

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hicks Municipal Center
Council Chambers
Tolland, CT 06084

VISION STATEMENT

To represent education at its best, preparing each student for an ever-changing society, and becoming a full community of learning where excellence is achieved through each individual's success.

BOE GOALS

- Engage in a positive relationship with all stakeholders.
- Engage in a transparent and responsible budget process that maximizes innovation and efficiency.
- Foster a holistic & positive learning environment that results in a strong student skill and knowledge acquisition focused on student welfare.

REGULAR MEETING

7:00 – 10:00 P.M.

AGENDA

February 28, 2024

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86358441213?pwd=dUJpbmVDV3BoZW1MT1ZJZ1F1K21XZz09>

Meeting ID: 863 5844 1213

Passcode: 5FgfFH

Dial by your location

+1 929 436 2866 US (New York)

Meeting ID: 863 5844 1213

Passcode: 582724

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86358441213?pwd=dUJpbmVDV3BoZW1MT1ZJZ1F1K21XZz09>

A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

B. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- B.1 Tolland Public School Retirees
- B.2 Tolland High School Salutatorian, Lily Byam and Valedictorian, Sulan Zhang
- B.3 BOE Members

C. ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 7, 2024 -special meeting
February 13, 2024-special meeting
February 14, 2024
February 15, 2024-special meeting

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (2-minute limit)

The members of the Tolland Board of Education welcome members of the public to share their thoughts and ideas at this time. When appropriate to do so, members of the Board and the administration may respond to comments during "Points of Information". However, in consideration of those in attendance and in an effort to proceed in a timely manner, follow-up discussion may need to take place outside of the meeting setting.

F. CORRESPONDENCE

G. POINTS OF INFORMATION

H. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT – Audrey McKown and Sara Poulin

I. COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS

J. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

K. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

K.1 Review of Portal and Student Performance

L. NEW BUSINESS

L.1 School year adjustment from 182 to 180 days

M. OLD BUSINESS

M.1 Board of Education Goal Setting (no enclosure – continued from January 24, 2024)

N. BOARD ACTION

O. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (2-minute limit)

Comments must be limited to items on this agenda.

P. POINTS OF INFORMATION

Town Council Special Meeting Minutes – February 8, 2024
Town Council Meeting Minutes – February 13, 2024

Q. FUTURE

R. ADJOURNMENT

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION
 Hybrid Meeting
 Council Chambers
 Tolland, CT 06084
 Zoom or In-Person Meeting

SPECIAL MEETING – February 7, 2024

Members Present: Tony Holt, Chair; Jennifer Gallichant, Vice Chair; Bill Bode, Secretary; Renie Besaw, Dana Philbin, Jayden Regisford, Dan Sheridan, Brian Thompson

Members Absent: Kay McNulty

Administrators Present: Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent of Schools

A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Holt called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

B. OLD BUSINESS

B.1 Board of Education Budget Discussion

Mr. Holt noted that at the last meeting, the Board directed Dr. Willett to present scenarios for discussion, debate, and analysis by the Board. The goal is to narrow down to a single scenario that the Board can send back to the Superintendent with guidance for any adjustments.

Dr. Willett noted that by town ordinance, he needs to turn the Board's Adopted Budget over to the Town Manager by the evening of February 14, 2024.

Dr. Willett reviewed the 3 scenarios requested by the Board. (2024-2-7 Reductions Crosswalk)

- 9.78% (\$4,205,310)
 - No staff reductions; maintains current staffing levels
 - No program reductions
- 8.79% (\$3,76,951)
 - No staff reductions; maintains current staffing levels
 - Program reductions
 - Co-teaching
 - Legal services
 - Lexia student support (online)
 - Wit and Wisdom materials
 - Superintendent Conference/Travel/BOE Conference Travel
 - Business Education textbooks
 - Library books
 - BGP iPads/Promethean Boards
 - Summer Maintenance
 - Reductions in staff severance
 - Special Education Transportation reductions

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- 6.98% (\$3,002,366)
 - Personnel Reductions
 - 1.0 FTE THS ELA Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE THS Social Studies Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE World Language Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE THS Science Education Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE TMS Computer Education Teacher
 - 2.0 FTE 6th Grade Teacher(s)
 - 1.0 FTE TIS Music Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE K-2 Teacher (note: this is the reduction of a grant position not transferred to operating budget)
 - 1.0 FTE THS Paraeducator
 - Program Reductions
 - Co-teaching program reduction
 - Legal Services
 - Lexia student support (online)
 - Wit and Wisdom materials
 - Superintendent Conference/Travel/BOE Conference Travel
 - Business Education textbooks
 - Library books
 - BGP iPads/Promethean Boards
 - Summer Maintenance
 - Reductions in staff severance
 - Special Education Transportation reductions
- 4.00% (\$1,721,267)
 - Personnel Reductions
 - 2.0 FTE THS ELA Teachers
 - 1.0 FTE THS Math Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE THS Librarian (Library Manager position added)
 - 2.0 FTE THS Science Education Teacher
 - 2.0 FTE THS World Language Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE THS Social Studies Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE THS PE Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE TMS World Language Teacher
 - 0.5 FTE TMS World Language Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE TMS Computer Education Teacher
 - 2.0 FTE TMS 6th Grade Teachers
 - 1.0 FTE TMS Music Teacher
 - 1.0 FTE K-2 Teacher (note: this is the reduction of a grant position not transferred to operating budget)
 - 1.0 FTE THS Paraeducator
 - Program Reductions
 - Co-teaching program reduction
 - Legal Services
 - Lexia student support (online)
 - Wit and Wisdom materials
 - Superintendent Conference/Travel/BOE Conference Travel
 - Business Education textbooks

- Library books
- BGP iPads/Promethean Boards
- Summer Maintenance
- Reductions in staff severance
- Special Education Transportation reductions
- TALC Program eliminated
- Superintendent Tuition Reimbursement (contractual)
- Tutoring – General Education
- Tutoring – Special Education
- Reduction in Athletics
- Reduction of 0.5 SRO (one of the two part-time SROs)
- Resignation of BIS, hire at lower level ABIS
- ERF Server offset
- ELA Textbooks
- Mission Square 401a reduction
- Severance reduction

Dr. Willett provided an overview of the 4.00% scenario.

He explained that in terms of personnel, seniority matters, and they need to go through the bumping process. If two people are of equal seniority, then it goes to a review of the evaluations. He noted that in terms of the reduction at TMS, there would no longer be World Language or Computer Science Education. The 6th grade team structure would become more like that of the elementary school or split into a different structure with three groups of two teaching on an elementary school model. In terms of Social Studies, he does not yet know which electives would be lost but there would be an impact. Science electives would also be lost. Math sections would be limited and either standard and college prep would be combined and/or there would be a loss of an AP program. ELA would be similar. The reduction of a Music teacher would mean that there would not be Band or Chorus at TIS. General Music Education would still be available at TIS. In terms of the paraeducator position, fewer people would be moving through the building monitoring activities.

Dr. Willett noted that the 6.98% Superintendent's Proposed Budget has some of the same impacts but to a lesser extent than the 4.00% scenario.

Dr. Willett provided an overview of the 5-year plan.

He explained that it was designed on the basis of a 6.98% budget. If approved, they could maintain services and not reduce staff in a major way the following year with a 2.92% increase unless there are significant changes such as 2-4 outplacements that average \$100K each. The following years would be 4.46%, 3.22%, and 3.21% respectively. Dr. Willett noted that board budgets may be impacted in a positive way through relationships with other districts if some students attend high school at THS. Additionally, expanding Open Choice and evaluating the energy program can have positive impacts as well. This is based on current contracts and bargaining unit agreements.

Mr. Holt commented that one of the reasons for bringing up the 5-year plan at the last meeting was because budget season is not only the 2 months when they review the

Superintendent's Proposed Budget and send the Board's Adopted Budget to the town but also something that they need to work on the entire year. If they work with the town and neighboring districts it can have a positive effect. They are in a position where staying level requires almost 10%. The Superintendent's Proposed Budget, which is usually the Board's starting point, includes reductions in programs and staff. Mr. Holt noted that in the past, even with reductions, the district has found a way to make it work and this is a testament to Dr. Willett and his staff and Mr. Holt believes that with attention from the Board they can amplify this and will have to. Given the numbers, they will need to make it work with less money. He does not believe they can give a high request to the town and have them knock it down. It is up to the Board to provide direction to Dr. Willett and his staff. Some of the effects of the reductions can be minimized through scheduling changes and extra efforts on how some things are done. Mr. Holt recommended that they start by discussing the 4.00% scenario and add Music back.

Ms. Philbin commented on the incoming 6th grade class. She struggles with the change in structure. While there will be 4 less students, they are talking about reducing the 6th grade by 2 educators and she is concerned about class sizes. Over the next 5 years, there will be 10-20 more students. Dr. Willett explained that reductions have negative impacts, and they cannot be completely mitigated. Currently, K5 has high class sizes and cannot take any reductions so the majority of reductions would need to be in grades 6-12. In grade 6, they can use variants of the 5th grade model. The grade 6 class size would be 24 and grade 5 is currently 25. Ms. Philbin noted that it will increase with a jump from 146 to 183 over the next 5 years. Dr. Willett explained that K6 certification area means they can utilize all teachers within the scope and move them as needed. Ms. Philbin commented that someone who has been teaching kindergarten would not have a specialty for teaching the 6th grade and may not have focused on this area of professional development. The 6th grade is a big change, and the class size will be larger now through the next 5 years. Dr. Willett noted that when looking at the impact across the district, kindergarten is 140 this year and class sizes fluctuate. Staff can be moved to accommodate the K-6 spectrum so in the future, if they go with the 5-year plan and there are no additional reductions, they can move existing staff as the numbers rise and fall. While does not want to lose the 6th grade teaming model, he is in a position of relative impact. Ms. Philbin commented that it will be a major disservice to students to have larger class sizes, especially with social emotional items. All the administrators and educators in the rounds spoke about this in regard to anxiety and stress. There is also anxiety among educators being moved to areas that are not their expertise. Additionally, many spoke about losing Music at TIS and why it is so critical to their educational development so the district would be doing a disservice losing programs such as this one. Further, in the 4.00% model, World Language would be completely eliminated at TMS leaving a single option at THS and 3 years of language are required. Dr. Willett noted that they would need to see how it works out at THS in terms of bumping and the scenario chosen, but World Language would still be available at THS. Ms. Philbin explained that students would need to hurry to register for a class and a student may be cutoff and not have an opportunity. She wants to ensure that students are competitive when applying to college.

Mr. Bode asked about the 6th grade class sizes. Dr. Willett explained that they will increase due to fewer teachers, but the model will be similar to that in the 5th grade. Given the spectrum of K6 teachers, they can be moved based on class sizes. That said they would not want to have a teacher make the leap from kindergarten to the 6th grade as they may not be prepared. There is some flexibility in this range and he is trying to balance. Dr. Willett noted that the 6th grade would go up to 24.

Ms. Gallichant commented that they received at least 5 e-mails from 5th grade parents who said that the current class sizes are detrimental to students as they transition to TMS. They were looking forward to students going into 6th grade with class sizes of 19/20. Ms. Gallichant explained that if two teachers are reduced, the students will be in the same position. Administrators spoke of anxiety and self-harm concerns being seen at the middle school.

Mr. Regisford commented that responsibilities are being put onto other people in the buildings aside from the students and he feels they are being ignored. There is an impact on students and a further impact on staff.

Mr. Thompson commented that when talking about the number of personnel being reduced in the 6.98% budget, 70% are resigning. He asked if last year when the Superintendent's Proposed Budget was reduced, and the Board's adopted budget was 3.0%, if there were personnel reductions similar to those being proposed this year. Dr. Willett explained that some of the reductions proposed have individuals who may be able to bump into another position due to retirements, but it is about the program impact such as more students in combined sections and a loss in the higher end of language and elective or program options. They try to prevent people from losing their livelihoods as long as it does not compromise the integrity of an education program or students' needs. Mr. Thompson asked if last year these positions and programs were going to be on the chopping block. Dr. Willett explained that there would have been impacts. His job is to do the best he can to maintain the quality of education given the circumstances the Board gives him. He encouraged the Board to look at the programs that would not exist and make decisions accordingly. Ms. Gallichant responded that last year they lost a person and position in THS Business; a person in THS Math; a person and the childcare program at THS; the ROPE program at TMS and the associated teachers and para. Losing a math teacher directly affected her child.

Mr. Holt commented on Dr. Willett's statement that it is up to him and his staff to determine how best to make things work within the confines. Mr. Holt explained that the Board has an opportunity to select items within the scenarios. Dr. Willett has done a great job trying to anticipate where the minimal impact would occur.

Ms. Philbin commented that even when grant and other funds are used, they need to be sustained in the budget and this impacts where they are today. Mr. Holt added that the initial proposal does not include using other funds which were used in the past so that too impacts where they are today.

Ms. Gallichant stated that this is "horrific". In terms of numbers, \$1.7M of an increase over 11 years. When compared to other schools in the regional group, Tolland is the lowest. When doing contract negotiations, Tolland is the lowest. It got here by digging

a hole over 11 years and almost everything on the list is detrimental to students. The Board's purview is to do what is best for students so if anyone is going to propose a cut, she will want to know how it is best for the students and how they will do better without it. They need to find a way out of the hole. Ms. Gallichant stated that the town does not necessarily have to raise taxes to provide the Board with an increase. The town's fund balance is growing and for years the Board has been told that the money cannot be touched. The policy is 10-15% so the town is over what it is supposed to be. When asked during the audit presentation about the Tax Stabilization Fund and how much could be used toward the budget, the answer was \$300K. The new development project was mentioned as well, and its tax benefit is expected to be \$300K/year. Other businesses are coming, and the town will forecast its revenue. Why would the Board not tell the town what the students need and ask what it can do for the district which for the last 11 years has done less than surrounding districts? Ms. Gallichant commented that they were just working on their goals and asked how the cuts support the goals. A "responsible budget" does not mean "low". It means that they are meeting the needs of the students. She commented that the cuts do not support Portrait of a Graduate. Some items will sink students and may be less fiscally responsible.

Mr. Bode asked why Open Choice was not expanded in the past. Dr. Willett explained that the Superintendent's site and budget document provides more information but when they started the program, they limited it to 5 seats/year for kindergarten. This is what they have been doing and it has helped but the district was impacted by the Birch Grove rebuild and COVID. If he can expand the number of seats and do something with preschool in the future, there could be more participation of students in the program. Mr. Bode asked how much each seat brings in. Dr. Willett noted that it is dependent on the percentage of the population. The program also provides important skills for all students in terms of working together. Mr. Bode asked if it would be realistic to increase the program over 2024/25. Dr. Willett responded that they would look to increase it more gradually. With a preschool program, he expects that more students would enroll. Mr. Bode commented that reducing 17.5 FTE teacher positions is not acceptable. Mr. Bode asked if with the 6.98% they would lose French at THS. Dr. Willett explained that it depends on the certifications of the staff and the budget approved. While the French teacher (1 FTE) at THS is the lowest tenured position, it depends on how many positions are being reduced. TMS has 1.5 FTE running the program and with the 4.00% scenario they would lose the 1.5 FTE and 2 FTE at THS. They would need to look at the certifications. THS would still have French but possibly not the higher-level courses. Mr. Bode commented that at the last meeting they discussed bumping the 1.0 FTE TMS French teacher to THS so it would not be lost at THS. Dr. Willett explained that this would leave .5 FTE at TMS. A cut as deep as 4.00% would eliminate World Language at TMS regardless as to who is bumped. Dr. Willett noted that he has always proposed budgets that he felt were needed to keep the system going though it may impact offerings. Mr. Bode asked if Dr. Willett is working on any opportunities that would bring in revenue before this budget goes into effect. Dr. Willett explained that the "before it goes into effect" is the difficult part. He is working on items, but it is out of his control if they could happen before the budget goes into effect. The 5-year plan is based on solid assumptions. Mr. Bode commented that he likes that Dr. Willett is being proactive with the high school piece. Dr. Willett noted that staff has done an amazing job with programs that offer cost avoidance and provide a quality program.

Mr. Sheridan commented on putting the onerous on the town regarding having it utilize other funds. He would like to hear more about how the Board can direct the town to utilize the funds. Over the last 11 years, there has been an average 1.7% increase. The mill rate was 29 and is now 37 even with a small increase to the majority of the town's budget by the BOE. With a 4%, 5%, or 6% increase, he does not know what the mill rate would be. Ms. Gallichant commented that the mill rate is growing because the town has not been utilizing the funds. She is not suggesting that they use them year after year, but due to the lack of funding over the last 11 years, a hole has been created. The district is an asset to the town, and it needs to look at the funds that are overages to help the district. It will take something to get the district out of the hole and with the 5-year plan, the hope would be to have reasonable and sustainable budget increases (2-3%). Mr. Sheridan asked if this would be a budget increase or an injection of other funds. Ms. Philbin explained that in terms of the process, it can be discussed at the BOE/Council joint meeting and by the respective Chairs. Mr. Holt noted that this conversation has to happen. He and Ms. Gallichant have sat with the Council Chair and Vice Chair and stated that they would like to have conversations not only on this budget but also about a 5-year plan. A 5-year plan needs to be developed so they are not asking for such numbers in the future. While it will not help them now, it would help in the future. Dr. Willett noted that there are some cooperative things that can be done that would reduce the request. He noted that the 4.00% scenario does include not reimbursing the offsets from ARPA to the insurance account. Mr. Thompson asked if they could ask the town for funds at the joint meeting. Mr. Holt responded that they can ask but believes it is too close to call to know if the Board would get them.

Ms. Gallichant asked Dr. Willett if they take these items away from the district, if the district would still be competitive so that students want to come. Dr. Willett commented that the 5-year conversations are important to maintain competitiveness but reductions impact programs. They have an opportunity to collaborate with the town. Ms. Gallichant stated it has been \$1.71M over 11 years and data suggests that this is not what is going on elsewhere. There are solutions under the leadership. This would help maintain the district's competitiveness. Ms. Gallichant believes that they can start the conversation with the Council, and she does not understand why they would push digging out of the hole until next year. They are meeting on Monday. Mr. Holt explained that they could have the conversation but is unsure about the chances for agreement. He added that they are meeting on Monday and there is a joint meeting on the 22nd. They have a commitment from Council leadership to continue conversations going forward and an opportunity to add asterisks to the scenarios presented but he does not believe the Council can rotate quickly enough to offer solutions this year. Ms. Gallichant noted that she wants to empower people to start the collaboration with the Council now.

Mr. Sheridan commented that if the need is \$3M from a 7% budget with the reductions, he does not see how a 7% increase now and starting next year at \$44M and \$3M after that would work. In 10 years, it would be a \$62M budget at 3% every year. He asked if they could get \$1.3M from the fund and not start the massive trend of increases. If it was not funded well over the years, why can they not inject from the reserve? If they

do 7% now, they are setting a precedent and 6% over the next 10 years would be an \$87M budget. At 9% for level services, it would be \$120M.

Mr. Thompson commented that he agrees that they cannot lose staff positions and the music program needs to stay as well as computer education at TMS. The \$200K should be removed if they have a surplus in the reserve. Regarding Open Choice, he asked if this could get underway over the next couple of years. Mr. Holt confirmed that the 5-year plan is about the discussions and actions that would be needed. Mr. Thompson stated that not having the positions recommended by the administrators in addition to the other reductions is "crazy." The reading program at Birch Grove was mentioned and these are the youngest students who need to thrive and be up to par as they go through the school system. He commented that it is disappointing that they cannot discuss the numbers presented in depth because they were just received.

Ms. Besaw agreed that having the information late makes it difficult for any Board member to think about and make a \$42M decision. She does not believe the budget is "horrific". Any use of the fund balance is a temporary fix that they may be able turn into something but at the end of the day, it is like the ERF that no one wants to spend because it may be needed. The town's bond rating is based on the fund balance so something about that balance needs to be maintained. This is not under the Board's decision-making process. Ms. Besaw commented that the district has 600 fewer students than it did 10 years ago so there is an understanding that things would be different and adjustments would be needed due to a smaller enrollment. There are not enough people for a fully comprehensive program. Regarding the 6th students, if they kept the 2 positions, class sizes would be 18.25, less than grade 1. She feels that in 6th grade, although a transitional year, students can probably handle a higher class size than 18.25. Ms. Besaw commented that the 5-year plan is a good idea but there are a lot of variables over 5 years including enrollment. She commented that at 4%, they are not discussing reducing any administrative positions. The reductions are teachers etc. This is something they could potentially look at. She noted that there have been some questions about the bus contract increase and if it is accurate. Ms. Besaw commented that she was surprised by the four scenarios and though there would be an in-between 4% and 6.98% and one higher but there are two that are higher than the 6.98%. She is leaning toward the 4% with some add-ons such as the music teacher. The French teacher position has riled people up but they are possibly not going to remove French from THS. It is upsetting to students, parents, and the Board when it is not what may happen.

