.32 decrease versus a 1.18 decrease.

Mr. Bernier: Just for clarification, what we did is we came forward with a place mark and it was to allow the Board of Education to continue the activities that we had talked about at the last subcommittee meeting. Our intent was to signal that obviously 1.5% was not a number we wanted to entertain, 2.96% we understand is the magic number in which we're able to stay status quo, we certainly wanted to urge the Board of Education and education staff to continue with those activities and discussions that were ongoing and to come back to us prior to the public hearing, and at that point I think as a Council we would be able to set the appropriate budget. This is predominantly a place marker just so we could go to public hearing.

Mr. Fusco: I'd like to say something. If I could ask Karen, we were left, or the Council was left with the feeling that you were going to go back to the Teachers' Union and see if we could get some type of a concession, and I guess we're waiting here to hear something.

Ms. Adams: No, I think, Rich, that at this point in time that's a question for next Tuesday.

Mr. Fusco: Well the only reason I say this is if we were to get a concession, I would see nothing wrong with this 2.96%, but if we're going in with no concession from what I've heard from one of the representatives, there's no way you're going to get anything back. And I think that's what I'm left with so I'm just, well maybe we'll go to public hearing and see what happens.

Ms. Adams: I think that's the thing, Rich, is tonight it to put something to public hearing. There's still more meetings to be held, ARIA money, there's a lot still with just (inaudible) in flux right now. I mean obviously the 19th will have to be the date that everything is going to have to come forward, but I think right now what we're looking to do is to put the legality in motion for the public hearing and then that night we will have more information as far as where we're at with this. This is an unusual year. I can never remember in past Board meetings or past Finance Subcommittees meeting with the Board of Education three times, usually it's a one shot deal (Tape #1, Side B ended – may have missed some) side we have I think it's important to mention as far as with that zero percent increase on the Town that we're putting forward potentially tonight that one of the department heads and our Town Manager have not, have come forward and said you know what guys, we understand exactly what you're going through as a Town. Every year they come forward, the Manager puts a recommendation on the table for raises for all of our department heads and (inaudible) the Planning and Zoning Director, we have our Director of Parks, Director of Recreation, and there are like how many positions?

Mr. Nardelli: (Inaudible) plus all the non-organized.

Ms. Adams: Plus all the non-organized that will not be getting raises this year, they have not asked for one, they have understood what is going on and they have said thank you, but we're not even going to put you in the position of having to say no, we're just not going to ask and I think that's important for the Townspeople to understand that we do understand and our department heads understand exactly what is going on in this tough economy we are in now. So with that said, is there any other discussion? We have on the table a proposal for again, for the Budget Public Hearing for a zero increase for the Town except for \$1,400,000 proposed for the bond payment and to put on the table 2.25% increase for the Board of Education to put to Public Hearing which will be recommended put to a Public Hearing next Tuesday. Any other discussion? Seeing none, all in favor? All opposed?

In Favor: Ms. Adams, Mr. Bernier, Mr. DiFederico, Mr. Fusco

Opposed: Mr. Demirs, Mr. Mancini, Mr. Primini, Mr. Rinaldi, Mr. Winn

Abstained: None

MOTION FAILED (4-5-0)

Ms. Adams: Okay, motion fails. Now I'm going to ask those who put up the opposed to put something forward so we can get to a Public Hearing something that you're willing to have the public do their thing on. Paul? Ray? Carl? Dave? And who, Richie?

Mr. DiFederico: For a motion?

Ms. Adams: Yes.

Mr. DiFederico: I didn't oppose it.

Ms. LaForme: No, it wasn't Rich.

Ms. Adams: I thought we had 5 opposed.

Ms. LaForme: We did. Tom, Dave, Carl, Ray, Paul.

Ms. Adams: All right. We'll call for the vote again.

Mr. Rinaldi: On what?

Ms. Adams: On the original motion, there's a lot of confusion here.

Mr. Rinaldi: How many times are we going to vote on it?