Ms. Gallichant commented that Ms. Besaw stated that the district has 600 fewer students over the last 11 years. The statement does not include that positions have been cut as well. Ms. Besaw stated that they do not have enough students to fill classes, but the Board is receiving e-mails from parents stating that students are in large classes. Ms. Gallichant noted that her child is in classes of 26-28 students, and it is detrimental. She does not understand why they are saying there are not enough students to fill classes while data shows that class sizes are too high. Ms. Besaw noted that she is going off the data provided by Dr. Willett. Ms. Gallichant commented that a chart showed max class sizes of 26-28. Staff have made several comments over the years that class sizes are too high. Ms. Besaw noted that she stated her position as did

Ms. Gallichant. She noted that she is not here to answer Ms. Gallichant's questions. Ms. Besaw is going off her interpretation of the budget and the information presented. She does not feel that she should have to defend herself and neither should Ms. Gallichant. Ms. Gallichant commented that she is merely countering Ms. Besaw's points because the public is watching, and she wants to ensure that the data they hear is accurate.

Mr. Holt asked Dr. Willett about the reductions and why they went with the ones listed. Dr. Willett explained that the district is not overstaffed with administration. They have many responsibilities such as grants, state reports, and evaluations. If they are taken out, he would not be able to do the work. The increase in the SBAC scores is due to the Math Supervisor and the teachers. The administration is responsible for everything having to do with literacy and the Right to Read Act compliance, and grant. Without staff, they will not be able to be awarded grants or fulfill duties from a contractual obligation point of view. They would not be able to hit evaluation timelines. He would not be able to do them. It is important from an operations standpoint for the district to have the administrators it has and it is not an unreasonable number.

Ms. Gallichant commented that they talk about leaving it to Dr. Willett and his team to determine where cuts would be best but then talk about protecting Band. They cannot be specific about what they want to keep and also not take responsibility for what they are going to lose. At the last meeting, they asked why they have three curriculum supervisors but who would be lost. Will they take away the mathematician and ask the literacy expert to cover the subject? She noted that she reviewed the Curriculum Supervisors' Board presentations and if people are going to talk about cutting the positions, they should know what they do. Ms. Gallichant highlighted items their responsibilities. Without them, it would fall to Dr. Willett, and it would not be effective or work. They should not lose the people holding the district together.

Dr. Willett noted that adjustments have been made for enrollment. There are 49 fewer FTE teachers than there were in 2006. Adjustments will need to be made and to do so in some areas would be more damaging to class size. The Board is in a tough spot and the tough work is the 5-year plan but is a good thing to do. Mr. Holt commented that there is a drastic difference in setting a direction and dictating how it is achieved.

Ms. Philbin commented that while discussing the numbers, they need to discuss what is needed to educate students and provide that budget. Regarding the 6th grade, she is the parent of a 5th grader and a 4th grader with 24-25 students in their classes. Based on her math, going from 146 to 168 is not 18.5 students/classroom. Even with a restructuring to having the number in the mid-twenties, and if rounded to 15-20 students, increases class sizes. While the table shows there are fewer students, there have been reductions in staff and programs. The class sizes are larger because there are fewer educators. She gets concerned when they talk about misleading people. There are 168 4th graders and 150 6th grade kids. First grade has 183 students and compared to 150 6th graders is an increase. In regard to the bus contract, they are in a bad situation because of bad decisions people made and the district is hundreds of thousands of dollars in the hole because they went out to bid when they should not have. She voted against it. They are here because of the decisions that were made

recently, and decisions made over the last 11 years. In regard to the budget, over the past 11 years, the Superintendent's Proposed Budget was always reduced by 50% on average. Dr. Willett has always said that he presents a fiscally responsible budget that serves the needs of students. Dr. Willett and his staff discuss the needs of the district, and for 11 years the budgets have not been approved. Ms. Philbin made the correction that the 11 years of budgets were in regard to all Superintendents who have been in the district over the 11 years, not solely Dr. Willett. The Board has been told what was needed and they have not complied. She asked that the Board have conversations with the Council. The Board has an opportunity to make a good, solid decision with Dr. Willett's guidance and work with the Council to be creative and not make the same mistakes that have made over the past 11 years. The students are suffering for it.

Mr. Regisford commented that the debate started when 4% was presented. He asked why they started at 4% rather than 9%. Mr. Holt explained that he looks at the scenarios as starting places from 4% to 9% and knows that in previous years when budgets have been proposed, there have been reductions, and opportunities have come back to either bring items back or have similar items. The effects are not necessarily what is presented. Dr. Willett sees opportunities that while not solid enough to be a budget item, Mr. Holt believes they can realize with a little effort. Mr. Holt explained that he started with the more reasonable fiscal number and then tried to build it back up to the need rather than starting at the top and reducing. Mr. Regisford explained that they have a difference in philosophy. When elected it was to advocate for students. Starting at 4%, which is "horrific", rather than 9%, concerns him. They are being hypocritical by starting at the lower numbers. They signed up to do a job, to advocate for students and staff and by starting at 4%, they are ignoring everything within the school buildings. Their job is to advocate for the school system, not to do the Council's job for them. He noted that it was stated that 6th graders could deal with a lot, but it does not mean that there will not be long term impacts. Mr. Regisford commented that over the last 10 years the Board has reduced the Superintendent's Proposed Budget, and he feels that there is no alternative to giving the schools what is needed. He has reviewed all of the lines, and they cannot ignore what has been communicated to the Board. The Board is ignoring what its job is and he cannot sign up to be part of this for another year. He would like to start at 9.78% with no reductions.

Mr. Holt explained that the Board has great opportunities to make a change and whether someone is at 4% or 9%, all members have a concern for the students and staff. Everyone is looking at doing good from slightly different perspectives.

Ms. Gallichant commented there are many impacts on staff when they reduce positions. She cited the example of moving teachers when there are bubbles. Staff are not factory workers, and they should not move them to other places and hope it works out yet hope they give students their best every day. She cited the example of a 6th grade language arts teacher and bumping them to kindergarten or first grade. She noted that they have barely mentioned social and emotional health, large classes size, and the taking away of programs such as Band and World Language. The program loss is significant.

Mr. Regisford commented that the school system is one of the biggest draws to Tolland. They need to encourage people to remain in town and the biggest factor is the school system. If people hear about teachers moving repeatedly through the classes, why should they not look elsewhere so students can have consistency? It will become a grand scale issue.

Mr. Bode commented that if they approve the 6.98%, they lose ten positions and programs. Historically, the Superintendent's Proposed Budget has not been adopted and if they do so they are still losing staff. Approving the budget is part of the 5-year plan to put the district in a better position moving forward. Mr. Bode asked what the likelihood is of getting \$1.5M from the Council. Mr. Holt responded that their conversations with the Council have suggested that it is willing to work with the Board. Mr. Holt believes that they will but does not know to what extent.

Mr. Thompson asked about the solution if the Birch Grove reading positions are added. Dr. Willett explained that to add the positions back would be \$170K-\$200K which is about three teachers and a para. Mr. Thompson asked if \$200K could be taken from the health insurance reserve for these positions. Dr. Willett noted that in terms of the health insurance reserve, they need to ensure it has a sufficient balance to cover any changes to trend. While there is an opportunity at times to take a particular amount, it cannot be relied upon to sustain staff costs. The current staff is doing an amazing job and Dr. Willett did not feel they were in a position to add staff this year. Mr. Thompson commented that they speak of relying on the experts and if the experts at Birch Grove are recommending six positions for reading, he does not understand how half are not in the budget. If they are talking about reducing the bus expense next year and doing things to generate revenue, he does not know why this cannot be addressed.

Mr. Holt commented that his plan tonight is to have one of the scenarios as a framework and provide direction to the Superintendent to make adjustments. He invited the Board members to motion to make specific adjustments. Ms. Gallichant commented that she is not ready to do so. It would be detrimental to the Board. Many members can look at various items, but they will not vote to give everyone the world and it would be a shame if they had a party line vote. This is not the goal. She asked about finding common ground and enough members to roll the dice with a higher number and have discussions with the Council. It may come back, and cuts would need to be made but right now they are choosing the reductions. Mr. Holt explained that he believes the next step is to propose a solution so they can direct the Superintendent. He would like to move from discussion about the contents to one about a solution and provide direction. Mr. Thompson believes they need to come to a consensus first on what the Board would like to see. Ms. Gallichant commented that the risk is five members voting for 4% and then there would no longer be conversation which would be catastrophic and politically divisive. Ms. Philbin recommended that the Board absorb the content and have further discussion. She is not ready to commit and wants to absorb the content. Mr. Holt commented that the challenge becomes the timeline. If they do not provide direction tonight, there is no time for Dr. Willett and his staff to create the document that needs to be turned in next week. Ms. Philbin asked if they could submit questions and ideas to the Council to see if they would be receptive. This would allow the Board to have a more fruitful conversation. There are funds in places

that could help. Part of the 5-year plan could be a discussion of capital items. A brief discussion took place regarding learning more about how cooperative the Council would be and scheduling a special meeting. Mr. Holt and Ms. Gallichant have a meeting scheduled with Council leadership on Monday.

*Ms. Gallichant motioned to direct the Superintendent to generate an 8.79% budget exploring opportunities to put programs back.
Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Mr. Thompson asked if this includes additions to the reading program at Birch Grove. Mr. Bode asked why this was not a consideration when creating the budget. Dr. Willett responded that staff are sustaining the needs of the students through program elements described in the recent ELA presentation. This is evidenced in the district's performance its accountability scores and other metrics. Having another interventionist would allow them to serve additional students but it needs to be balanced with the other reductions. In a year such as this, it is about sustaining successful programs and it did not seem that the directive was to add positions. Extensive efforts and programming are provided for the students' reading needs to be met. They can add \$170K in positions but it did not seem like this was an option. Successful programs are in place right now. Mr. Thompson commented that it was a reading teacher and if Mr. Swanson requested the positions, then it "boggles" his mind why they would be requested if the programs are running well without them. Mr. Bode asked if the requests are wants or needs. Dr. Willett responded that they are wants. When talking to educators about children, if there is an opportunity to increase the number of educators there will be more success with smaller class sizes, but he needs to balance requests with the needs of the entire district. They cannot add the positions in one place only to have a negative impact in another. Dr. Willett explained that he needs to make a value judgement in consultation with staff to determine the lesser evils. Not fulfilling the requests right now is a lesser evil than impacting class sizes in other grades. The reading teacher is not a classroom teacher per se so it would impact class sizes as a teacher would need to be reduced in the current situation. Dr. Willett works with the experts, and they plan accordingly based on the resources they feel they can reasonably request. This year, the budget request is this high because 6.51% is tied up in items he cannot change.

*Ms. Philbin motioned to amend the motion to include "consideration for the reading program at Birch Grove Primary School".
Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.*

Discussion: Ms. Philbin tabled the discussion.

Discussion [continued]: Mr. Bode confirmed that with the motion the Board is not binding. It is only directing the Superintendent to work on the scenario in the motion. Dr. Willett asked for clarification. Ms. Gallichant explained that the original motion was to start with the 8.79% budget that does not eliminate any staff. The Board would like to consider some of the program reductions as well.

Dr. Willett explained that with the fixed dollars, the \$400K for the programs recommended for reduction would need to be found elsewhere. There are not many places to look as programs do not make up the majority of the budget. He asked if the Board is opening the door to having more staff reductions. Ms. Gallichant commented that they need to stick to no staff reductions. The co-teaching program means the most which is improving test scores and is vital to special education – one of the highest budget items that will only grow if students do not get what they need in regular programming. Ms. Gallichant stated she would like to add co-teaching back in as well as Mr. Thompson's request. Mr. Bode confirmed that with no teacher reductions they would fill the currently budgeted vacant teacher positions. He asked if they do not fill those positions if they could roll the money into the programs that have been cut. These are unfilled positions that the district is getting by without having right now. Dr. Willett responded that vacant teacher positions are currently staffed by long term subs. Regarding any position not filled, that this is what the Superintendent's Proposed Budget does for some positions. It also accounts for a particular number of retirements but if the number is not reached, there will be a budget shortage. Dr. Willett explained that there are not a lot of programs reductions he can go to. If the \$30K is going to be put back for co-teaching, he could take a position or a 0.5 FTE position. The program budget is a tiny fraction of the personnel budget. He will do as directed but the funds may come from somewhere the Board would not like them to come from. Mr. Bode asked if they budgeted for ten teachers but only nine positions are filled, if they can take the funds from the vacant position and use them to fund programs. Dr. Willett noted that if they do so, they would take away more of the program offerings provided by the position. The position not returning would mean that a program or section would not come back and they would be funding the material program instead. He noted that they already do this to some extent in the proposed budget by taking into account some vacancies and retirements. He confirmed that Mr. Bode is saying that if anything else comes up to use the funds toward a program rather than restoring a position. The positions are currently being filled with subs. Mr. Bode asked about the comparison between what is budgeted for long-term subs and having a teacher. Dr. Willett explained that they calculate in the differential of the step of the person who retired vs. the step expected to fill the position. Mr. Thompson asked if the technology funds could be used for the Birch Grove iPads and Promethean Boards rather than doing maintenance. Dr. Willett noted that the ERF fund may be used for this, but they need to use care in how much is taken from the fund as it may be needed to offset items such as special education and capital items. Additionally, it may lower the budget this year but if the need still exists next year it would carry. Mr. Thompson explained that the future is now. People have asked them to stop "kicking the can down the road" and they have the money. They will already have to spend money on maintenance for the Promethean Boards so this would allow them to offset this expense. Dr. Willett commented that one version of "kicking the can down the road" would be taking money from an account such as the ERF and then needing to fund it in the budget in a future replacement cycle. There will be a larger climb in next year's budget. If the Board wants to take more from the ERF to offset this year's budget cycle it may do so but there

have been conversations that the Board does not want to run the ERF too low. The current budget year is just above zero and if they are hit with special education impacts, they may need to dip into the ERF to offset them. They want to have enough funds available to be able to respond. Mr. Thompson commented that it is a waste of money to put maintenance into the old boards and buy them next year if the money is available now.

Mr. Thompson motioned to amend the motion to include, "to use the ERF to take care of the line item, BGP iPads/Promethean Boards."

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Thompson commented that there should be savings in another line item to offset the cost. Dr. Willett explained that this is already listed as a reduction to the budget so taking from the ERF means they are instead funding it through the ERF. Mr. Thompson confirmed the Board would like to use ERF funds to restore something else. Ms. Gallichant commented that she would like co-teaching to be restored.

Dr. Willett noted that the amended motion is as follows:

Motion to direct the Superintendent to generate an 8.79% budget that restores programs and to investigate the use of the ERF fund to offset costs of the BGP iPads and Promethean Boards and restore co-teaching.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Regisford, Thompson, Bode, Holt, Gallichant, Philbin

Opposed: Besaw, Sheridan

Abstentions: none

Motion carried.

Ms. Gallichant motioned to extend the meeting past 10:00PM

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Regisford, Thompson, Bode, Holt, Gallichant, Philbin.

Opposed: Besaw, Sheridan

Abstentions: none

Motion carried.

Dr. Willett noted that with the motion presented, the ERF would be used to fund co-teaching.

Mr. Thompson commented that he would like there to be exploration of the reading program resources requested by the experts. Dr. Willett noted that when grants come up, they do submit applications for those resources. He does not know if any would come up for those specific positions.

Motion to direct the Superintendent to generate an 8.79% budget that restores programs and to investigate the use of the ERF fund to offset costs of the BGP iPads and Promethean Boards and restore co-teaching.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Regisford, Thompson, Bode, Gallichant, Philbin

Opposed: Besaw, Sheridan, Holt

Abstentions: none

Motion passed.

A brief discussion took place regarding having a special meeting on Tuesday, February 12, 2024.

Ms. Philbin motioned to schedule a special meeting on Tuesday, February 12, 2024.

Mr. Bode seconded the motion.

Discussion: Mr. Bode commented that it would be important to how he votes and knowing the temperature of the Council. Dr. Willett noted that it would need to be scheduled tomorrow.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Regisford, Thompson, Sheridan, Bode, Holt, Gallichant, Philbin

Opposed: none

Abstentions: Besaw

Motion passed.

C. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Besaw motioned to adjourn at 10:14 PM.

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Pascuzzi
Clerk

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION
Zoom Only
Council Chambers
Tolland, CT 06084

SPECIAL MEETING – February 13, 2024

Members Present: Tony Holt, Chair; Jennifer Gallichant, Vice Chair; Bill Bode, Secretary; Renie Besaw, Kay McNulty, Dana Philbin, Jayden Regisford, Dan Sheridan, Brian Thompson

Members Absent: none

Administrators Present: Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent of Schools

A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Holt called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

B. OLD BUSINESS

B.1 Board of Education Budget Discussion

Mr. Holt explained that during the last meeting the Board debated four primary budget scenarios with increases that ranged from around 4% to around 9%. After deliberation, the Board directed the Superintendent to look closer at the 8.79% option which included no staff reductions and a number of program reductions. Mr. Holt noted that he asked the Superintendent to work on an additional scenario that will be reviewed this evening. Last night, he and Ms. Gallichant met with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Council. He noted that no decisions were made, and no guarantees were offered. The purpose of the meeting was to gauge the leadership's willingness to possible financial opportunities between the Board and the Council. It was a productive conversation and Council leadership is enthusiastic about working with the Board towards a common goal. Mr. Holt noted that they articulated the Board's intention to work on, and implement, a 5-year fiscal plan which will need the assistance of the Council and the PZC. Council leadership stated that the town is in a good place this year to help with educational pursuits. A number of possibilities can be explored to augment the existing and longer-range plans. Mr. Holt met with Dr. Willett today and discussed ideas to present tonight. A couple of the Council avenues are included in the scenarios as assumptions to maintain certain services while driving down the ask. He noted that these assumptions are pending request and approval by the Council. Other avenues were brainstormed as well but these are the ones he feels have the highest probability of approval while staying within the long-term goal of leveling out future requests. The Board will have a list of priorities should the Council approve funding opportunities. Mr. Holt noted that they also discussed the format of the combined meeting on February 22nd. It is his belief that the meeting will be successful and collaborative. At the end of this evening's meeting, he will look for a motion with a single budget option. The Board needs to have a budget proposal for approval at tomorrow's Board meeting. At the conclusion of tomorrow's meeting, Dr. Willett will deliver the Board of Education Budget Request to the Town Manager.

Dr. Willett reviewed the 2024-2-13 Reductions Crosswalk document.

This document includes the scenarios previously presented in addition to an 8.79%. In regard to the 8.79%, the Board requested that the Birch Grove iPads and Promethean Boards be funded with the ERF and that co-teaching 30k be funded. This brought the 8.79% to 8.82%. The 8.82% restores co-teaching and has no staff reductions, but includes the program reductions noted in the document. These are the same program reductions previously presented.

Dr. Willett reviewed a 4.56% scenario. This was created as an intermediate between the 4% and 6.98% scenarios.

The main differences with respect to positions are the following reductions:

- Reduction: 2.0 FTE THS ELA Teacher (2.0 vs. 1.0 in the 6.98%)
- Reduction: 2.0 FTE THS Science Education Teacher (2.0 vs 1.0 in the 6.98%)
- Reduction: 1.0 FTE THS PE Teacher (no FTE reduction in the 6.98%)
- Restored: 1.0 FTE TMS Music Teacher (- 1.0 additional ELA)
- Restored: 0.5 SRO
- Restored: 1.0 FTE TMS World Language Teacher (- 1.0 additional Science)
- Restored: 2.0 FTE TMS 6th Grade Teachers (-1 PE Teacher)

The program reductions are similar to those in the 4.00% with the exception of the co-teaching.

The budget assumptions (TBD by the town) in the 4.56% scenario are as follows:

- \$200K not put into insurance to restore ARPA funds provided last year
- \$649,429 (principal and interest for geothermal system loan returned to the BOE budget from TC)

The ERF would be used for the iPads and Promethean Boards at Birch Grove.

Mr. Holt asked how the effects would be mitigated from the reduction of the ELA and additional science teachers. Dr. Willett explained that when looking at comparative enrollment, class size, and certification, it would increase class sizes at THS but in K5 and the middle school class sizes are larger, and reductions would have a larger impact. This model maintains teaming at TMS and World Language through the district.

Mr. Regisford asked why it is now ok to eliminate the positions at THS. Dr. Willett explained that they are not talking about what is ok per se but after conversations of the board, reviewing information, and seeking an intermediary step, they would be able to cover the necessary certification areas and preserve World Language district wide and Music at TIS. The reductions will not be easy from an organizational point of view but are possible. When discussing budgets and considering options, these are options. It is up to the Board to decide and make a value judgment. He is trying to adapt to the Board's discussions. Mr. Regisford commented that it feels like it is about keeping the number low. Philosophically, they disagree about what is best for the school system. If it means keeping positions, regardless of a number, they should look at it. The Board asked for an 8.79% to avoid eliminating any positions and this scenario does not do this. Dr. Willett noted that the 8.79%, which is now an 8.82% with co-teaching is also a scenario presented and still a scenario that can be considered.

Ms. Philbin asked if the reduction of the science teacher jeopardizes accreditation. Dr. Willett responded that in and of itself it will not cause them to lose accreditation, but

they are they will look at everything including budget and support of the budget as part of the overall review of the district and the school.

Ms. Gallichant asked what the reduction would mean in terms of co-teaching. Dr. Willett explained that the objective is to expand the program and the dyads, teaching teams typically of two, to reduce the achievement gap and to have more students going into college prep classes as well as to increase accountability scores. The district's accountability scores are excellent, but this would allow it to do even better. With the reduction of \$30K to \$20K, Dr. Willett would look for other ways and grant funds but there would be fewer dyads. Ms. Gallichant commented that when the Board discussed the 8.79% at the last meeting, it was to keep as many positions as possible and she does not know that she agrees with the trades presented without Dr. Willett providing compelling reasons such as the enrollment in some of the THS classes. She does not agree with reducing TMS computer education or two teachers and a para. In terms of co-teaching, it is an important program, and she does not want to lose an entire program where grants may be available assuming that they would not be available to support computer education or a kindergarten teacher. Ms. Gallichant commented that she and Mr. Holt had a productive meeting with Council leadership. She also attended Council meetings including the capital budget meeting and heard that the town is in good shape and very healthy overall, but the district is facing massive cuts in education. Last year, the Board asked for help and was only able to receive \$200K in ARPA funds. Positions and programs were cut. This is the time for the Board to work with the Council to pull the district out of the 11-year hole and she feels the Council leadership felt the same although they could not make any commitments. They said the Board should ask for what students need and not focus on a percentage. They are excited to work with the Board and this should be kept in mind when making decisions. Ms. Gallichant has not heard a compelling reason why the proposed cuts are good for students. She would like to see as many of the positions as possible go forward.

Mr. Thompson asked about the total number for the 4.56% increase. Dr. Willett noted that it is approximately \$1,958,430. What greatest offset is the \$649,429 assumption for the geothermal system outside of various combinations of teachers. For example, the two 6th grade teachers would have a higher return than the PE teacher. Mr. Thompson asked what is projected to be cut in the 4.56% for the tutoring for general and special education. Dr. Willett noted that this is in the 4.00% as well. In certain situations when students are in unique homebound situations, one of the RTI/SRBI supports pays for tutoring. Given the trend, he believes a little can be cut from here. Mr. Thompson asked about the TALC program. Dr. Willett explained that it is an after school alternative learning program that helps keep the graduation rate high and assists with expulsions. Dr. Willett noted that TALC could be eliminated and restored in a future year. It has been done before.

Mr. Bode asked about the 4.56% and where it is in relation to the 5-year plan. Dr. Willett noted that it is based on the assumptions, particularly that the \$649,429 is provided. It is a little lower than the 6.98% scenario meaning it would have a mild effect on the 2.92% in the 5-year plan pushing it to 3% or 4%. Mr. Bode noted that his count for vacant para positions is 19 and asked if this is accurate. Dr. Willett responded that this number seems high and would need to check on this and provide him the

information. It may be that since then, a something may have moved from one line to another. They do not have many open general education para positions but there are open special education para positions. These are usually dictated by IEPs and PPTs. Sometimes, if they cannot fill a position, the classification and responsibilities are changed to an ABIS or similar position to fulfill the need. The numbers fluctuate. Mr. Bode commented on the vacant social studies position. He is assuming that it is being filled by a long-term sub and on the 4.56% there is a reduction of a social studies teacher. He asked if there is a line item for this long-term sub going forward filling the current position since it is vacant. Dr. Willett explained that the position is currently being filled by a long-term sub and would be coming out of the long-term sub line. If the long-term sub line is cut, it could put the district in a difficult position when things like FMLA coverage is needed. Mr. Bode asked if the social studies position is reduced if it will continue to be covered by a long-term sub. Dr. Willett responded that they do not keep long-term subs in perpetuity and the union would not allow this. Mr. Bode asked what THS class sizes would be with reductions. Dr. Willett expects class size average to be in the range of 18 to 21 overall. This is in regard to the average for all classes.

Ms. Besaw commented that at one time Dr. Willett provided a list of items that might be able to be reduced such as the food service fund (\$20K). She asked if this list is included in the 4.56%. Dr. Willett explained that the food service offset used last time would not be used again this year because they have not received a response from the state and approval is needed. The FRC program charges offset the financial impact for parents/guardians, and provides options than free/reduced lunch. Ms. Besaw asked about the \$64K for retirement and \$13K for MissionSquare and if they are part of the 4.56%. Dr. Willett responded that they are. Ms. Besaw asked if the tutoring line is for current needs or in case situations arise. Dr. Willett explained that if the line is reduced, they would need to try to find other ways to fulfill need but it is based on trend. Ms. Besaw commented that 2%-3% of positions remain vacant over the course of a year and confirmed that the scenario presented represents fully staffed positions. Dr. Willett noted that it would make sense for a district with 400+ employees to have such fluctuations. Most of the positions are for special education paraeducators and the requirements need to be addressed one way or another. Ms. Besaw explained that she was referring to this more broadly in terms of perhaps doing 0.5% assuming that not all of the positions would be filled and using the funds to not reduce a position. Dr. Willett explained that the funds may be needed for compliance in other ways i.e. a consultant to cover an IEP if a para is not available.

Ms. McNulty asked if the THS paraeducator position is vacant. Dr. Willett responded that he is unsure as of today, but was and these paraeducators are used at THS for monitoring the building for things such as vaping in bathrooms. They will rely on the administrators to make more sweeps. Ms. McNulty commented that she is concerned about larger class sizes in all of the schools. She is puzzled by the approach of limiting the budget based on previous occurrences when the town was in a different fiscal environment. It sounds like the Board should be supporting a more robust education system. She feels they should stay closer to the directive of providing a budget that depicts having a great school system. It is about the value of homes and getting people to move to town. She has concerns about dismantling the schools and heard about the Open Choice program. It is a great future state, but she is unsure how to lure people to

send students here if this is the direction they are going. Other towns in the area have schools with higher rankings and if more is cut, how can the town compete? She likes the 5-year plan but has concerns about where they are launching from. Dr. Willett noted that Tolland is ranked very competitively in the state accountability scores. Tolland ranks in the top 5 of the DRG and top 3 in SATs. Changes would need to be made to be competitive in Open Choice because other towns have preschool programs which can be an advantage but Open Choice would integrate students and provide a meaningful opportunity for collective learning and experiences as well as a financial return. Dr. Willett noted that he would like to expand the program. He noted that the Birch Grove program was in portables for 2 years which caused a dip in interest in coming to Tolland, but he sees a bright future if the Board wants to go in that direction. Ms. McNulty noted that the district is ranked well in the state and is relatively competitive, but they need to stop going in this vein or it will get worse.

Mr. Sheridan agrees that the multi-year plan is needed for the overall budget. He has heard what many have said about a level services and an 8%-9% budget but in his opinion, it is irresponsible to ignore the impact on households that cannot sustain further increases to the mill rate and 8%-9% increases in one year. He has received e-mails and spoken with people about the town's median income of \$120K. He researched this and while it was noted that the median income is \$121K, it also noted that 1,100 people are living below the poverty line in Tolland. He reads e-mails and hears from the public that they need to fund the schools to keep attracting families to Tolland. He does not want to see anyone lose their job and his family moved back to Tolland but commented that there needs to be some consideration for those living below the median income level. He does not want to push a family out of town that cannot afford to live here just to replace them with someone who can. His family moved back to town for the schools as well as to be with family, friends, and the community. The multi-year plan makes sense. If they pass 6.98% this year, they can look to 2.92%, 4.46%, 3.22%, 3.21% over the next 5 years which is needed to support students. He asked that they average these and reduce the 2025 impact to families which cannot take another hit. The average is 4.16% each year over the next 5 years. With this he sees programs that were lost coming back. He supports an increase on the lower end of the options and having the team focus on doing more to ensure the 5-year plan finds areas where they can invest and save money. He understands changes need to be made over the next 5 years to support the schools, but they need to try to ease the burden in year 1 and look strategically at other areas to save over the next year.

Ms. Gallichant commented that the Board's percentage increase does not dictate a mill rate increase. A budget increase of 8% does not dictate an 8% mill rate increase. No one's goal is to impact taxes, drive families out of town, or make it harder on anyone; however, the Board does not manage the town's funds. The Board's job is to pass on the budget students need. They heard from the Council that this is what they want the Board to do. They are asking the town to look beyond the \$200K and the \$649K to help the Board, and the town has the funds to do so. The town is on track to be \$1M over budget this year. It is over the policy amounts for the fund balance. The town is not in a place to hurt people and take them out of their homes. They are all in a good place to have conversations and she is hopeful in that so many, including the Council, want to back a multi-year plan. Many members did not like the 6.98% which was 10 positions

and 4.56% is 9 positions. The town is in a healthy place and this is the time to ask for things and not cut positions before the Council review.

Ms. McNulty commented that she agrees that they need to be cautious of the most vulnerable residents. She is pleased that Tolland has tax relief programs, and that the state provides an even larger safety net for struggling residents. There are a lot of options that do not require unreasonable tax increases. While it is not the purview of the Board to explore those options, they should keep them in mind. The 4.56% range is deplorable and low. It does not help them. There will be changes to the grand list after the assessment in 5 years that will affect the mill rate. It is up to the town to adjust the mill rate and ensure residents are in a healthy state.

Ms. Philbin commented that she appreciates people being cognizant of all of the town's residents. The charge of the Board members is to ensure an appropriate and strong school system. She is concerned that they are discussing the mill rate. While they cannot be oblivious to it, the charge is to provide a flourishing and responsible school system and budget. She believes Dr. Willett is downplaying the impact of the cuts presented and minimizing what they can potentially do. She asked how any of the cuts are good for the school system and noted that she is concerned about accreditation. They should not be cutting this deep if they are discussing rebuilding. At the Council meeting they discussed the health of the town and supporting other avenues. Given the leadership's discussions, she hoped the Board would be having a more positive conversation about supporting the schools and not cutting programs.

Ms. Besaw commented that Ms. Gallichant said that the town was overbudget but perhaps meant that it is underbudget and has extra money. Ms. Besaw noted that she believed that moving forward with the 4.56% would be done with the ask that the Council provide additional funds so items not in the 4.56% could be restored. Mr. Holt commented that after the budget is passed, Dr. Willett and the staff look for ways to recover or not eliminate items proposed in the budget. Council leadership said that multiple avenues could be explored. If additional funds are available, he assumes staff would not eliminate items on the list. Dr. Willett explained that if there are funds that can restore items, the changes will be in the budget that goes to referendum.

Mr. Bode asked about the 19 para positions. Dr. Willett clarified that stipends are included in that number and that there are about 10 open positions.

Mr. Sheridan explained that his biggest concern is about starting at an 8% or 9% increase in one year. Over the past 10+ years, the budget has not gone down. If they continue to throw money at every problem and add 31 teachers each year, in ten years the budget will be \$90M-\$100M. Compromises have to be made during budget time. He recommended easing the burden in year 1 and taking the average of the request over the next 5 years. Putting it all in one year will put hardship on families. It will have an impact and he cannot ignore it.

Ms. McNulty asked if the 5-year plan has teacher cuts. Dr. Willett responded that the purpose would be to stabilize so they would not be making a lot of reductions over 5 years. Ms. McNulty asked if they pass an 8.79% increase, how it would impact the

following 4 years. Dr. Willett noted that the numbers are based on a 6.98%. If they go higher, it will not negatively impact the projection.

Ms. Gallichant noted that in regard to the budget, she meant that the town has funds in excess of and not over budget.

She commented that she has never seen it work where they would bring something to the Council and then add back. She read a quote from the Council Chair that they want the Board to present the budget it wants funded. Ms. Gallichant commented that if they do not ask, the answer will be no. If the number requested is not the one given back, then decisions will be made. Last year the Council discussed giving the Board more, but this was because the Board passed a 6% and the Town Manager cut it to 3%. Ms. Gallichant commented that the full Board received 58 e-mails regarding the budget and last year it was 24. Of the 58 e-mails, 5 were not in support of asking for a higher budget, the others supported education at a higher level. She stated that the 4.56% without the energy and ARPA funds would be about 6%. The Board would not be asking for 8% and asking for it year after year. If the town provides the funds, the Board would be asking for 4.56%, not 6%. If the Board asks for 8% and receives the funds and more, it would not be 8% nor the requested number next year. This is where the multi-year plan comes in. A large part of the budget is from contract negotiations, and many were recently done so they know where they will be 3 years out. Further, the term has just started so the Board will be with the same Council next year that will hold the Board accountable.

Ms. Philbin commented that she would like to send what is needed to the Council and that Dr. Willett spoke of the cuts as though they would not have a large impact on the health of educators and students or class sizes. She added that she would like to hear from the members how any of the cuts are helpful, part of a flourishing education system, and are the right thing to do for the schools.

Mr. Bode noted that any money received from the Council cannot be used for operating expenses. If used, they will be back in the same position next year. The money from the Council needs to be used for one-time, capital items.

Mr. Sheridan commented that he does not know that any of the proposed cuts will help students but believes there are parents who may have difficulty remaining in town. Long term, decisions made now have a significant impact if they start with such a large number.

Mr. Regisford commented that it was said that at some point they would reach a \$100M budget and he does not believe it is appropriate to put something like this out there and would like to see the data behind the \$100M projection. A Board increase does not necessarily mean a mill rate or tax increase. He asked what policy was being referred to in terms of use of the operating budget. Mr. Bode clarified that this is not policy nor that the funds cannot be used, but in a financial sense they should not be used if they cannot account for it next year. Mr. Regisford commented that this is where they are because of the past 11 years when they did not want to have a large up-front cost. Now, the Council has funds available, and this eliminates concern, so he is unsure where

the conversation is in this regard. They will not ask for 8% every year after this. The 8% is due to the past 11 years and the hole they are in.

Ms. Besaw commented that if they ask for \$45M and the town gives \$1M, the budget will go to \$44M. Next year, they will want to start at \$45M and will be missing \$1M. When using fund balance to support operating expenses, the operating expenses do not go away the following year. It is the epitome of "kicking the can down the road". She asked that they resize and do what is needed to support students. She added that Dr. Willett presented a great option although it has downsides, like all budgets. She does not want to be in a position next year of trying to make up ground.

Ms. Gallichant commented they are ignoring that the town has a lot of funds and the Board made significant cuts last year that did not have to be made. They are talking about numbers, but this is not their role. She does not want to vote on this with numbers. These are positions and programs that impact students. She does not want to be forced into a vote and drive it down party lines based on how a 4.56% looks, which is really a 6% over what they like about 8.79%.

Ms. Philbin noted that she understands when something is funded and not available the following year that it needs to be offset but with the Council taking away the UISF interest and fees for geothermal, it will no longer be in the Board's budget. They need to talk about the numbers and vote on them, but their job is to determine what will help schools flourish. What is good for the school system is talking about restoring programs and staff, not cuts. During the rounds, educators spoke of mental health and anxiety. When they strip core educators and programs, they erode items that provide support. They need to talk about what cuts will do. The Board's charge is to present what will take care of the school system.

Mr. Sheridan commented that the numbers he is presenting are not hyperbole. The 1.7% increase over the past 11 years is horrible based on the conversation but if they go forward 11-12 years at 3%, they are at \$61M, 6%, \$86M, 9%, \$120M respectively. He understands they are not going to do a 9% increase year over year but will be somewhere in these numbers.

Ms. Gallichant commented that she does not believe Mr. Sheridan is throwing out random numbers. They have dealt with these discussions year over year, and she knows that he cares. In terms of 3% every year, this is what other districts are doing. The district is the lowest of the average over the last 11 years and she wants it to grow like other districts and be competitive. If class sizes are at 21, she is ok with this but is concerned at 23 and higher. As they take things away, the district becomes less competitive. Ms. Gallichant asked how long the district has been paying the \$649K for the UISF agreement. Dr. Willett believes it has paid since approximately 2014. He confirmed that local boards of education are not supposed to hold debt. Such items are put in the Board's capital request. Ms. Gallichant commented that it sounded the other night that the reason the Board took on the debt was because the town could not do so. She asked how much has been paid on the debt thus far. Dr. Willett noted that he would have to research it. Currently, principal and interest are \$649K. It was refinanced

and was originally an ESCO project. Ms. Gallichant commented that the Board never should have held this debt, and the town should help.

Mr. Regisford commented that conversation with worrisome future numbers is taking away from conversations about problems that need to be addressed now. They should be focused on what they have and what is needed. He does not understand why there is not an all-out pursuit to fund the schools.

Ms. Besaw commented that they are asking the Council for help even with the 4.56%. They are asking for \$650K for the energy situation and \$200K on ECHIP. The schools are in a good position and students are achieving. She added that they would need to dig into what underlies situations in other districts regarding their increases. Ms. Gallichant agreed that it is difficult to compare but it is the district's regional group and what they should compare themselves to. It is the same group used for contract negotiations. This is the best data they can go on.

Ms. Philbin asked if they could ask the town to pay the Board back for the \$649K it has paid over the years when the Board should not have been carrying the debt. When looking at the health of the town and the fund balances, why can they not recoup some of that? If they do not ask, they cannot say yes or no. The job of the Council and the Town Manager is to fund the town. Departments present their needs, and the Board is one of the departments. It is the Board's time to deliver its need. To ensure the school system is robust, they should ask for what is needed. The need is not 4.56% or 4.00%.

Mr. Thompson commented that compromise will be needed. He asked if there is a gauge of what the Town Manager will do before presenting the budget to the Council and if there is room for negotiation on the budget numbers.

Mr. Holt noted that they do not have a gauge on what will happen with the Town Manager and there is always room for negotiation.

Ms. Gallichant commented that although they do not have insight from the Town Manager, they have insight from the Council that asked that the Board ask for what it needs. Anyone who votes for 4.56% says that middle school students do not need computer education or an additional PE teacher. That they are ok with losing 2 ELA teachers and 2 science teachers at THS and the programs. No one has said that they are not needed.

Ms. McNulty commented that nationally it has been a difficult year for all schools with a 6%/student average spending increase. She does not understand why the town would be exempt. In the past there have been low percentages and they need to spend a little more to get to a stable place.

Ms. Philbin noted that she supports 8.79% and it should be sent to the Council. All they can do is say no. Opportunities have been lost.

Mr. Bode reiterated that the 4.56% is a 6%+ increase, the highest in at least the past 11 years. They cannot make up all 11 years in 1 year, but he supports a 5-year plan.

Mr. Regisford commented that is he confused as to how they can propose a set of positions to be cut and deem a subset unnecessary to be cut and go to a changed narrative of 2 ELA teachers, 2 science teachers, and a PE teacher. He is leaning toward 8.79%.

Mr. Thompson commented that he believes in the programs and teachers but one cannot make up 10 years in 1 year. He is leaning toward the 6.5 – 7% because he does not want to price people out. A 5-year goal is more realistic.

Mr. Sheridan noted that he supports the 5-year plan. If at the middle ground of 4.56% and adding the additional funds, they should put it on the Council to approve the use of the additional funds vs. funding what was underfunded over the past 11 years. He would like to see the 4.56% and focus on reducing costs where possible through the FFC.

Ms. Gallichant commented that the 5-year plan does not talk about adding the items discussed back. She asked what the 8.79% looks like if they remove the \$649K and \$200K as well as the \$30K for co-teaching. Dr. Willett noted it would be approximately 6.79%. Ms. Gallichant commented that they were told that it does not have to stop there with funding from the Council and does not want to limit their ability.

Ms. Gallichant motioned to put through the 6.79% with the removal of \$30K for co-teaching, and the budget assumptions of \$649K (UISF) and \$200K.

Ms. McNulty seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Gallichant noted that the 4.56% was contingent on assumptions and asked the math to be applied to 8.79% in addition to the removal of the co-teaching to reach 6.79%. Mr. Holt confirmed that the reductions are the ones in the 8.79% column. Mr. Sheridan commented that at 4.56% when adding potential funds, they would be over 6%. He asked what the difference is. Dr. Willett explained that all staff would be added back so it would be a little higher and have fewer program reductions. Mr. Holt explained that the 6.79% includes the assumptions. Ms. Besaw confirmed that 4.56% is 6% without the assumptions.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Gallichant, McNulty, Philbin, Regisford

Opposed: Bode, Sheridan, Besaw, Thompson, Holt

Abstentions: none

Motion failed.