Ms. Adams: Yea I know, I'm hearing 4 and 5, I'm hearing no I didn't, I voted yes, I voted no.

Ms. LaForme: I didn't count him.

Ms. Adams: Then it was 5 in favor. No? What did you have for the vote? Who did you have, Lynn?

Ms. LaForme: Opposed – Paul, Ray, Carl, Dave, and Tom. Those were the opposed.

Ms. Adams: Okay. Tom, opposed?

Many people talking at once (inaudible).

Ms. Adams: Okay, you're right. Okay, I ask the 5 of you to put something on the table, what do you want to do to put it to a Public Hearing?

MOTION: (Mr. Primini, sec. Mr. Rinaldi) I make a motion to put forward a 0% for the Town, \$1,400,000 for the bonding, and 2.96% for the Board of Education.

Discussion: **Mr. Primini:** I'm just going to make the argument, I'm looking at 13 tenths of a percent on the mill rate. And I'm hearing as far as okay there might be some extra money, but if there is extra money I'd like a commitment that that money be used towards the astro turf fields (inaudible) that's one thing we talked about when we did this astro turf field, so I don't care if it's \$100 or \$200, but something should be going towards that fund because what I'm looking at, 10, 12 years down the road when that field is ready to be replaced, and I'm hearing a number of about \$600,000, we're going to have to bond that out and we are talking about \$10,000 for referendum fees and about \$50,000 for bonding fees so you're going to talk, 10% of our overall budget is going to go towards just bonding and referendum fees, so I'd like some kind of commitment from the Board of Education that if there is something extra, that it goes into that account. That's just a sidebar.

Mr. Bernier: I guess that's really where we wanted to be with one exception, there is no longer any motivation for the Board of Education and the administration to look at any other potential cost savings.

Mr. Primini: I don't agree with that statement.

Mr. Bernier: What's the motivation at this point? (Inaudible.)

Ms. Adams: Any other discussion? Okay, in order to avoid any confusion, we're going to go individual voice votes. Paulie, in favor or opposed?

Mr. Rinaldi: In Favor.

Ms. Adams: Ray?

Mr. Primini: In Favor.

Ms. Adams: Carl?

Mr. Mancini: Opposed.

Mr. Demirs: In Favor.

Mr. DiFederico: Opposed.

Mr. Fusco: I'm going to vote in favor just to get it into the referendum.

Ms. Adams: Tom?

Mr. Winn: In Favor.

Ms. Adams: I'll go in favor.

Mr. Bernier: Opposed.

Ms. Adams: Okay, motion carries.

In Favor: Ms. Adams, Mr. Demirs, Mr. Fusco, Mr. Primini, Mr. Rinaldi, Mr. Winn

Opposed: Mr. Bernier, Mr. DiFederico, Mr. Mancini

Abstained: None

MOTION CARRIED (6-3-0)

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5. Consider Setting a Budget Public Hearing date, time, and place to hear comments on the proposed Fiscal Year 2009/2010 Budgets

MOTION: (Mr. Bernier, sec. Mr. DiFederico) I make a motion to set the Budget Public Hearing to be held on Tuesday, May 19, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. at Swift Middle School, 250 Colonial Street, Oakville, Connecticut to hear comments on the following Fiscal Year 2009/2010 budgets:

Town General Fund	\$24,810,584
School General Fund	\$36,247,908
Town Road Aid	\$ 131,486
Water Operations	\$ 1,379,503
Water Capital	\$ 183,900
Water Extension	\$ 139,157
Sewer Operations	\$ 2,011,691
Sewer Extension	\$ 83,092
Sewer Capital	\$ 131,436
Water and Sewer Debt	\$ 171,250
Crestbrook Golf Operations	\$ 732,854
Local Capital Improvement	\$ 160,121

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

6. Adjournment

MOTION: (Mr. Bernier, sec. Mr. Demirs) to Adjourn the Special Meeting at 8:48 p.m.

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Special Meeting Adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine H. Adams, Chairman
Watertown Town Council

Approved: _____
Lynn M. LaForme, Clerk