Mr. Sheridan asked if 4.56% and the 1.0 FTE for computer science reduces all computer education at TMS. Dr. Willett explained that this is the only position that teaches computer science at the school but there is still tech education that can involve computers. Mr. Sheridan asked if they add this program back vs. the position if it would be more of a 4.5%, thus 6%. Dr. Willett responded that it would change about 0.1% to 4.7% and thus approximately 6.0% - 6.1%.

Mr. Bode motioned to approve the 4.56% budget with adding back one computer science teacher.

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Gallichant thanked Mr. Bode and Mr. Sheridan but thinks the other cuts are also detrimental and they should be passing on something higher because the town told them to. While they should not take this many programs away, and she will not support it, she appreciates the add. Ms. Philbin commented that they are not talking about a middle ground. She appreciates adding the program, but they have science education, ELA teachers, social studies, a PE teacher, and a K2 teacher along with program reductions as well. They should not look at it as what will be approved, consider the mill rate, or that they do not want to price people out. She does not want her taxes to go up, but wants to ensure a good education for students and future students. Going to 4.56% is not a compromise they should be making. They are going with the lowest option. She agrees they cannot do it all in one year, but things do not come back. They will be voting on the lowest possible option. She does not think it sounds like a robust budget or school system and it is not the right thing to do by educators or future students. Mr. Regisford asked what it would look like if they added back an ELA and science teacher at THS. Dr. Willett estimated it to be 0.23% making it a 4.8% or 6.2%. Mr. Regisford commented that they are cutting 2 positions to save 0.2%. The jump from 8.79% to 4.55% and up to 6% - he does not know if it will go to 6.55%. Going with 4.55% and not 0.2% to save 2 positions does not make sense. Cutting the positions and programs does not make sense and does not help students. Ms. McNulty commented that what Mr. Regisford stated brings them to a more reasonable place that is healthy for the schools. She would like to see the 6.2%. Ms. Besaw asked if they could amend the motion and asked to clarify what is being said – keeping the computer science teacher plus 1 ELA teacher and 1 science teacher. Mr. Regisford commented that he is looking at the 4.56% and the original 6.98% proposal and asked if they could keep 1 ELA teacher and 1 science teacher. He was told it would be 0.2%. Ms. Besaw asked if the 0.2% includes keeping the computer science teacher. Dr. Willett clarified that one scenario is to add the computer science teacher back making it about 4.72% - adding .12% to the 6% or the 4.56% accordingly or the new option presented by Mr. Regisford which would be a different motion. Dr. Willett noted that adding back computer education is about 0.12%. Adding the 1 ELA and 1 science is 0.25%. Ms. Gallichant asked if co-teaching is reduced in this. Dr. Willett explained that the 4.56% does not have the co-teaching reduction. Ms. Gallichant asked that they consider adding back 1 ELA teacher, 1 science teacher, the computer education teacher, and taking the \$30K of co-teaching off the table which would provide an offset. A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Besaw, Bode, Sheridan,

Opposed: Regisford, McNulty, Philbin, Gallichant, Thompson, Holt

Abstentions: none.

Motion failed.

Dr. Willett noted that the co-teaching reduction is not in the 4.56%.

Ms. Gallichant motioned that they start with the 4.56% and reduce the co-teaching as proposed (\$30K) and add the computer education teacher at TMS, add 1 ELA teacher, and add 1 science teacher.

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. Besaw asked for a rough percentage. Dr. Willett responded that it would increase by approximately 0.31%, bringing the percentage to about 4.87%. Mr. Regisford commented that while he supports this option relative to the others, they are losing valuable and important positions.

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Holt asked that Dr. Willett prepare the materials for tomorrow's meeting.

C. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Bode motioned to adjourn at 9:29 PM.

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Pascuzzi
Clerk

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

Hybrid Meeting
Council Chambers
Tolland, CT 06084

REGULAR MEETING – February 14, 2024

Members Present: Tony Holt, Chair; Jennifer Gallichant, Vice Chair; Bill Bode, Secretary (Zoom); Renie Besaw, Dana Philbin; Kay McNulty, Jayden Regisford, Dan Sheridan, Brian Thompson

Members Absent : none

Administrators Present: Dr. Walter Willett, Superintendent of Schools

A. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Holt called the meeting to order at 7:11 PM.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A.1 BOE Photograph - none

B. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

B.1. Student Artwork

Dr. Willett highlighted the artwork displayed in Council Chambers created by the following students.

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Andie Hampton	Sadie Barners-Bernardo	Lilianna Aliceas
Jasmin Imanov	Camryn Bushnell	Monika Dziewa
Kelsie Johnston	Madelyn Connelly	Nora Hildebrandt
Alexander Palermo	Junith Dinesh Kumar	Lucas Hudson
Cooper Parks	Gracelyn Oatis	Mackenzie Mason
Maverick Pryputniewicz	Sophia Rizzo	Riley Pitruzzello
Damon Ratti	Benjamin Russo	Cole Riendeau
Marilyn Soucy	Lawson Salerno	
	Kinsley Sousa	

Dr. Willett congratulated all of the artists.

C. ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA - none

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- January 17, 2024 – special meeting
- January 24, 2024
- January 29, 2024 – special meeting

Mr. Besaw motioned to approve the minutes of the January 17th, January 24th, and January 29th meetings as amended.

Ms. Gallichant seconded the motion.

Edits: January 24th: page 14, Strike, "Mr. Holt reviewed the 3 scenarios the Board is asking Dr. Willett to research.", Replace with, "Mr. Holt reviewed the 3 scenarios he is asking Dr. Willett to research."

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION –

Rebecca Risely, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented that she has done a lot of writing and talking but she does not feel like she has been heard. Students are not numbers or dollars. Teachers and staff are not just open positions. They foster and nurture students. There are lost opportunities. She asked that Board members with younger students remember that when something is gone, it does not come back, and they reap what they sow. All but 5 of the 53 (estimate) e-mails the Board received supported a level services budget or better. The Board discounted this and voted on party lines and does not listen to the constituents.

Heather McCann, 62 Crossen Drive, commented that she was disappointed with yesterday's vote. It demonstrated the division between party lines. The Chair previously expressed gratitude towards the those who gave testimonies and acknowledged that their voices were heard, and their input was valued. It has been acknowledged that the issue has been delayed and the Chair stated that the can has been kicked down the road; however, when the decision was made, the easy way out was taken, and the majority of voices went unheard. A subpar budget was selected. The majority of community members who actively communicate were in favor of a more comprehensive budget. Ms. McCann commented that it is difficult not to interpret the decision as self-serving or politically motivated. Again, they are postponing action for the future. In two years, a new board may discard the "5-year plan". Now is the time to be proactive. It is year 1, not year 11. Nevertheless, they must accept the Board's decision even though it falls short of what is needed and those who voted must demonstrate their commitment by advocating their decision to the Council as a cohesive entity. This presents an opportunity to build character and integrity as individuals and as a group.

Lisa Burns, 214 Slater Road, commented that it is a tough budget as in the past, but the Board has worked with reasonable expectations. She does not have children in the schools, but her aunt was a teacher in the district and Ms. Burns sees both sides. When she goes to the referendum, she wants to have an idea of what has been presented and is why she attends Board meetings and asks questions. She feels that in some ways she represents some of the families that are not comfortable asking questions. The community does not know the details of the projects. It is challenging when there are unfunded mandates and contracts that continue to go up. Finding areas to balance is difficult. She appreciates all the Board's considerations.

Katie Stargardter, 8 Lisa Lane, noted that she is speaking as the Chair of the Tolland Town Council. She was unable to attend last night's meeting due to a Council meeting at the same time but wanted to follow up and reinforce what she is sure the Board was told last night about the productive meeting between the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Council and the BOE that took place earlier this week and the commitment from the Council Chair and Vice Chair to work with the BOE to explore and discuss any and all funding mechanisms they can find to support the budget that Board presents to the Council. While she is sure this has been shared by the Board Chair and Vice Chair, she wanted to put a face and voice to it. Ms. Stargardter noted that her request to the Board Chair was that the Board put forward the budget it thinks is the best policy

for students and staff. The Council Chair and Vice Chair have committed to having open, honest, and robust conversations about funding. Ms. Stargardter noted that while they did not commit to anything in their discussions, they did promise to talk. She is sure the Chair has provided this information to the Board, and she is here to reiterate what was told to the Board.

Kate Howard-Bender, 103 Goose Lane, commented that she appreciates the work, research, and questions as people try to figure out the budget. It has not been properly funded for 11 years. She commented that it is nice to see everyone working together. Any cuts and loss of positions are not ok for students. They lose when there are increased class sizes, lost programs, and lost certifications. Unfunded mandates have been a talking point for years and everyone, every member of an elected board, can advocate and ask state leaders to do something about the mandates instead of wringing their hands. The Board is charged with taking care of students. Ms. Howard-Bender commented that if this makes her a “budget bully” then so be it. The Board can do better, and she has faith in the members. While she appreciates their work and attempts to come together, she is going to ask for more. She thanked them for considering every member of the community and the investment needed.

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, expressed her disappointment regarding the budget deliberations and the lack of opportunity for public participation during the last two meetings. She believes it is essential for the Board to provide avenues for open dialogue and input from the community and the public particularly when decisions are being made that directly impact students and schools. Conversation and listening are not just symbolic gestures but fundamental pillars of effective governance allowing participation in the budgeting process. It is an opportunity for diverse perspectives to be heard, fosters transparency, and builds trust between the Board and the community. The lack of public participation deprived the Board of valuable insights and stories from students and their families. Conversation and listening are vital to the process and engaging with the community helps identify concerns, anticipate challenges, and allows the Board to work collaboratively towards the shared goals of TPS. Ms. Costa urged the Board to reconsider its future approach and make a commitment to prioritize public participation in the future for budget deliberations before making decisions. This will demonstrate the Board’s dedication to serving the best interests of students. Last night, the implications of cuts were poignant for THS and highlighted the potential for significant disruptions to students’ educational experiences by increasing class sizes and reducing choices for electives. She found it disconcerting to observe the potential impact on reductions in tutoring, TALC, and athletics, all of which were neither specified nor questioned during the previous discussion.

Christina Plourd, 101 Metcalf Road, commented that Mr. Sheridan’s comments at last night’s meeting were an articulate way to advocate for students, their families, and everyone in town. In regard to taking money from the town, any use of emergency savings, windfalls, or unanticipated interest for the operating budget is kicking the can down the road. She commented on the meeting between the leadership of the Council and the Board. While she appreciates the transparency, such meetings between the Board and the Council should be public.

Kate Vallo, 80 Tolland Green, commented that she appreciates the Council Chair attending this evening’s meeting and highlighting the time she and other Council members have taken to tune into the budget process and understand the thinking behind the proposed budget. She asked that people listen to the statements made by Board members at the last meeting who fought to

keep the meeting's focus on teachers and programs. Recently, there has been a lot of effort in town to care for the social emotional well-being and mental health of students and teachers. Ms. Vallo commented that cutting staff will negatively impact this. Larger class sizes reduce the amount of time students have with teachers and cutting programs and opportunities for students to explore interests negatively impacts their social emotional health and well-being. She hopes that tonight the Board will focus on this and consider what they can do to support the mental health and well-being of students as it is foundational for their learning.

Katie Stargardter, 8 Lisa Lane, noted that she is speaking as a resident and not in any of the volunteer roles she holds in town. She explained that in her home she has a child who needs a little extra help and COVID really had an impact. The special needs needed fell through the cracks during COVID. She appreciates all the work staff do but it was a difficult time, and the needs were not addressed during COVID. Now, post-COVID, he is struggling. Class sizes are too big. He is overwhelmed in a room with so much noise and has a hard time reading. He is in middle school. It is heartbreaking and he does not like school anymore while before COVID he did. Teachers and staff are doing all they can, but the community is not providing enough for students – her child or his classmates. She hopes they keep him in mind when finalizing the budget.

Toni Moura, 42 Center Road, commented that she sent multiple e-mails to the Board. One included that if mill rate and tax implications are a Board member's driving force, she asked that they consider running for the Council. She is a one income family of three living below Tolland's median income and would happily pay the additional \$10-\$15/month, likely the increase in her taxes, as opposed to paying a private tutor that would likely be needed with the cuts at THS. Her son is struggling and has since the 4th grade. She commented that whatever hatchets Board members are carrying or mission they have to drive certain people out of the BOE, they are doing it on the back of the students and the 21% of residents who do not have a voice – a vote. She asked that the Board consider students over party affiliations.

Mary Rose Duberek, 37 Ryan Road, expressed disappointment with where the budget is going with cuts to teachers and programs that they will not get back. When they determine the budget after hundreds of hours of negotiations, discussions, and deliberations with the Superintendent and staff, and each other, she asked that they promote it to the public and not sabotage it. Many work hard at referendum time and will fight for the budget to pass. If the budget goes to a second referendum and beyond, there will be more cuts. She asked that they do their best and when they decide the budget, that they promote it to the community, so students have a fighting chance.

Aaron Risely, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented that he is a freshman at THS, and it feels like they are on the chopping block for the cuts. Larger class sizes will make school more boring for students. If they want students to be happy, they need to make it exciting to go to school and not make students hate it more and more. It is the future of the nation, and they cannot throw it away. Mr. Risely stated that it is ridiculous how students are reacting at school these days. They hate it. They are bored and annoyed. This is not how they want them to feel.

F. CORRESPONDENCE – Postponed until the next meeting.

G. POINTS OF INFORMATION -

- Ms. Gallichant thanked everyone for attending the meeting tonight at Town Hall and online and having the courage to share their personal stories. She thanked staff for attending as well. The Board is listening, and she is looking forward to continuing the discussion.

H. STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES' REPORT – Audrey McKown and Sara Poulin

- Senior Valentine – taking place again this year; seniors volunteer to be the Valentine of an underclassman; tickets go on sale today.
- School Musical – tickets go on sale today at www.tollanddrama.org for \$15 ea.
- Pep Rally – moved to April.
- National Business Society – applications are due February 23rd.
- DECA – states are upcoming on March 6th; students should prepare, dress appropriately, and review their category.

I. COMMITTEE & LIAISON REPORTS - none

J. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Mr. Holt commented that it has taken time and work to get to this place, beginning with communication between the Superintendent and his staff months ago. The process has touched the hearts and minds of everyone. The Board has wrestled with the tough questions, analyzed data, and asked for detailed clarification. It answered the request for debate without disrespect. The process culminated last night with the unanimous vote to move the budget forward to print. While it is not exactly what anyone wanted, it represents the heart of compromise. The Superintendent has created the documents that, with tonight's approval, will be delivered to the Town Manager. Equally as important as that document, the process has a commitment to develop and implement a long-range fiscal plan. This effort will reach into the agendas of every committee and every board. It will make the district stronger. Mr. Holt expressed appreciation to everyone involved in the process. Their efforts were not unseen. He thanked them for their time away from their families, the creative thinking, reaching across the aisle and being willing to talk.

K. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

K.1. TMS Instructional Rounds

Dr. Willett reviewed attachment K.1.

Dr. Willett noted that the rounds at TMS were moved to February 28th. The focus will be on the social emotional learning program. Board members should register so materials can be prepared.

Mr. Holt noted that he has attended several rounds, and they were all eye-opening and inspirational. He saw his daughter reflect what was taught at school when at home.

Ms. Philbin noted that she attended many rounds, and it opened her eyes to see what happens in the classroom. She appreciated the panel of students at TIS and seeing the students in a variety of settings.

Ms. Gallichant noted that it is a great experience. Her favorite part is following a program and watching it grow through the grades.

K.2. Traffic Pattern Review @ TMS Results

Dr. Willett reviewed attachment K.2.

Dr. Willett noted that the committee reviewed the traffic pattern request and voted 6-0 to maintain the current traffic pattern.

Mr. Thompson commented that people had concerns about what side students would exit to the walkway.

Mr. Sheridan asked how this information would be shared with the member of the public who posed the question. Dr. Willett responded that the person did not reach out to his office and recommended that they reach out and note that this is on the agenda of the February 14th meeting.

Ms. Gallichant commented that she understands the concern expressed but when a student gets out of the car, the student crosses only in front of that car in the crosswalk. She does not believe there is a safety concern.

Dr. Willett noted that they explained that everything has an opportunity cost, but the risks are higher going in the other direction.

L. NEW BUSINESS

I.1. Monthly Financial Report

Dr. Willett reviewed attachment L.1.

The January 2024 financial report shows an available balance of \$2,684.76 (0.01%) of the BOE's current budget. This is due to a variety of financial challenges this year and the numbers will fluctuate. The ERF may be used for special education expenses to offset and stabilize at the end of the year.

Dr. Willett highlighted line items including the following:

- Stipends (150) – over budget; staffing for clubs, coaches with 5+ years of experience receive an increase in compensation.
- Health/Benefits (190, 200, 210) – collectively over budget; impacted by vacancies and fewer people paying in
- ICMA (240) – over budget; funds will be received from the forfeiture account.
- Legal/Audit (340) – over budget; contract negotiation
- Tech Service (350) - over budget; price increases in online services; other budget lines in this department area will be underspent and balance.
- Transportation (510) – over budget; includes McKinney-Vento transportation and additional buses.
- Sped Ed Tuition (560) – over budget; one outplacement (\$138K)

Mr. Sheridan noted that this was reviewed in the FFC.

Mr. Regisford asked how often a club or extracurricular increases in size that additional staff are needed and if there are state policies on the adult/student ratio. Dr. Willett explained that when a club exceeds twenty-five students, an additional staff person is needed.

Ms. Philbin commented that outplacement is quite high. She asked for examples of why a student would be outplaced. Dr. Willett explained that there are a variety of reasons such as to address program needs including behavioral programming that would be better suited if it was provided outside of the district. Expulsion is usually an outplacement as well. He noted that the IEP determines the programming.

M. OLD BUSINESS

M.1 FY25 Budget Discussion (no enclosure)

Mr. Holt explained that the budget book contains the proposal voted on last night. Once voted upon and approved, Dr. Willett will present it to the Town Manager.

Dr. Willett provided an overview.

He explained that many components are similar to what was previously presented. Changes will be seen in the object budget information. For the purpose of providing information to auditors, the introduction discusses the Board's work and highlights what was done to achieve the 4.84% including articulating the potential offset of the UISF account via the town. The Object Budget Information (pages 14-15) provides the 6.35% without principal and interest offset (UISF payment) and the 4.84% with the principal and interest offset (UISF payment). The Budget Funding Estimates page shows this information as well. The Personnel Staffing FTE page shows the adjustments for the employees with the changes the Board made. This is also articulated as well as the program reductions in the Introduction.

Ms. Gallichant commented that the Board voted to have Dr. Willett present an 8.82% budget scenario for the purpose of not eliminating any positions. It was presented last night for review. Additionally, Mr. Holt asked Dr. Willett to provide a 5.99% compromise scenario. It showed items the Board had not previously seen. The Board has received sixty-four e-mails regarding the budget and fifty-eight were in support of more funding in the budget. Over the past few days, the Republican Town Committee and a Republican Town Council member asked, via social media, that people reach out about the BOE budget if they felt it would negatively impact them. The Board received six e-mails on this. Ms. Gallichant commented that the budget that the Board voted on has the district still facing many cuts to personnel and programs and she does not believe any are good for students. She noted that she asked several times if other members thought they were good for students and to explain, but no one did. The conflicting point of view was on percentages, which is not what the Board is tasked to do. The Board is tasked to do what is best for students. It seems that they cannot move forward without compromise. The sticking point for her is that three people will lose their jobs and this is being done due to dollars and cents. Last night there were points made that increases to the Board's budget could impact people's livelihoods and this scenario directly affects the livelihoods of three people unnecessarily and causes negative impacts to students. Ms. Gallichant asked Dr. Willett what the percentage would be if the three teachers were added back. Dr. Willett

responded that conservatively it would be 0.47%. Ms. Gallichant commented that the town's financial situation is healthier than it has ever been, and the fund balance exceeds the policy amount. There was a surplus of over \$1M last year but the Board's budget was cut causing them to eliminate staff and programming. Additionally, almost \$400K was put into the Tax Stabilization Fund and about \$700K will be in it at the end of this fiscal year. Of that, \$300K can be used toward budgeting this year. She cited the town's ordinance on the Tax Stabilization Fund. Ms. Gallichant commented that more funds are available than the ask of the UISF and ARPA. Council leadership, at the meeting with Board leadership, acknowledged this and that there could be a path forward to help fund portions of the BOE budget without the tax impact being implied. They left the meeting with the directive that they should ask for what is needed and that this is the year to do so. Thus, she asked the Board to consider adding the three positions back. They are still compromising and reducing three positions and nineteen programs. Multiple scenarios have been run so if the Council reduces the ask, the Board knows the options.

Ms. Besaw commented that she has concerns about using a 1-time influx of cash to support an operating budget. They will be in the same position next year. She is not 100% in favor of this. She understands the sentiment and wanting to support students. They have put together a responsible and comprehensive budget that supports students and one they agreed upon. She would like to move forward with it.

Mr. Sheridan commented that he looks to the direction of the expert, Dr. Willett. When he asks for a 6.78% increase and can make it work for a 5-year plan, giving him 6.35% at this point is a big jump for families to dig out of an 11-year hold. To dig a potential hole in the reserve fund is not the smartest thing to do. Efforts have been made for compromise and in regard to the e-mails, if only five people do not support a level services budget, he knows there are others who are not reaching out. When running for the position, he was told by people that he was being elected to be their voice and they are tapped for cash. This is why he would not support a level services budget but fully supports the 5-year plan as proposed. They are making adjustments and listening to people.

Ms. Philbin commented on using funds for recurring items. The school system is constantly changing with retirements etc. and is not a fixed situation. The Board members' charge is to be guardians of education and to help those who trust all will be ok. While she needs to be cognizant fiscally, her charge is to support the schools, staff, and students and provide the proper programs. She noted that a 6% BOE budget does not equate to a 6% mill rate increase. The Council Chair noted that Board leadership was advised to provide a budget that it feels is good for students, staff, and the schools. She asked why they would not go with a budget that provides what the Board is charged with providing that includes the proper needs including programs, educators, paraprofessionals, staff, and resources for students. Ms. Philbin noted that the 3 staff reductions will cause people to lose their jobs and adding them back will not bring the budget to one of level services. Last night they had five options and started with the lowest. In previous talks 10% was needed. She asked that they keep the conversation going.

Ms. McNulty commented that she is puzzled by the approach. The directive from the Council was to supply the budget that has what students need. Looking at the June report and hearing from the Council, the more stable approach is to retain the three teachers at

0.5%. This does not represent a level services budget. She noted that nothing they have discussed supports a level services budget. Not all students are the same kinds of learners and she is most concerned about those students who were most impacted by the pandemic and did not go to kindergarten or the 1st grade the traditional way. Many are presenting with many different issues including emotional ones and how to be in a classroom. They are pushing for an equal education, but they should be pushing for an equitable education that addresses the specific needs of each student. In terms of the THS students, the last part of the brain that develops is impulse control so they likely need a little more adult supervision so she cannot agree with fewer teachers in the school. If it is true that once something goes it does not come back, by the time students who were affected by the pandemic are at THS, there will not be enough teachers to help them. Retaining the three teachers helps them be closer to what is needed and would provide a more equitable learning environment for students.

Ms. Poulin commented that Tolland is very focused on history but when they look far into the past, many leaders on the Board and Council forget about the future. With this budget, they are “scraping the bottom of the barrel”. It will get them to a future, but not a good future. A future where they will have to keep “scraping the bottom of the barrel”. Many students will stay in town and will not have the education students are getting now. They will not bring on the legacy of Tolland and it will have a worse future. It is not just about students and the schools but the town. She wants Board members to ask themselves why they are here and if the answer is not to do what is best for the schools, then they should not be here and should walk out now. Those people should go to the Council where they can focus on political lines, budgets for their wallets, or personal ideologies. The Board is for the schools. The loss of teachers and programs is detrimental. With this budget, she is glad she is leaving next year because she does not want to know what it would be like to be in a school where there are few options and large classes where she cannot learn. She wants to be a realist and does not know if the Council will even approve the budget. She appreciates the leadership discussion, but they always talk about things, and she does not think the Council is ready to give the needed budget and believes the budget will be cut. They need teachers, programs, and funding and it is the job of the Board to get it approved by the Council.

Mr. Regisford commented that they can talk about the past 11 years, but they are not talking enough about the future. There are teachers in attendance who have impacted him personally and he asks himself if he would be here without those teachers. While the three positions are generally presented, he can only think of how backstabbing it must feel for staff who have helped so many. If he did not have the teachers he had, his future would be dim. He is not saying that students’ futures are dim, but the younger students have many years left in the school system and the budget does not prepare the students or where the district needs to be. He asked that they consider the three positions and those who would be losing their positions. Mr. Regisford asked how many staff live in town. Dr. Willett responded about 168 live in Tolland out of about 400. Mr. Regisford thanked Ms. Poulin for speaking on behalf of about 2,000 students and hopes she was heard.

Mr. Holt commented that when they started the budget process, one item mentioned was the firm belief that everyone on the Board has the sincere desire to do the best for students, staff, and the district. No one has ill will or motivations to the detriment of

students or the consideration of party or politics over people. Each member is there for the students. It is incorrect to think that any of the decisions any of the members make are not looking in their children's eyes and thinking about what they are preparing for them. He also believes that there is diversity of thought and a myriad of opinions, positions, and experiences on the Board all aiming for the same goal and leading to the right decision. None of the scenarios that were created and modified were done in a vacuum. They were done in session and by going to Dr. Willett and asking the experts about the impact of the scenarios. The intention last night was to put together a budget proposal that could be approved and delivered by Dr. Willett. The Board voted for the proposal unanimously. Mr. Holt noted that the conversion is not over, and he hopes that whatever comes out of this meeting is supported. He requested a motion to move this item to Board action.

Ms. Philbin commented that last night they voted for Dr. Willett to prepare the materials for the Board to review, discuss, and vote on this evening. Last night, they did not vote on the adopted Board budget to be presented to the Council. They still have an opportunity to discuss options. The student representative spoke about how difficult it is and she has the courage and conviction to speak to the Board but what about students who do not have that opportunity? The student representative is speaking for 2,000 students who may not be able to speak. They owe it to the students, staff, and schools to continue the conversation versus forcing a motion.

Mr. Thompson asked about the class sizes in regard to those classes where there will be only one teacher with the elimination of two positions. Dr. Willett responded that the average would be about sixteen in science and twenty in ELA. Mr. Thompson clarified that when discussing the scenarios, he was not going with the 8.9% or 8.82% down to 6% or 7% with this potential reduction. He noted that he has concerns about the Council approving the funding.

Ms. Besaw motioned to move this item to Board action.

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Besaw, Thompson, Sheridan, Philbin, McNulty, Bode, Holt

Opposed: Regisford,

Abstentions: Gallichant

Motion passed.

M.2. 2024-2025 School Calendar

Dr. Willett reviewed attachment M.2.

Dr. Willett explained that ER days allow time for professional development and mandatory training; otherwise, teachers need to come out of the classroom and sub coverage would be needed. During negotiations, it was noted that additional ER days are needed.

Mr. Thompson noted that the addition of the three ER days would bring it to a total of eleven.

Ms. Gallichant noted that this was important during contract negotiations and a priority. Teachers want more time to be better for students. She noted that PD days are shortened days, but instructional time is more predominant. Ms. Gallichant added that by not having subs, it is more fiscally responsible and there is less learning loss.

A brief discussion took place regarding the various options and state requirements.

Ms. Besaw motioned to move this item to Board action.

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.

N. BOARD ACTION

N.1 FY25 Budget Discussion (no enclosure)

Ms. Gallichant motioned to pass the Board of Education budget as presented on February 14, 2024, with the addition of the high school ELA, high school science, and high school PE teachers.

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ms. Gallichant commented that the scenario provided by Dr. Willett at a slightly higher number reduced 10 positions while this one reduces three positions. A student said that class sizes are too high, and she cannot get into the electives she wants. She asked that they not take away her teachers. Ms. Gallichant noted that the budget is still between 6% and 7%. She is asking that they try. This would save three people's jobs, do what the students asked, and listen to the majority of the community. It is a compromise. They are still taking a lot away and asking the Council for help. Council leadership told the Board to ask. She asked if they are going to vote against the student representative for 0.47%.

Mr. Sheridan commented that he is continuing to look at historical numbers because funds seem to be fungible. Last year, for FY24 nine positions were going to be lost but only one teacher was reduced. It is confusing at best to realize the actual number of people who would lose their jobs. The Superintendent and his staff have operated on a paper-thin budget for 11 years and now they are giving almost what was requested, adding additional funding from the Council, and it is unfortunate that their efforts are apparently going unseen. They are trying to compromise. He does not want to cut teachers or families that could be pushed out of town. They should be doing more work to refocus, do the hard work, and reallocate funds to keep the jobs rather than adding to a budget and people's hard budgets in the current landscape.

Ms. McKown commented that she understands about not wanting to push people out, but her parents and others moved to town because of the school system. It is what makes Tolland great and is the driving force for people to move to the town. It seems counterintuitive to take something away from the school when it is why people move to town.

Ms. Gallichant commented that they lost more than Mr. Sheridan noted last year. Dr. Willett noted that the ROPE program was taken out, but the individual was transferred to another position. The business teacher reduction was a job loss for the individual but the others, due to retirements, transferred to other positions. The programs reduced and are listed in the Q&A. Ms. Gallichant noted that the THS/TMS math coach was lost. The position was cut and another position opened up, but the person had already left and the program was not reinstated.

Mr. Sheridan commented that he is a product of the paper-thin budget and moved back to Tolland for the schools. He is not trying to underfund the schools but to fund them over 5 years so if a new family wants to move to Tolland, an old family does not have to move out of Tolland because they cannot afford to live in town. They do not want to only attract people because they can afford to live in town but have them stay as well and he has heard that people are tapped. The mill rate when he initially lived in Tolland was 27/28 and is now 37. This was due to a 1.7% increase year-over-year. They will see another increase, which is fine, but he is opposed to the increase being all in one year.

Mr. Regisford commented that he hopes they do not create anymore paper-thin budgets. It will affect students. He takes pride in being a Little League coach and a level of trust is built in the community. Likewise, the Board has built trust to be at the table to do what is right. Some people wrote in about their fiscal concerns and asked why he is not asking for more. Passing a budget sacrificing three people's jobs over 0.47% loses some of the trust. As a Board, there is a lot to lose – the quality of education.

Mr. Holt commented that he is confident every decision being made is with students in mind. The choices are being made because the Board is charged with ensuring the educational responsibilities of the town. This means that ensuring education is properly funded in the short term and the long term. It is upon them that every dollar requested is necessary. The budget articulates the needs and if money presents itself for the wants, the priorities have been articulated.

Ms. Philbin commented that years ago there were classes, programs, and offerings that are no longer available with the paper-thin budget. Everyone needs to be cognizant of the 15K residents, but Mr. Sheridan's comment is more of a Council discussion. The town has a lot of programs that can help people with financial constraints. They have an opportunity to reinstate three teachers. Since 2019, there have been reductions in teachers and paraprofessionals. Educators have left the district because of the reductions and found what they felt was a better culture in a robust school system. They are not only talking about people's livelihoods but morale. They cannot talk about students and staff as numbers. She will not vote for a budget that cuts staff, programs, and opportunities for students. She agrees with the multi-year plan, but they need to fund the education system and it will take a while to get to the level services budget.

Mr. Bode commented that they cannot make up 10-11 years of paper-thin budgets in one year. They need to put forth as responsible of a budget as they can without kicking the can down the road creating continued holes. He likes the 5-year plan and the budget voted upon last night because it positions the Board to be successful with the 5-year plan.

Ms. Besaw commented that they cannot make up all of the past years in one year. If they adopt the budget, it is more than twice what was approved last year. She is confident they can maintain an excellent school system with 4.84%. She understands that there are programs in town that can help people who have challenges with taxes, but it does not help those who want to move to town but cannot afford to do so due to the taxes. A budget cannot be considered in a vacuum, and she is clear about her job on the Board – to support staff and students and provide the best education possible based on need and what they can do.

Ms. McNulty noted that last year the Board passed a 6% budget, but it was reduced to 3% by the town. She likes the multi-year plan. The 6.8% puts the Board in a good position. Providing three additional bodies at THS will allow them to maintain a better equipped school. Students will thrive with more teachers to guide them. It is a negligible amount of money to keep them in the building and it is important.

Mr. Sheridan commented that while programs have been lost, others have been added such as the business and engineering programs.

Ms. Gallichant commented that many say they like the multi-year plan, but the number was higher than the one being requested. A 6.8% saves 7 positions. She does not understand why they are talking about a tax increase when Council leadership said there were several avenues they could explore without going to a tax increase. There is a large surplus. Between 6% and 7%, they would not be taking jobs away would be listening to the students. This is only an ask to go to the Council.

Mr. Holt clarified that the 5-year plan presented by Dr. Willett is a seed. It is the beginning of a plan. The plan, and the commitment, is that the plan will enter the committees and they will create, articulate, and implement it.

Mr. Sheridan clarified that in regard to the 5-year plan, last night he was talking about one option at 4.56% because when he was rationalizing the 5-year plan, if they look at the requested percentage increases through year 5, the 5-year average is 4.16%. Instead of a large increase in year 1, he asked why not do 4.16%. He wanted to ease into the increase and provide relief for households that cannot withstand it.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Regisford, Gallichant, Philbin, McNulty

Opposed: Besaw, Thompson, Sheridan, Bode, Holt

Abstentions: none

Motion failed.

Rationale:

Regisford – affirmative vote to save positions.

Ms. Besaw motioned to pass the Board of Education budget as presented on February 14, 2024.

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ms. Gallichant confirmed that that the 4.84% is with the assumption noted. She commented that they are voting on a 6.3% versus 6.8% and they ignored the students, staff, fifty-eight community members, Town Council leadership, and her.

Mr. Regisford asked for confirmation of the percentage. Dr. Willett noted that it is 4.84% with UISF offset and 6.3% without the UISF offset. Mr. Regisford commented that they are deliberating over .047% - three people.

Ms. Philbin commented that she cannot get behind a budget that is cutting people.

Ms. Besaw commented that last night they returned positions to the original 4.56%.

Ms. McNulty reiterated that this is not what the Board is charged to do and is puzzled by how they back into the process and looks forward to having basically the same conversation next year.

Ms. Gallichant commented that they are failing to add that they cannot fix it all in one year. She has not heard anyone talk about adding the positions back. They would have already lost these people. They will not add people back, these would be asks in the 5-year plan.

Mr. Holt commented that this is the same proposal that was passed 24 hours ago unanimously with considerations.

Ms. Philbin commented that both sides compromised but her compromise ends at cutting the three people for 0.47%. She has listened to the community members. They are asking educators to do more with less and the Board is charged with supporting the education system. By no means do any of the scenarios presented come close to making up the 11 years. She was never asking for it all in one year. She agreed because she wanted to give direction to the Superintendent so he could provide something for the Board tonight. She compromised with hopes that a robust conversation would take place tonight with more compromise and opportunities to hear from community members since this was not afforded in the last couple of meetings.

Ms. Gallichant commented on the unanimous vote last night and that Mr. Holt provided completely different scenarios with cuts and things not previously seen. She asked several times last night about discussing in detail what every cut meant to students. He was asking the Board to digest new information they voted to move forward with the best information they had. Her intention was never to take away positions. At a previous meeting they voted on an 8.79% and did not take away positions. Before she sees it on social media, they had a every right to digest the information to move it forward last night and discuss it tonight for the final vote. This is what they thought they were doing tonight. They did not think they were going to be held to the vote last night like they did not hold everyone to the previous vote.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Besaw, Thompson, Sheridan, Bode, Holt

Opposed: Regisford, Gallichant, Philbin, McNulty

Abstentions: none

Motion passed.

Rationale:

Sheridan – Would like to focus the FFC as it has already continued to reallocate funds of the BOE to try to do its best to maintain teachers in their current roles to save jobs.

N.2. 2024-2025 School Calendar

Dr. Willett confirmed that the staff prefers to start after Labor Day.

Ms. Besaw asked if PD days are offered before school starts. Dr. Willett noted that they are, but it is contractually stipulated. Ms. Besaw asked about the impact if they were to start school before Labor Day. Dr. Willett noted that staff would start earlier.

Ms. Besaw motioned to accept the Tolland Public School 2024-2025 Calendar Version 1 + 3 PD Days.

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Mr. Regisford commented that he finds it disturbing that now they are listening to staff.

Ms. Besaw commented that she has been vocal about not having half days, and is not thrilled with it, but it sounds like it is driven by a state mandate. They are talking about funding schools but giving more time off.

Ms. Gallichant noted that the staff will be there the full day and getting the training they requested.

Mr. Holt commented that he likes the early release. He has seen the information from the Legislature and PD will increase in coming years. He appreciates attempts to do this without using substitutes, although they are amazing, and confirmed that this version does not put the district at risk in terms of the date of

the last day of school. Dr. Willett noted that there are options if needed. Wednesdays were selected as opposed to Fridays because often the latter increases absenteeism.

Ms. Philbin commented that it is important to have the PD days and during the budget rounds the educators and administrators spoke of the desire for PD and the need to catch up on program information. Instruction time for students is a minimal loss.

*A roll call vote was taken.
Motion passed unanimously.*

Rationale:

Regisford – Believes they are being hypocritical listening to staff on this topic but not the previous one.

O. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Liz Costa, 54 Josiah Lane, commented that she is proud of the Student Representatives. They made a difference to the people listening.

Mary Rose Duberek, 37 Ryan Road, commented that she echoed Ms. Costa's comment. The Student Representatives give her hope. Ms. Duberek has a student at THS and cannot wait to tell him about it. She is also proud of those who fought for 4.7% for three more people. It would be nice if people were concerned for people in the community and not those who want to move to the town.

P. POINTS OF INFORMATION

- Ms. Gallichant thanked the Student Representatives She saw respect on everyone's faces when they were speaking and sharing their experiences. They are about the most mature high school students she has met and hopes that as a Board they made them feel comfortable enough to participate and that they will continue to do so.
- Mr. Holt commented that the Student Representatives articulate the role of the position, and both embraced that they are members of the Board. Their participation is appreciated and encouraged. He noted the budget conversation was difficult and far from over, he does not believe it is the hardest conversation the Board will have this year. A lot of important items are coming down the pike.
- Ms. Philbin commented that the Student Representatives are phenomenal and the bright spot of their evenings. She appreciates their reports, and they showed courage and conviction. They spoke from the heart and are going places.

Q. FUTURE - none

R. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Philbin motioned to adjourn at 9:53PM.

Mr. Regisford seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Pascuzzi
Clerk

TOLLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL MEETING – February 15, 2024

Members Present: Tony Holt, Katy McNulty, Brian Thompson

Also present via zoom: Walter Willett, Superintendent, Attorney Jessica Ritter, Shipman & Goodwin, LLP, Attorney, Stephen Sedor Pullman & Comley LLC, Tom Swanson, Birch Grove Primary School Principal,

A. CALL TO ORDER

Called the meeting to order at 9:15 am.

- B. Katie McNulty motioned to go into executive session at 9:16 am for the purpose of a confidential student matter. Brian Thompson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 11:36 am.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Tony Holt motioned to adjourn at 11:36 am. Katie McNulty seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

Respectfully submitted,
Walter Willett

Agenda Item #K.1

SUPERINTENDENT'S AGENDA ITEM BACKGROUND

ITEM: Data Portal/Student Performance Update

ITEM SUBMITTED BY: Walter Willett, Ph.D., Superintendent

FOR BOE MEETING: February 28, 2024

ITEM SUMMARY:

https://www.tolland.k12.ct.us/DistrictOffices/superintendent/superintendent_willett_s_page

Left Menu

[TPS Data Portal](#)

FINANCIAL SUMMARY:

N/A

BOARD ATTORNEY REVIEW:

N / A

BOE ACTION DESIRED:

Review

SUPPORTING MATERIALS ATTACHED:

<https://sites.google.com/tolland.k12.ct.us/sqr/home>

SUPERINTENDENT'S AGENDA ITEM BACKGROUND

ITEM: Shortening school year from 182 to 180 days

ITEM SUBMITTED BY: Walter Willett, Ph.D., Superintendent

FOR BOE MEETING: February 28, 2024

ITEM SUMMARY:

CGS 10-15 defines a 180-day minimum student school year. The Tolland Public Schools currently extends to 182 student days. Reducing the TPS 2023-2024 school year to 180 days will make the last day of school two days sooner to Thursday June 13, 2024.

As of February 23, 2024 the last day of school without a two-day reduction is June 17, 2024.

Additional cancellations will continue to push back the last day of school.

The school year cannot legally extend beyond June 30, 2024.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY:

Transportation savings for the two days of runs. Some non-certified personnel generate small savings. Teachers work 188 days.

BOE ACTION DESIRED:

Potential Motion:

Motion to reduce the Tolland Public School student school year for 2023-2024 from 182 days to 180 days. Second. Discussion. Vote.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS ATTACHED:

None

MINUTES

TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING February 8, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.

Present: Katherine Stargardter, Chair; Jacob Marie, Vice Chair; Jennifer Buckler, Chris Moran, Joseph Sce, Colleen Yudichak

Members Absent: Alexander Noonan

Also Present: Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Mike Wilkinson (Zoom), Director, Administrative Services; Brian Foley, Town Manager, Scott Lappen, Director, Public Works; Carl Dojan, Assistant Fire Chief, Tolland Fire Department; John Littell, Fire Chief/Director of Public Safety; Walter Willett, Superintendent, Tolland Public Schools (Zoom)

Barry Bernabe

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Stargardter called the meeting to order at 7:04PM.

2. **Public Hearing Item**

2.1 Consideration of the Proposed 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Foley reviewed the presentation.

Town of Tolland

FY 2024-2025 through 2028-2029 Town Manager's Five-Year Capital Plan, February 8, 2024

- Capital Budget
- What Is a Capital Item?
- Capital Budget Planning Process
- Types of Funding Methods
- Year 1 Capital Budget Summary FY 24/25
- FY24-25: Town of Vernon Water Pollution Control Plant Upgrade; Total Amount \$164,906
- FY24-25: Significant Capital Projects Funded by the General Fund; Total Amount \$397,395
- FY24-25: Significant Capital Projects Funded by Non-Referendum Bonds/School Construction Grants
- FY24-25: Significant Capital Projects Funded by Other Sources
- Significant Projects in Years 2-5 by All Sources; Year 2
- Significant Projects in Years 2-5 by All Sources; Year 3
- Significant Projects in Years 2-5 by All Sources; Year 4
- Significant Projects in Years 2-5 by All Sources; Year 5
- Past 5 Year General Fund Capital Contributions
- FY24-25 Capital Plan by Program Area
- FY24-25 Capital Plan by Funding Source
- Tolland Debt Management Plan Schedule 2024-25 Through 2028-2029
- Budget Schedule: Important Upcoming Dates

Questions Regarding Year 1

Mr. Marie asked about the \$790K vs \$4M (Streets and Roads, Road Improvements \$790K). Ms. Hancock explained that the last referendum item for this was in 2018. They were trying to do at least \$1M in road improvements each year by using bond funds, LOCIP, or other funds to reach \$1M/year or \$5M in total. Given the allocation, it was able to be pushed out 5-6 years. This is the final year of the \$5M. As of the end of 2023/24, \$4.2M has been spent. Next year, they will request that the Council go out to referendum for additional road funding. Ms. Hancock noted that the cost has substantially increased. Mr. Foley noted that there are 123 miles of roads, and they can do 3 miles for \$1M. While costs have increased, the town's spending has been level. Mr. Marie asked if the pavement software provides information about the age of the road. Mr. Lappen explained that the software assigns a pavement condition index (PCI). The goal is to get all roads up to 70 and new roads (100) have a life expectancy of 18-20 years, but it varies depending on the location. Ms. Stargardt asked if the year the road was improved is part of the equation. Mr. Lappen explained that that information was not available when the engineering firm initially came to do the analysis. They look at longitudinal and latitudinal cracks, alligator cracking, etc. and do core tests to learn how much pavement remains. Mr. Foley noted that cracks in roads lead to increased salt in the immediate area, so they try to do a lot of repairs as well. Mr. Marie noted that at the next Council meeting there is an item for the Road Salt Task Force and the consultant. He asked if it makes sense to put a higher number in the capital budget based on what they are seeing from the consultants. Ms. Hancock responded that it depends on how much further the Task Force will move and what will be encountered for expenditures. They would need to return to the Council if the \$50K is insufficient, similar to what will happen next week.

Ms. Yudichak commented that it is a shame that the ADA walkway ended up in the capital plan because now it will cost taxpayers more vs. if it had been addressed with ARPA funds. It was important to the group, and it is sad what happened and how it happened.

Ms. Yudichak asked why the Parks Facility Improvement Project is still in the capital plan. Ms. Hancock explained that they tried to pull out items that were approved by ARPA. This item was recently approved and not pulled out in time, but an appropriation is in place. The project can be taken out toward the end or left and July 1st it will go forward.

Ms. Yudichak asked how much the ADA walkway will cost now that it is in the plan. Ms. Hancock responded that she does not have the interest expense impact, but it is in the new debt management plan. The \$1.2M approved for the Parks Facility Improvement Project is out now and so there will be at least \$504K in savings from this but some will be eaten by the \$400K (ADA walkway) that needs to go back in. There are still significant savings.

Mr. Sce asked if there is any documentation that shows how much money they receive from each of the Alternative Sources of Funding annually. Ms. Hancock referenced the Year 1 Capital Budget Funding Categories table. Mr. Sce asked about the pavement funds and Ms. Hancock confirmed that this is what was received for the year. Ms. Hancock reviewed the table. It shows the initial balances, the projects, and what is expected to remain at the end of the fiscal year. She noted that the starting number of the following fiscal year may not match the ending number because items such as interest earnings will be added. Ms. Stargardt explained that every year the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report has a complete audit of each fund with information on what was spent during the fiscal year and the ending balance. Mr. Sce asked if there is a reconciliation between the projections and actuals. Ms. Hancock responded that when they build the capital plan, they ensure the starting numbers are correct and estimate future years. Each year, this is reconciled. Mr. Sce commented that he would like to review this for large variances. She noted that in terms of projects, they would never spend more than what is

appropriated. Anything left over is turned back. Ms. Hancock explained that if funds are allocated but the full amount is not spent, depending on what fund provided the funds, the remaining money will go back to that fund except for remaining funds from a project funded by the general fund. These go to the CNRE given the ordinance in place. For example, \$700K may be in a fund separate from the capital plan. If \$300K is allocated toward projects, then \$400K should remain in the fund. This is where the audit comes into play and it is reconciled at year end so when they start the next capital plan, the beginning number is the actual number including interest or other funds that went in after the capital plan was adopted. Ms. Stargardter explained that if an item goes over, it is presented to the Council. Ms. Hancock noted that they cannot spend more than is approved in the budget.

Mr. Sce requested a listing of the town's vehicles other than highway trucks etc. Mr. Foley noted that he has a detailed sheet with this information that can be shared. Ms. Hancock noted that not all of the vehicles are replaced with new ones. Used vehicles are passed down through the system/town. A brief discussion took place regarding the Fire Chief's vehicle which is now being provided by the town. Formerly, it was supplied and replaced by the Tolland Fire Corporation and passed down. Technically, it was owned by the Corporation but used for town business.

Mr. Sce asked if the engineering report regarding the road conditions looks at the cause of wear on the roads i.e. water flow. He asked if anything is in the budget to reengineer a road if needed to increase its longevity. Mr. Lappen responded that the same pavement budget is used, and issues are addressed.

Mr. Moran noted that there are a few items in year 1 for the BOE that sum to over \$500K that were not previously included and asked why they are in year 1 now. Dr. Willett reviewed the items. When they did the capital plan, they were also applying for round 6 of the School Security Grant and the Board felt that some items were very high priority (\$226,561). The \$296,979 is to for the remaining paving at TMS. The other portions were completed over the past 18 months, and it is best if all of the paving is around the same age. The \$62,521 for the THS dishwasher is necessary due to its age and lack of availability of parts. If it were to break down and parts are not available the cafeteria would need to be shut down due to health standards. Mr. Moran asked if the safety items will be funded by the grant. Dr. Willett explained that they are applying for the next round. If awarded this could be funded. Ms. Hancock clarified that if the grant is awarded, the debt would not be issued. She explained that there may be a slight variance in the numbers due to the requirements when bonding. Ms. Stargardter asked about the grant, and if it is feasible that if awarded that this could be taken off the spend for next fiscal year. Dr. Willett responded that he is unsure about the timeline. Ms. Stargardter asked about the reuse of the capital plan funds due to the cancelled BOE oven and steamer. Ms. Hancock explained that the \$40K for the 2 items was approved and part of the capital plan. It was not a bond issue. The Board cancelled these 2 items and Ms. Hancock recommended reusing the money. Dr. Willett explained that this project was cancelled because after further research they learned that installation would not be cost positive for what would be achieved. If possible, they would like to pivot the funds toward what the Board feels is most important. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the funds were allocated and now will be reallocated. Ms. Hancock noted that the money is sitting in the capital projects fund and would be transferred once approved.

Ms. Stargardter commented that for year 1, the contribution to the capital plan from the general fund is almost \$400K. Previously, less was contributed. Ms. Hancock noted that for the next 5 years the number is stable in order to start building in more pay-as-you-go. Additionally, many of the items cannot be funded elsewhere. She is proposing using \$78K from the Municipal Tax Stabilization fund for the next 3-5 years. It would go into the general fund, and this would offset the mill rate. In this way, the reserves would be used to help save taxpayers money and would be part of the operating budget. Thus, there

would be a stabilized impact where the amount of the general fund contribution would be close to \$400K. The biggest piece of this would be for the water pollution control payment.

Ms. Stargardter noted that she submitted additional questions.

[Those questions with the responses are Attachment 2.1.]

Ms. Stargardter asked about the turf field. It was in the capital plan for 2026/27 and is not in the 5-year plan. He went with Dr. Willett, Mr. Sztaba, and Mr. McCluskey to examine the field last year and it is in good shape. Provided that maintenance and upkeep are done, it can be put 6 years out. Mr. Lappen explained that when it was first put in the plan it was done based on the manufacturer's end-of-life expectation of 10 years. Some areas could use some patching but overall, it is not in bad shape. Ms. Stargardter thanked the town for the efforts to maintain it. It is a great example of how investing in maintenance can save the town money in the long run. They are now able to get extra years out of the field.

Ms. Stargardter asked if it would be a problem if they commit to bonding in year 1 for the sidewalk if the project cannot be moved forward before the end of FY25 since they do not yet have information on a timeline. Ms. Hancock explained that it depends on how long the project is delayed. Usually, one has 3 years to start a project and depending on the level, there are different timeframes for completion and spend down requirements.

Ms. Stargardter requested that they discuss bonding next.

Bonding

Mr. Foley noted that the town contracts out for financial advising, specifically debt, and they are pleased with their consultant Barry Bernabe and the management of debt. [Mr. Bernabe was in attendance via Zoom].

Ms. Hancock reviewed the Tolland Debt Management Plan Schedule 2024-25 through 2028-2029 and how the debt and general fund budget may look over the next 5 years. Several years ago, they set up a separate debt service fund that includes proceeds from premiums on bond sales. In FY 24/25, the debt cost would be \$5,092,491 and \$4,700,000 is budgeted leaving a shortfall of \$329,491. The funds set aside in the debt service fund will be used to offset the differential so they will not need to increase the general fund budget and impact taxpayers. Ms. Hancock reviewed FY 25/26 through FY28/29. During this span, they will have more money in the budget budgeted vs. the actual debt. When this process started the goal was to stabilize the impact on the mill rate and general fund budget as well as get to the point when debt starts falling off the books to reallocate some of the savings (decreases in debt) to pay-as-you-go. Ms. Hancock reviewed the scenarios.

Mr. Bernabe reviewed the following presentation.

Proposed Debt Management Plan, Fiscal Years 2025 to 2029; February 8, 2024; (Presented by Barry Bernabe)

- Executive Summary
- Long-term Interest Rates – Past 55 Years
- Short-term Interest Rates
- Town Bond Ratings
 - Major Rating Assessment Categories
- Existing Debt Service

- The Proposed Debt Issuance Plan – Assumptions
- Projected Impact of the Proposed Capital Plan on the Debt Service Budget
- Summary Points

Mr. Bernabe noted that the town is well-positioned financially from a bond rating standpoint and the new debt is not projected to have any material impact on the town's current debt budget.

Ms. Buckler asked if there is a list of projects covered by the debt. Ms. Hancock explained that it is in the debt management plan year by year. The budget book contains year 1. As part of the capital plan, they will see how it is funded by debt but in the debt management plan it is presented a little differently because debt is issued based on when the cash flow is needed. Ms. Buckler commented that in the BOE budget, there is about \$650K in debt payments for energy costs. Ms. Hancock explained that this expenditure is not part of this plan. It was an ESCO project many years ago. About \$10M was issued in debt to create efficiency and make improvements for the BOE and the town. The savings generated pay for the debt. This is why it is in a different fund. Ms. Buckler asked if it could be moved to the capital plan. Ms. Hancock responded that it cannot be. The Council could discuss the debt payments in the future, but the plan was to always have it as part of the utility account. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the savings are not covering the costs. Ms. Hancock explained that the savings ran a little short and it was going to cost the town more money for a measurement evaluation process than it would have received. There was a settlement with Honeywell. In addition, they refinanced and restructured the equipment lease payment process which resulted in savings. This also stabilized the amount that needs to be budgeted every year. Both the town and the BOE deposit the money into the utility fund and are still saving money. She noted that 96% of the project was under the BOE with the other 4% belonging to the town. Both the town and the BOE pay their share from their operating budgets, and it goes into the utility fund at the beginning of the fiscal year and is utility cost. Ms. Hancock confirmed that this is the only debt the BOE pays out of its operating budget. Ms. Buckler asked if the town could take on paying the BOE share. Ms. Hancock noted that anything is possible. It depends on what the town and the BOE agree upon. If the town were to start paying for it, it would be the Council's budget and would have a significant impact. A lot would need to be discussed to take on such an annual payment and something that would have to give elsewhere such as a reduction to the BOE side where they would no longer budget for it. When making such decisions, other items on the state level would come into play such as the MBR as well.

Mr. Moran confirmed that there is a \$25K shortfall that is not being recouped. Ms. Hancock explained that this is why they received a settlement. Mr. Moran asked if the BOE pays the \$696K. Ms. Hancock explained that it pays a portion of it. The details are included in the Board's budget book.

Mr. Marie asked if any ordinances govern the debt management plan schedule. Ms. Hancock noted that it is a Council decision and depends on its goals. One of the Council's goals is pay-as-you-go and this would be one way to reach it.

Mr. Sce asked if pay-as-you-go would go into the reserve fund. Ms. Hancock explained that the recommendation is that it go to the CNRE and there is an ordinance that guides the use of the fund. Ms. Hancock noted that state statutes allow them to invest the funds in certain, secure products and the town does so. Mr. Sce commented that the CNRE is earning interest and asked why they are not paying off debt if the interest that is earned is less than what is being paid on debt. Ms. Hancock explained that there is not enough money to cover the debt. It has been used as an emergency fund and where possible,

may be used for pay-as-you-go projects. The fund's balance has ranged from \$200K-\$700K. Ms. Hancock noted that in terms of paying down debt, it is not like a home mortgage where you can pay toward the debt. When bonds are issued, investors buy the bonds and there are legal limitations and IRS regulations that come into play. Mr. Sce noted that they could use money from the fund so less would need to be borrowed. Ms. Hancock noted that this is what she is proposing for when debt starts falling off. The funding sources in future years' capital plans may change based on this. Mr. Bernabe noted that it rarely works as well as it does in Tolland where a town can borrow over \$26M and essentially not increase the debt service budget. He congratulated the town on issuing debt the right way, having a high bond rating, and planning debt into the future.

Mr. Sce asked if the referendum funding presented has gone through. Ms. Hancock responded that it depends on the project. In terms of non-referendum debt, at the end of June a bonding resolution to fund the projects in year 1 will be presented to the Council and at the first meeting in July it will be voted upon. Once approved, the bonding authorization is then in place. Future years work the same. Currently, the only authorized bonding in the plan is for the roads. This was approved in 2018. Mr. Sce asked about the difference between referendum bonding and non-referendum bonding in year 2 and beyond. Ms. Hancock explained that non-referendum bonding, up to 5% of the current tax levy, may be authorized by the Council. Anything more would have to go to referendum. She noted that timing is imperative.

Questions regarding Year 2.

Mr. Marie asked how often the UTV is used. Chief Littell reviewed some examples of its use including searches and brush fires. Its life expectancy is 10-14 years.

Mr. Sce asked about the THS roof and its estimated life and repairs. Dr. Willett explained that the warranty will expire in 2026 and regular maintenance is performed. If they do not replace the roof there could be an impact from leaks on items such as indoor air quality, possible insurance claim, and building safety. Dr. Willett noted that he spoke with Mr. Sztaba who has some concerns and wants to be proactive rather than reactive. Mr. Sce asked about what the warranty covers. Dr. Willett believes it only covers the roof and materials.

Ms. Stargardter commented that in year 2 they are moving from approximately \$1M annually for road improvements to \$1.4M. She asked if they would have 40% more roads covered. Mr. Foley explained that initially, \$1M covered 5 miles of roads. Now, \$1M only covers 3 miles. Mr. Lappen requested \$1.7M/year to keep up with the road improvement schedule. Mr. Foley noted that he brought it to \$1.4M. Ms. Stargardter explained that that the note is to bond for \$5M. Ms. Hancock explained that it should be \$7M (\$1.4M over 5 years). Ms. Stargardter asked if the decision as to how much they commit to or bring to referendum has to be made in the current budget cycle. The Council should discuss if it wants to stay at \$1.4M or go to \$1.7M. Ms. Hancock explained that this would be the time to have the discussion before it goes into the public document. She expressed concern that otherwise it would be misleading if \$1.4M is proposed during the budget process and \$1.7M is brought to referendum in November; however, legally it can be done. The number would need to be firm by August. Mr. Lappen noted that it is unlikely that 40% more roads will be done due to the escalation in cost of doing the jobs.

Ms. Stargardter asked Mr. Lappen if the plan presented to address roads with the funds is a reasonable and adequate approach to addressing the roads and if Mr. Lappen is comfortable with the pace of working toward the goal of 70%.

Mr. Lappen responded that he is.

Questions Regarding Year 3

Mr. Marie commented that almost \$1M seems high for the building at Crandall's. Mr. Foley explained that it is a rough estimate. They will be looking at a prefabricated building and there may be plumbing and other items that will need to be addressed.

Mr. Marie asked if the ability to wash the undercarriages of vehicles has been taken into consideration in the vehicle list in terms of life expectancy. Mr. Foley explained that it will take a while, but they hope to see the benefit. Mr. Lappen noted that the vehicles are being cleaned after every use.

Mr. Moran asked how the town plans for the dollar amounts in years 3+. Mr. Foley explained that they get rough estimates but typically do not get an engineering estimate. Ms. Hancock explained that it depends on the project. They sometimes use the ezIQC process for a cost estimate. Mr. Foley explained that with the new engineer they want to have projects in their pockets for the plan and in case grants avail themselves.

Questions Regarding Year 4.

Mr. Sce asked about the \$210K for LED lighting for Crandall's. Mr. Foley noted that a local company provided the estimate. Significant structures and software are involved. They cannot just change out the bulbs. Mr. Sce asked if the same company that promised energy savings is the one telling them to do the project. Mr. Foley noted that they only requested an estimate, and the town approached the company.

Ms. Stargardter asked if an ambulance lasts 5 years, and the plan is to replace one of the new ambulances that is on order, then why is there one in year 4. She noted that she has the same question regarding the one in year 5. Chief Littell explained that they did not have a VIN number when the plan was drafted and will revisit the timeline when more information is available. Mr. Foley explained that it is a placeholder given the volatile situation. Ms. Stargardter noted that she is in favor of having the appropriate ambulance equipment needed in town and appreciates the proactive thought. It is clear that they will be on top of scheduling ambulances appropriately and ensuring that they hopefully get replacement ambulances in the correct schedule. Mr. Foley explained that as part of the capital process, Mr. Lappen and Chief Littell have to come up with an apparatus review where they go over everything they have, decide if it is needed, and when it will be replaced etc. Ms. Stargardter commented that she was reassured that there is a process in place to consider the appropriate timeline to order new ambulances.

Questions Regarding Year 5.

Mr. Marie asked about the escalation factor for inflation going out to 5 years. Mr. Foley explained that it depends on the project. Mr. Lappen explained that they estimate 7% for smaller trucks and 10%-15% for larger trucks per year and the lead time to receive trucks is now about 18 months.

Ms. Stargardter noted that on weekends the tennis courts are full and asked if they can get a general sense over the next 4-5 years on their use. Mr. Foley noted that he will monitor it.

Ms. Yudichak asked Ms. Hancock if there is a policy on the different funds. Mr. Sce added information on the funds' sourcing etc. would be useful as well. Ms. Hancock noted that information is available in the budget book, and they can create a list and see what needs to be updated. Ms. Stargardter noted that this is something they can discuss after the budget.

Mr. Marie commented on the capital plan presentations and noted that it would be helpful to include the previous year's capital budget in the packet. Ms. Hancock noted that they are available online.

Mr. Marie motioned to open the public hearing on the 5-Year Capital Plan.

Ms. Buckler seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

George Ulrich, Fish and Game Road, asked how a 2007 loader that is going to be replaced in 2027 has a 10-year replacement need. This is 20 years. *Mr. Foley responded that they extend the life of equipment but need to plan for it in case it needs to be replaced.* Mr. Ulrich commented that they should order the next ambulance and noted that the one on order has not yet arrived and they should not wait until 2027/28. He asked why companies are not improving their lines to make equipment more quickly. *Ms. Stargardter explained that 2 ambulances are on order. One was ordered several years ago and the other a year later. The goal is to have 2. Things have sped up but with the multiple year national ambulance shortage, it will take multiple years to catch up. It is a nationwide issue that started with COVID-related shortages. The town is very frustrated with the situation and this is why a backup ambulance is in operation - to ensure public safety has the needed apparatus. She does not believe ordering an ambulance now is the proper way to schedule the 5-year life span expectancy of ambulances. They need to wait for the next one to arrive before thinking about ordering another one.* Mr. Ulrich commented that he believes it is a scheme to raise prices and believes that at this rate the ambulance will not arrive for 7-8 years. *Ms. Stargardter commented that they are monitoring this closely.* Mr. Ulrich spoke regarding the schools and the budget and commented that no one has mentioned anything about improvements for TIS. *Mr. Foley noted that they did some last year.* Mr. Ulrich commented that he was told a few years ago that TIS would be closing between 2025 and 2027 and asked for an update. *Ms. Stargardter responded that based on the current and projected population of the schools this is not part of the current discussion.* Mr. Ulrich commented that they have gone from 3,000 students to 2,100 students. *Ms. Stargardter commented that there are more than 2,100 students now.* Mr. Ulrich commented that the town's population has decreased so it will not go far. *Ms. Stargardter commented that the projection is that the school population will have slight increases in the next 5-10 years.* Mr. Ulrich asked when the sidewalk project would be starting and if there are bids. *Mr. Foley responded that he wishes he had an answer, but it is tied up in litigation.* Mr. Ulrich commented that they should try to shorten the time to do the roads. Every year it will cost more. *Ms. Stargardter noted that roads are an ongoing maintenance item, and the cost will never go away.* Mr. Ulrich asked if anyone has found out why the town cannot add sand to road salt. *Ms. Stargardter explained that sand adds other environmental contaminates. It was discussed at a meeting with DEEP. Sand has a different and substantial impact compared to salt.* Mr. Ulrich commented that it seems hard to imagine that dirt is worse for the environment than chemicals. When it gets cold, salt does not work anyway so they might as well put some sand on it to get some traction. It took 8 days for his road not to have ice on it. Only one side of the road was cleared. Mr. Ulrich commented on moving funds from the school to the town and that either way, either he pays, or he pays. He does not care what fund it comes from.

Mr. Moran motioned to close the public hearing.

Mr. Sce seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

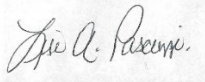
3. **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Marie motioned to adjourn the meeting at 10:16PM

Mr. Moran seconded the motion.

Meeting was adjourned without objection.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair

- Where is the turf field replacement? For the FY24 capital plan, it was in year 4 (26-27). It's not on this 5-year plan.

The Town Manager pushed the project out to future years beyond the original replacement plan as he felt that it did not need replacement within these five years.

- What is the impact to the capitol plan if we want to add \$400k for sidewalks on the Green in FY26?

There is available non-referendum bond funding in year 2. If moved to year two it would not change our current debt management plan funding level in year one. It might slightly push out the debt payments in future years. The only issue, is that the project would not be able to be started in year 1 if it were allowed to proceed.

- Why are we replacing Old Cathole Rd tennis courts when we just refurbished them in 2022?

The courts at Old Cathole Road were patched. Sticky tape was placed over the worst cracks and the top was sealed. This was a band-aid method of repair to hopefully extend the life of the courts, until they could be properly replaced. Cracks that were not patched have since expanded and new cracks have formed. These courts are past useful life and simply need to be replaced.

- Lots of BOE items on Y1 of this proposal that were NOT on the previous capital plan totaling ~\$600k

These projects are decided upon by the Board of Education Capital Committee. The Superintendent of Schools would need to comment as to why they added them now. I have sent him and Peter an email to see if they can respond with the reasons for the additions. Looks like a lot of security is being addressed.

\$226,561 are safety and security items that when we did the capital plan we were also applying for round #6 of the School Security Grant. These are items that the Board felt were a high priority therefore they were placed in the ASAP category.

\$296,979 is to complete all the remaining paving at Tolland Middle School. The other portions of the school were completed over the last 18 months therefore it would make sense to have a "similar" age to the paving on the campus which would make it easier to tie into the recently completed, make it easier to plan for replacement in the future (as everything would basically be the same age) and old paving will actually start to tear apart the transitions between new and old the longer we wait to replace the old.

Lastly, \$62,521 is for replacement of the Tolland High School dishwasher as recent reports from the Food Services Department are that parts are becoming obsolete for that specific unit and repairs are becoming more and more prevalent. At some point we will come across a part we may not be able to replace rendering replacement necessary.

- Capital equipment truck #21 now \$264,000 in FY26, was \$75k for FY25 or 252% increase

Truck #21 – This piece of equipment was originally planned to be refurbished which is a process where the cab and chassis are stripped of all of the corrosion, sealed and repainted along with any failing parts being replaced. Then a brand new body is put on the chassis. Further evaluation as the truck moved closer to being repaired showed that the two part frame had begun to split apart due to corrosion. We are left with no choice but to replace the vehicle in its entirety. **

The report from MRI strongly recommended not refurbishing this vehicle as well. The life expectancy according to the report for this type of vehicle is 10 years, when we replace this it will be approaching 17 years old.

Other questions/observations:

1. Town Admin: Light duty vehicle replacement: reductions for town, increases for BOE. What's going on here?

Each year we try to make allowances for replacement costs and also to make up for use of funds if the replacement vehicles have had higher costs. These could possibly change from year to year based on the financial needs for replacement. We review and recalculate each year. The BOE had extended the replacement of their utility vehicle and the cost to replace in the future will be higher because the cost of the new vehicle was higher.

2. Town Admin: Servers at town hall went up \$20k or 40%. Why?

Inflation. We actually received quotes for \$45,000 each but were able to get lower quotes from other vendors. This is the estimated replacement cost at this time. The cost in last year's budget was what had been originally provided by IT staff and was underestimated.

3. Town Admin: Switch replacements are new to this plan over \$200k in years 3-5. Why are these being added to the capital plan?

This response covers all the IT requests including the needs for switches. This equipment is reaching the end of their useful life.

Year 1 – FY 24-25:

2 servers: this is the hardware that runs all of the town's virtualized servers. Email, file, print, user drives, etc. The PRIMARY lifespan of one of these servers is 5 years. After the 5 year period, we replace the servers and repurpose the older servers to secondary use, such as backup servers, offline file storage, and test units. This way we still get a good 10 years use out of the equipment while still making sure our front line servers are all running on modern hardware.

Year 2 – FY 25-26:

No IT needs budgeted

Year 3 – FY 26-27:

Aruba 6300M (JL658A) – Three Core Switch Replacements: These are the main switches that handle all intersite (between building) network traffic in town. One lives in the Town Hall, one in the FTC, and one in the HS. They are on a fiber ring that provides redundancy to our buildings, if the fiber path from the HS to the TH is interrupted by, for example a tree falling on the fiber, the system uses modern routing protocols to change the direction of traffic to go around the other side of the ring. The existing network switches providing this service are already close to 10 years old and finding replacement parts for them is exceedingly difficult now. This expenditure is split between Years 3 and 4

Aruba 6300M (JL662A) – Nine 48 port distribution switches: These provide connectivity from the core switch ring to the end devices (desktops, printers, Wireless Access Points, etc). Again, the switches currently in place are close to 10 years and need to be replaced.

Laserfiche – Document management system. Scott can speak to the utility of this more than I can, as I don't work with it normally.

Year 4 – FY 27-28

Aruba 6300M (JL662A) – Continued from year 3.

Aruba 6300M (JL662A) – Seven 24 port distribution switches: These, like the 48 port switches in years 3 and 4, connect end devices to the core network. They are a smaller unit, 24 port vs 48 port, and are for networking closets that don't need the full 48 ports, such as some of the fire houses that don't have as many end devices.

Year 5 – FY 28-29

Aruba 2930F (JL258A) – 8 port switches for outlying network locations that only need one or two devices. Phones and alarm/hvac connectivity in Cell Towers, Dog Pound, etc.

Summary: The core networking and distribution switches all were installed before I started here in 2016. They are currently operational but when they start to break down finding parts for them is nearly impossible. In another town had the same model of core switches as we use in Tolland and when lightning struck and fried a line card in the core switch it took MONTHS to procure a good replacement, and had to rely on donated equipment from the board of ed to get the system back up and running properly. The servers are a required update as hardware needs increase with every new operating system release, and we can't NOT update the windows systems as Microsoft stops releasing patches for deprecated systems. Windows Server 2016 will be end of support around the time we are replacing the server hardware and unsupported operating systems are a major security risk.

4. Capital equipment truck #81 \$22k more than previous plan or 47% increase. Why?

Truck #81- We had budgeted \$48,000.00 for this vehicle when it first came onto our five year plan. With increases in steel, etc., the State Bid has increased to \$66,000.00 at this point. With a contingency of 7.5%, we are estimating the new pricing will come in around \$70,600.00, if the projections that we have been given by the Truck Dealer holds consistent. ** The life expectancy according to the MRI report for this type of vehicle is 6 years, when we replace this it will be approaching 18 years old.

5. Capital equipment: Roadside mower went up \$90k or 30% (FY26)? Why?

Roadside Mower – This piece of equipment is actually two separate units, the main portion is a four wheel drive tractor with the capability of handling the boom type (over the guardrail) mower which is extremely heavy. This piece of equipment was put on the replacement plan in FY '22-'23 at a price of \$200,000.00. Again with all of the increases in pricing, the most recent estimate from the Dealer is between \$275,000.00 and \$300,000.00. ** The life expectancy according to the MRI report for this type of vehicle is 10 years, when we replace this it will be approaching 15 years old.

6. Capital equipment: Why did truck #11 go down (from \$92k to \$77k) (FY26)? Why?

Truck #11 – When this pickup truck was first being looked at for replacement in FY '22-'23, the pricing was estimated at \$88,000.00 for replacement. Based on a recent purchase of a similar pickup truck, the State Bid is approximately \$77,000.00 for a comparable vehicle with a snowplow and the necessary snow plow package for the vehicle. ** The life expectancy according to the MRI report for this type of vehicle is 6 years, when we replace this it will be approaching 13 years old.

7. Capital equipment: Backhoe #22 was in previous capital plan, now we have “Caterpillar backhoe”. Are these the same piece of equipment?

Backhoe #22 – The “Backhoe” and the Caterpillar Backhoe are the same piece of equipment. The description was changed to reflect more accurately the make of the backhoe. ** The life expectancy according to the MRI report for this type of vehicle is 10 years, when we replace this it will be approaching 15 years old.

8. Fire & Ambulance: Why was replacing engine tank 340 removed from the capital plan?

In an effort to be fiscally responsible the decision was made to remove ET 340 due to overwhelming prices increases. Prices have nearly doubled and with two newer Engine Tanks we feel comfortable these apparatus can hold us over until such time as a budget allows.

9. Fire & Ambulance: Moved UTV from FY27 to FY26, price went up 16% - why do we need such an expensive UTV?

The decision was made to move up this apparatus within the Capital Budget to combat increasing pricing. We envision the prices on this type of unit will continue to rise. This Utility Terrain Vehicle or UTV is a specialized vehicle that is capable of navigating all types of terrain. It is used when a patient must be extracted from places such as woods, trails, open spaces, bike paths, etc. It can also be used when combatting brush fires due to its capabilities to haul equipment and firefighters deep into the woods. This apparatus saves the physical exertion of those responding to emergencies in hard-to-reach places. It is also used at Community Events which are spread over large areas.

10. Fire & Ambulance: Moved ambulance 640 from FY28, price went up almost \$100k. Don't these need to be replaced every 5 years? We don't yet have the new one, so why is this on the capital plan for year 3?

We are not comfortable removing these units from the Capital Budget at this time due to the continued industry-wide backlog. These were left in as placeholders as it seems we may need to order years in advance of actually receiving them. Initially prices were in the \$260's, they then moved to the \$350's and are currently in the \$450's.

11. Fire & Ambulance: Added ambulance 540. We don't have the ambulance this would replace, so why is it on the capital plan for year 4?

We are not comfortable removing these units from the Capital Budget at this time due to the continued industry-wide backlog. These were left in as placeholders as it seems we may need to order years in advance of actually receiving them. Initially prices were in the \$260's, they then moved to the \$350's and are currently in the \$450's.

12. Fire & Ambulance: nothing for year 5?

Year 5 was intentionally left blank to reexamine placing Engine Tank 340 back in at this time and or any other Capital items that may arise.

13. Parks & Rec: removed multi- purpose athletic fields FY28 \$300k. Why?
The multipurpose field was removed due to the overall reduction in participation in some of the youth sports and the addition of the Birch Grove multi use field back on line. The combination of both stated factors, plus other facility needs played a role in the removal of the multipurpose field.
14. Parks & Rec: Added replace basketball courts at Heron Cove FY26 \$530k. Why?
The basketball courts at Heron Cove are in need of replacement. The court has several cracks ranging in various widths. At one point, our Public Works Department had tried to fill these cracks to further the life of the courts. The basketball courts has reached the end of its lifespan (over 20 years old) and needs to be replaced.
15. Parks & Rec: Added Crandall park building improvements FY27 almost \$1M. What's going on here?
The existing building used to be the old parks garage (from what I can gather, from the 1970s). The building is old and outdated. This building is used during the spring/summer/fall seasons for facility rentals, summer camp, open swim, special events, and more. The building needs to be updated and more welcoming/function able. The amount requested is for removal of the current structure and the addition on a new structure.
16. Public Works: How long has the tree trimming budget been \$70k. Is this sufficient for the goals/needs?
Tree Trimming – This line item in our Capital Budget was started in FY '19-'20 with funding of \$70,000.00. This was designated for the removal of diseased or dying trees that have been infected by wood boring insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer. We use this funding to compensate our tree Contractor for the removal of these diseased trees. We also have \$30,000.00 in our Operating Budget which is typically used for Resident concerns about hazardous trees within the Town Right of Way that present a possible safety concern. At this point, we feel that between the two accounts that we have adequate funding for our current needs.
17. Streets & Roads: decrease funding for FY28 is a concern due to recent issues with flooding.
Streets & Roads – I spoke with Lisa Hancock about this, the following was her explanation – Each year we use Bond funding and whatever balance is estimated to be available from Town Aid for Roads (TAR). In FY'26-'27 we anticipate having TAR funds available for \$268,776.00 because we had \$49,000.00 for drainage paid for by LoCIP. In FY '27-'28 we didn't have LoCIP funds available for drainage, so we reduced the TAR allotment by \$49,000.00 to be used for drainage. We also increased our annual funding from 1 million per year in bonding to 1.4 million for our Road Resurfacing Program.
18. Road Improvements: going from \$1M to \$1.4M starting FY26. Why?
Road Improvements – When we first started the 5 year, 5 million dollar program, we were able to resurface approximately six miles of road surfaces. With the increases in the paving industries, with the same 1 million dollars, we are able to resurface approximately 3.5 miles of road surfaces. A typical road in a neighborhood will last about 20 years, our primary roads have a considerably less life span. With approximately 123 miles of paved roadways at a rate of 3.5 miles per year being treated, it will take us roughly 35 years to do the entire Town once. This will leave us with deteriorating road surfaces where a less costly overlay will not be an option. Increasing the Bond package by \$400,000.00 per year we should be able to address approximately 1.5 miles of additional roads, provided that the current pricing doesn't continue to increase rapidly.

19. Public Facilities: We did not end up spending \$100k on Jail Museum renovation FY24 - how was that going to be funded and what happens to the money?

After engaging a historical architect, the estimated cost to complete repairs is \$509,320. Initially, there was a plan to use \$100,000 of ARPA funds to complete the repairs, but the project value was assumed prior to having an actual cost estimate in hand. While waiting for the condition assessment, design plans and cost estimates, the \$100,000 in ARPA was allocated to other projects.

There is the option for applying grant funding, like Historic Restoration Fund Grants. These grants provide up to \$200,000 in funding with a 50% Town match, for rehabilitation projects directly attributed to the long-term preservation of historic building fabric and character defining features.

20. Could we please add reference to the fire apparatus and DPW vehicle study to justify the purchase of each of these items?

** The Vehicle / Equipment Evaluation that was performed by Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) provided a Life Expectancy chart for Pickup Trucks, Dump Trucks, Backhoes, Loaders and a Motor Grader. This information is what was used in the explanations above.

MINUTES

**TOLLAND TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR
ZOOM MEETING
February 13, 2024 – 7:00 P.M.**

Present: Katherine Stargardter, Chair; Jacob Marie, Vice Chair; Jennifer Buckler, Chris Moran, Joseph Sce, Colleen Yudichak

Absent: Alexander Noonan

Also Present: Brian Foley, Town Manager; Lisa Hancock, Director, Finance & Records; Beverly Bellody, Director, Human Services; Teresa Kristoff, Assistant Director, Human Services; Jillian Fiddler, Human Services Case Manager
Rob Miller, Director, Eastern Highlands Health District

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Ms. Stargardter called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Recited
3. **MOMENT OF SILENCE:** Observed
4. **PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS:** none

5. **PUBLIC PETITIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** *(on any subject within the jurisdiction of the Town Council) (2 minute limit)*

Rebecca Risley, 103 Mountain Spring Road, commented that when the conversation does not change, the possibility for change and improvement are lost. She asked that the Council listen to the residents that are suggesting providing the schools with a level services budget at minimum and change the conversation from an arbitrary number that it believes will pass at referendum on the first try. She commented that it is a disservice to the community and a limited view of what is important to residents. The town is economically varied like any town, but it is consistently ignored that the average median income for many years has been in excess of \$100K/household. She asked that the town use programs such as freezing tax rates on a case-by-case basis if someone can prove need. It has been done in the case of crumbling foundations. She asked that they find a way to provide help. Using the fund balance to maintain a level services budget makes sense to stop the bleed. While they will not recover from the 0% budgets, the town and the district need to work together on a 5-year plan that keeps the district from stagnating and falling back into the same hole it has been clawing out of for 10 years. If they consistently refuse to keep up with inflation and modernization requirements, they will be left fighting the same battle. She asked that they shift the conversation from there being tough choices and where they can cut to how they can work together as a community to keep the schools vibrant and progressive. The Tax Stabilization Fund was created from excess money from the state when the town budgeted conservatively and was awarded more than expected. Ms. Risley asked that the funds be used for their intended purpose this year to lessen or negate an additional tax burden on residents. She suggested utilizing a 1-time expenditure from the unassigned fund balance to make up the difference and provide a level services budget. If they allow the strength and value of the schools to diminish, they are not doing due diligence for homeowners and returning on their investment.

Kate Howard-Bender, 103 Goose Lane, invited the Council to take advantage of an exciting opportunity. Because the town is in a wonderful fiscal position as articulated by the auditor, Director of Finance, and many Councilors, the Council has the ability to work with the BOE to ensure a level services budget for the first time in at least 10 years. It is not about ensuring they do not lose friends or Computer Science at the middle school. It is about securing community investment. Tolland has a significant amount of unexpected income that can be allotted to BOE expenses. The BOE is attempting to negotiate a fiscal hole in order to get level services and is in this position for a multitude of reasons that are not suited to a two-minute share although they are well-documented. It would be a blessing to the entire community for leaders to work across party lines and ensure that the needs of students are met thus changing the trajectory of the town from hopeless to hopeful and askewing the hand wringing in favor of solution-seeking. Ms. Howard-Bender commented that she believes in the Council and in Tolland.

6. **PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS:** none

7a. **REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES RESPONSIBLE TO THE COUNCIL**

- ARPA Subcommittee – Ms. Stargardter asked what the plan is for the Subcommittee now that they have committed most, if not all, of the funds. Ms. Yudichak responded that they will likely cancel upcoming meetings and meet again in September/October to discuss any remaining funds. Mr. Foley noted that he is certain there will be funds coming back due to cost-savings so they will meet again later this year.

- Firehouse Subcommittee – Ms. Yudichak noted that they will meet on Thursday. She noted that it appears that the contractor wants to extend the completion date to May 31st.
- Road Salt Task Force – Ms. Stargardter noted that a public meeting was held on January 25th and the Task Force will meet later this month.

7b. **REPORTS OF TOWN COUNCIL LIAISONS**

- Planning & Zoning Commission – Mr. Moran provided an update from the February 12th meeting.
- Permanent Celebration Committee - Ms. Buckler provided an update.
- Recreation Advisory Board – Ms. Yudichak provided an update from the February 12th meeting.
- Agriculture Commission – Mr. Sce provided an update from the February 5th meeting.
- Economic Development Commission – Mr. Marie provided an update.
- CRCOG Policy Board – Ms. Stargardter provided an update.
- Board of Education – Ms. Stargardter noted that she and Mr. Marie met last night with the leadership of the BOE to discuss the BOE budget. The Board is trying to develop a budget and wanted to know the Council's appetite for support. Ms. Stargardter noted that neither she nor Mr. Marie can commit to anything but they would be interested in having a conversation once the budget is presented to understand the available funding avenues. Ms. Stargardter noted that she and Mr. Marie expressed interest in a multi-year spending plan, and she committed to working with the BOE on this in any way she can. An upcoming joint meeting of the Council and the BOE is scheduled for February 22nd. It will be held in the THS Library. This will be a formal conversation between the Council and the BOE with a presentation of the BOE budget. Ms. Stargardter noted that the BOE requested that Councilors read at least the FAQ document posted by Dr. Willett in advance of the joint meeting. Ms. Stargardter will e-mail the document along with the Board's budget on Thursday or Friday to Councilors.

8. **NEW BUSINESS (ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS):**

8.1 Human Services – Introduction to Council, Beverly Bellody, Director HS & Teresa Kristoff, Asst. Director HS

Mr. Foley introduced the Human Services Department.

Ms. Bellody provided an overview of Human Services and noted that this fall, she will have the honor of working for the town for 35 years. Although she has witnessed many changes in the town, the Human Services Department has continued to stay true to its mission of serving residents of all ages to achieve and maintain their personal and social well-being. The Senior Center is also a function of the department. The department consists of five professional full-time employees and two part-time. They have an extremely knowledgeable and dedicated staff. They also serve as staff liaison to the Commission on People with Disabilities, the Tolland Local Prevention Council (LPC), the Youth Review Board, and the Youth Advisory Board as well as the Water Commission. Staff also administer human service youth and senior center related grants as well as many entitlement programs such as fuel assistance. At this time of year, this is one of the primary services provided and they are an intake site for the state's public assistance program. Ms. Bellody noted that they have seen a significant increase in the number of residents requesting assistance and also unfortunately they are going through benefits rather quickly as the state has not been as generous as in previous years. In turn, they have sought other fuel assistance programs and have received

donations from local community members. Additionally, they have seen an increase in requests for food assistance and are serving 5-6 families/week. The department also administers the Renter Rebate program, the food pantry, the Housing Rehabilitation Program, and does case management and crisis intervention services as well as elderly outreach. The elderly outreach worker is Medicare Choice Certified in the Medicare Choice program which allows her to assist residents with complex Medicare issues.

Ms. Kristoff provided personal and professional background information and an overview of programs under Youth Services. She coordinates the Tolland Youth Services Bureau (YSB), the town's branch of the statewide network of youth services and participates in the CT Youth Services Association meetings. She has learned a lot from local branches. Tolland has a reputation for its Youth Services Community Theater program which was cited as one of the most unique and positive development programs because of the wide range of ages that is served (kindergarten through age 18). Ms. Kristoff reviewed the Juvenile Review Board program which is comprised of volunteers from local and state agencies as well as the school. The goal is to hold youth accountable for their behaviors in a supportive environment. In FY23, five cases were served, and the number has increased since she started. It is a positive mentorship opportunity for youth when they need to repair harm and get back on the right track. Ms. Kristoff is looking forward to discussing the Local Prevention Council (LPC) which she coordinates. The LPC includes representatives from faith-based organizations and nonprofits, local health departments, and the school system. The goal is to make recommendations and provide awareness of prevention programs to the community. Funding is grant-based. One of her goals is to make the Youth Advisory Board active again and she advertised via the BOE, and students have already reached out to her. She would like to work with them on a youth-driven social marketing campaign and discuss mentorship and leadership skill development. Moving forward, a large focus of the LPC will be using the recommendations of the former Mental Health and Substance Use Task Force including hiring a prevention specialist via the HVCC. She noted that Ms. Fiddler is currently undergoing the certification and credentialing as a prevention specialist, and this will be a great skill set for the department. This is a multi-faceted issue and Ms. Fiddler will be able to provide education, triage assessment, referrals, and do outreach in the schools and engage with people on the community level. Having someone able to do outreach and partnering with HVCC for the clinical component seems like it will be the best way to address problems. She noted that they have also been assessing the gaps in Human Services and the additional offerings that they can provide.

Ms. Kowalyszyn provided an overview of the Senior Center. It is a community for seniors, and the Center offers programs that keep everyone active and young. It is an opportunity for seniors to be together.

Ms. Stargardter asked about the Tolland Care and Share Program. Ms. Bellody explained that this program is about outreach and includes working with the State Police Staff A Cruiser Program to help families during the holidays. They also raise funds to provide gift cards to those at the 3 senior housing complexes. Donations are received from community members including residents, the Lion's Club, and other organizations. Ms. Stargardter noted that this is a great opportunity for the community to make a difference within the community. She extended her gratitude. Ms. Bellody added that Tolland is one of the most generous communities. Whenever there is a need, they reach out. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the Youth Community Theater will be held again this summer. She asked Ms. Bellody to reach out to the Council about advocating for increased state funding in regard to fuel assistance if there is anything it can do to help.

- 8.2 Eastern Highlands Health District – Introduction to Council, Rob Miller, Director
Mr. Foley introduced Mr. Miller. He noted that Eastern Highland Health District (EHHD) is hired by town to be its public health service.

Mr. Miller reviewed the presentation, “EHHD, Eastern Highlands Health District, Tolland Town Council Update, February 13, 2024”.

- Eastern Highlands Health District Background
 - History
 - Structure
 - Budget
 - Statutes
- Eastern Highlands Health District Main Program Areas
 - Community Health
 - Communicable Disease Control
 - Environmental Health
 - Public Health Emergency Preparedness
- Eastern Highlands Health District 2024 Initiatives

Mr. Moran asked about the sodium chloride mitigation support and how prevalent these issues are in other towns serviced. Mr. Miller responded that Coventry is challenged as well and, like Tolland, is working with a consultant and the DEEP to solve the problem. He noted that EHHD has done surveys and other towns are impacted as well.

Ms. Stargardter asked if the EHHD is exploring regulations regarding water softeners. Mr. Miller explained that the current regulation is not specific to water softeners but to water treatment wastewater discharges. The Connecticut subsurface sewage disposal regulations have standards for the design and installation of septic leaching fields for the discharge of water treatment systems such as water softeners. The role of the EHHD is to review plans against these standards. If the standards are met, the plans are approved. The installer is required to provide an as-built and it is put into the town records. Mr. Miller noted that they have not looked at anything beyond this but administratively, they can look into getting additional information from individuals submitting plans for review. If the town would like to look at an ordinance or regulation, the EHHD can work with staff. Ms. Stargardter thanked the EHHD for being such a good partner with the town in regard to the contaminated wells.

- 8.3 Consideration of a resolution making an additional appropriation of \$86,800 from the General Fund unassigned fund balance, to the Capital Testing Ins. Account 20500072-722460- 2155 to be used for costs related to the next steps in Well Contamination investigations by Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc. and authorizes Town Manager to enter into an agreement with Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc.

Mr. Foley noted that Mr. Wilkinson has been handling the legal and insurance aspects out of the Town Manager’s Office and the cost of this item is growing.

Mr. Wilkinson explained that the town is a member of CIRMA and periodically receives equity. These funds were being used for Langan, but have been exhausted. This request is to appropriate money from fund balance. The Road Salt Task Force discussed this prior to it being presented to the Council and this is a continuation of what DEEP has directed the town to do. The majority of the

\$86K is to look at four locations, one-offs as they are not in a cluster area, and investigate those locations.

Ms. Stargardter added that the town's legal advisor on this matter, Attorney Ann Catino of Halloran & Sage, worked with Langan to develop this proposal. The hope is that this authorization will bring Langan's services through the end of this fiscal year, June 30th.

Mr. Marie noted that he is in favor of doing what is needed to resolve this situation. He commented that this is likely not the last request for additional funding for Langan and asked how it fits with the plan for a solution. He asked what additional items would be needed and if Langan has laid out what data needs to be collected in order to present a proposal to the town. Mr. Foley explained that the Road Salt Task Force is addressing much of this and monitoring the progress. While there is a short-term plan, they need Langan to do more and come up with solutions. They are getting closer to a solution for a property outside of the Vineyards and want to start looking at solutions for the other addresses as well. There is a plan, and it is in the process of being executed but it will be costly and is expected to require money in the future. A lot still needs to be addressed. Ms. Stargardter added that every property or cluster of properties needs a unique solution. Because so many factors are involved in contamination, an equal number of factors are involved in the solution. That said, Langan is working on a standardized process to evaluate each property. She added that at the last Road Salt Task Force meeting, she asked how much it would cost the town to find a resolution and there is no answer. Attorney Catino provided information and the town is doing what is needed to find a resolution for residents, but the process will not be easy and financial support will be needed albeit the amount is unknown at this time.

Mr. Moran noted that it is good that the Road Salt Task Force is moving toward resolutions. For people in these homes, it has to be unbearable. He supports the \$86K request for the four one-off properties and asked where the Vineyards stand and if money will be needed for this as well. Ms. Stargardter believes that compiling the data from the Vineyards is part of this but much of the work in the Vineyards will be done by EHHD. This is a wonderful benefit of the town's relationship with the EHHD, and it is grateful for their assistance and support.

Ms. Buckler asked which of the tasks listed that sum to \$86K have been completed. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that only task #1 has been completed.

Ms. Stargardter asked Ms. Hancock if the town has sufficient funds in the unassigned fund balance to cover the \$86,800. Ms. Hancock confirmed that it does.

Mr. Moran motioned,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Tolland Town Council that it hereby appropriates \$86,800 from the General Fund unassigned fund balance, to the Capital Testing Ins. Account 20500072-722460 -2155 and authorizes Town Manager to enter into an agreement with Langan Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc.

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

8.4 Financial Overview – Lisa Hancock, Director of Finance

Mr. Foley noted that this is a quarterly update.

Ms. Hancock reviewed a high-level summary of the financials as of the end of December compared to last December. She noted that revenue through June 30th is her best estimate and that things

may change but believes revenues will exceed the budgeted amount by about \$1.1M. The majority is from intergovernmental revenues that were unexpected as well as ECS funds. A little over \$175K (ECS funds) was approved after the budget was adopted. They did not have any control over this and budgeted based on the Governor's figures. The Legislature reinstated the \$175K. The remaining intergovernmental revenue (\$372K) is related to a sales tax revenue that is not approved until after the budget is completed. Her understanding is that the Governor's proposal in the upcoming budget would eliminate these funds. Over the past two years the town has been fortunate to receive this money, but it never knows how much it will be. Thus, they were unable to budget for it. Ms. Hancock explained that the other large component of the excess revenue is from investments. As of the end of December, the town collected almost \$554K vs. the \$200K budgeted for investment income. When putting the budget together, the town was advised by multiple advisors that the Federal Reserve was going to reduce interest rates. Although the budget number was increased, interest rates were not reduced and the town is recognizing returns of around 5%. With that in mind, and if these rates continue, it is estimated that there will be \$913K in investment interest. Ms. Hancock noted that they will have a better idea at the end of March. In regard to the excess revenues from the intergovernmental revenue, these funds fall under the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund Ordinance. Seventy five percent of the excess revenue will go into the Tax Stabilization Fund and the other 25% will go into the CNRE. This will happen automatically at the end of the fiscal year. The ordinance provides the policy and guidelines for how this is managed. Ms. Hancock noted that if all holds true, they will not need to use the \$200K from fund balance this year.

Ms. Hancock reviewed the expenditures. She explained that the budget will not be overdrawn by \$598K as is reflected in the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet shows the amount that will be transferred to the various funds as well as an estimate for the Board of Education 1% fund. After the third quarter, the Board will request the funds leftover at the end of the last fiscal year – approximately \$172.5K. This will be transferred out along with the funds for the CNRE and the Municipal Tax Stabilization Fund. Ms. Hancock noted that most of the estimated savings have to do with attrition. She noted that these numbers will depend on how the rest of the year goes. It is expected that the BOE will spend its full budget.

Ms. Hancock explained that if her estimates hold true, the town will see an increase in fund balance of about \$475K at the end of the year depending on revenues and expenditures. Most transfers for settled contracts have been made.

Ms. Yudichak commented that the town seems to be doing better and better financially from investments etc. and confirmed this with Ms. Hancock. Ms. Hancock noted that they have been very fortunate this year with investments and will need to see what happens. Ms. Yudichak asked how much will be added to the unassigned fund balance. Ms. Hancock responded that she is estimating \$575,592 but noted that she is hearing that some departments may need some funds to address unexpected, needed repairs. Attrition helps fund such needs but at this point they have not made any transfers.

Mr. Marie asked for more information about the intergovernmental line in regard to sales tax revenue. Ms. Hancock explained that there is a fund at the state level where sales tax is collected. The state tracks the amount from each community and has expenditures for those funds. Whatever is left after the state budget needs are met is split up among communities. The number is not available until after June 30th. This year and last the town was able to receive a significant amount for the Tax Stabilization Fund. She noted that these funds have only been available last year and this year.

Mr. Moran thanked Ms. Hancock for putting the quarterly report together and doing an excellent job managing the finances and investments. Ms. Hancock credited Mr. Jordan who works with the investments.

Ms. Stargardter commented that the quarterly updates are helpful and thanked Ms. Hancock for the time she took to put the update together. She confirmed that the \$475,592 that would potentially be added to the fund balance includes the \$200K budgeted to be withdrawn from fund balance. Ms. Hancock noted the plan is that the \$200K will not be used. Ms. Stargardter confirmed that the \$475K would potentially be deposited at the end of the fiscal year into the unassigned fund balance, \$308K into the BOE/COVID/CNRE and \$400K into the Tax Stabilization Fund. The \$200K would not be withdrawn. Ms. Stargardter highlighted that it is a wonderful service to the town that investment income has been received without expending taxpayer dollars. She thanked Ms. Hancock and her staff. As of December 31st, they have had investment income of about \$550K and she asked if there is any chance they would end the year with less than that. Ms. Hancock responded that there is not. Municipal governments are restricted as to what they can invest in by state statutes. The net asset value must be kept to \$1. General fund money cannot be invested into anything that could lose \$1.

8.5 Appointments to vacancies on various municipal boards/commissions.

8.5a. Appointment to Planning & Zoning Commission Vacancy

Ms. Stargardter noted that there was a resignation on the Planning & Zoning Commission and a letter was received from the Chair of the Democratic Town Committee nominating Amanda Hickey to fill the vacancy.

Ms. Yudichak commented that Ms. Hickey will be a great addition to the Commission. She has been serving as an Alternate, is dedicated, and will be an asset.

Mr. Moran commented that as a liaison to the PZC he believes Ms. Hickey will be a great addition.

Ms. Yudichak motioned to approve the appointment listed in 8.5a.

Mr. Moran seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

9. **OLD BUSINESS (ACTION/DISCUSSION ITEMS):** None.

10. **REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER**

- Storm (02/13/24) - Mr. Foley provided an overview of today's storm and preparations. Due to the timing of the storm and when it was expected to arrive, he made the decision to close Town Hall. A variety of factors had to be considered and he believes it was the right decision. Power outages and accidents in town were minimal. He met with Mr. Lappen who is confident schools will be all set for tomorrow morning.
- Engineering - It was decided that it would be fiscally positive to change engineers. An RFP was put out. A team reviewed them and met with the engineering firms. They have selected 2 new firms.
- Assessor's Office – The Grand List has modest growth.
- Building Department – Mr. Paquin is working on multiple projects including those with the Girl Scouts, Santini, and the dispensary. He is also unofficially overseeing the firehouse project.

- Special Events Permits – Disc Golf Tournament at Cross Farms and Little League Opening Day at Cross Farms. Both special permits were approved.
- Human Services – Mr. Foley noted that the department presented well. The number of citizens served by the Senior Center and the Youth Theater is incredible. He recently visited the Senior Center, and it was full. Volunteers and staff were very busy, and many activities were taking place. In terms of pickleball at the Senior Center, ARPA funds from the Federal Government earmarked for senior centers (certain projects) are available but are not sufficient to cover the cost; however, Human Services believes that most of the difference can be covered by donations. Additionally, the DPW will do many of the tasks to save money.
- Grant Applications – Ms. Massa reviews a number of options.
- Firehouse Subcommittee – It will meet this week and the building is taking shape.
- Animal Control – New laws regarding the facilities have come out. These are mostly codes, and the town will need a new facility in the next 5-6 years. They will seek out a grant and put the project in a future capital plan.
- Emergency Management – The town has been directed by the state to come up with a plan should the town unexpectedly have migrants arrive in town. A plan has been drafted and approved by Mr. Foley. It is being vetted. Mr. Foley met with Region 3 Director Josh Cingranelli and spoke about items including this plan.
- Public Works – The ice rink was a success, and they may be able to open it again this weekend.

Ms. Buckler asked if anyone is temporarily filling in for Trooper Eklund and asked Mr. Foley to list the names of the current Resident Troopers. Mr. Foley noted the four resident troopers in town: Trooper Jared Bolduc, Trooper Lionel Hyatt, Trooper Cassidy Nuccio, Trooper Brandon Godwin. Trooper Godwin is temporarily assigned to the town.

Ms. Stargardter asked if the town has received any data other than the standard information from Troop C. Mr. Foley responded that they have not.

Ms. Stargardter thanked Mr. Foley for having the Special Permits information on his report.

11. **ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

11.1 January 23, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes

11.2 January 25, 2024, Special Meeting Minutes

Ms. Yudichak motioned to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2024 regular meeting and the January 25, 2024 special meeting.

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken. Motion passed unanimously.

12. **CORRESPONDENCE TO COUNCIL**

- E-mail regarding a 5-year strategic plan.
- E-mail with concern regarding use of fund balance.
- E-mail suggesting ways to minimize tax impact.
- E-mails (18) supporting the BOE budget request.

- E-mail regarding keeping Band in schools.

13. **CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT**

- Board of Education: The BOE is in the budget process and is meeting tonight and tomorrow night. The Superintendent will deliver the budget to the Town Manager later this week. The Council and the BOE will have a joint meeting on February 22nd in the THS Library at 7:00PM. Ms. Stargardter asked that Councilors review the Q&A prior to the meeting.
- Chair Hour – It was held on February 1st. Ms. Stargardter was joined by Andy Powell, the Chair of the Planning & Zoning Commission and Linda Byam, the Chair of the Library Foundation. Four residents attended as well. Ms. Stargardter noted that it was great to have so much engagement. The next Chair Hour will be held on March 7th and Susan Lucek, the Chair of the Commission on People with Disabilities, is scheduled to attend.
- Public Works – Ms. Stargardter extended her appreciation to Public Works for clearing the roads and getting the schools ready for students to return tomorrow. Mr. Foley noted that he also wanted to thank them for the funeral this past week. There is an employee wellness aspect and the DPW takes pride in this. Ms. Stargardter noted that it is wonderful to know that the town has such amazing employees who have so much respect for residents.

14. **COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS FROM COUNCILPERSONS**

- Mr. Sce asked if the BOE has passed a budget. Ms. Stargardter explained that she believes that last week the Board moved a budget forward but did not pass it. The final BOE budget will be passed tonight or tomorrow. Mr. Sce asked if the Council knows what the requested increase will be. Ms. Stargardter responded that last Wednesday the Board moved forward 8.96%. She does not know what they are discussing this evening. She noted that the 8.96% does not cut any positions and this was the reason for that number. Going any lower would cut positions. Mr. Sce commented that this is his [Superintendent's] typical threat every year - if you do not hit the number positions will be cut. This will be a discussion. Ms. Stargardter noted that the Councilors should read the Q&A document because it has a lot of information.
- Mr. Marie thanked Public Works for keeping the roads and towns safe.
- Ms. Yudichak thanked town staff, the DPW, and public safety for all they do every day. She commented that the BOE items will be a bigger discussion and noted that four Councilors have served on a BOE and have history. It will be good group to have tough discussions. Ms. Stargardter noted that she appreciates this. The process is complicated and nuanced. Having people with experience and familiarity will be invaluable.

15. **PUBLIC LISTED PARTICIPATION** (*on any subject within the jurisdiction of the Town Council*) (3 minute limit) - none

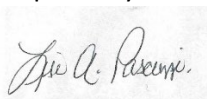
16. **ADJOURNMENT**

Ms. Buckler motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:20PM

Mr. Marie seconded the motion.

Meeting was adjourned without objection.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Pascuzzi
Town Council Clerk

Town Council Chair