

**Minutes
Town Council Special Budget Meeting
March 13, 2017
Town Hall Annex**

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

Present: Julie Blanchard, Hannah Pietrantonio, Richard Williams, Matthew O'Brien, Thomas Pope, Andy Brodersen, Justin Trzaskos

Also present: John Elsesser, Town Manager; Beth Bauer, Director of Finance

Board of Education: Jennifer Beausoleil, Mary Kortmann, William Oros, Michael Sobol, Eugene Marchand, Frank Infante

Also present: David Petrone, Superintendent of Schools; Robert Carroll, School Business Manager

1. Unfinished Business:

A. 16/17-41: FY 2017-2018 Budget - Board of Education:

Julie Blanchard asked if anyone would like to say anything before we begin.

William Oros said being in education for 48 years, he has seen the State make and withdraw promises. This is the first time he has ever seen a situation where the State has decided to revamp in such a short period of time the revenues that usually come to the town. Taking John Elsesser's advice we did compose an open letter to our state representatives that has been forwarded to them. There are three components to the letter: 1) We were really taken aback and have a great deal of concern that our budgets are due and we have no idea what we are going to do with it. We couldn't plan anything effectively. A lot of the revenue that comes from the state affects us and the town. 2) After taking a look at the way the money was redistributed, and how some of the ECS grant money was redirected, we said this is going to be a real hardship on the taxpayers of town. What it will probably do will cause our budget to be voted down and that will result in all kinds of programs and services to be reduced for both the school and the town. The unintended consequences of this will basically take a very successful school system and reduce it to a substandard system. 3) We asked Tony (*Senator Guglielmo*) to remind his colleagues that same type of attitude they have for the towns in terms of revenue is very similar to the businesses climate that has been established over a number of years, and he asked them to remember G.E. (*G.E. Corporation said they were going to leave the State*). What is going to happen is that no middle class family will be able to settle into some of these towns, because the taxes are going to be too high. What family would want to pay high taxes and go to a substandard school system. We received some feedback from Tony (*Senator Guglielmo*) and other representatives that they are working on doing something about it, but that doesn't help us right now because we have a very big challenge ahead of us. Maybe more of a challenge for the Council than us, because you have to look at the revenue. Whatever the case may be, we are here, and as John Elsesser has pointed out, really we submitted two budgets: an operating budget of 1.89 (*% increase*) and the consequences of the governor's work which ended up being up being 4.69 (*% increase*). I hope we can take a look at the 1.89 budget (*corrected to say 1.86 budget*) and answer questions to go with that because we all know the rest of that depends on where we will be with excess cost, and whether or not we will have special education funding. We are in a very challenging situation because the whole town revolves around the school system and the whole town revolves around the services provided. Winston Churchill during World War Two

said, "If we open a quarrel between past and present, we should find that we have lost the future." We are now sitting down so that we can clarify anything the Council needs to know about the present budget. We want to be very clear that we could not bring a 1.86 budget to you without giving the taxpayers the full story about what the impact of the Governor's budget was. We felt as a Board it would be better to be very clear and truthful. The dilemma is we probably won't know what is happening at the State Capitol until August. We will be more than happy to answer questions about this 1.86 budget.

Julie Blanchard thanked Mr. Oros for his opening comments. She agreed this is extremely challenging - there are things we have never had to deal with before. It will not be easy but we will have to be very realistic.

Justin Trzaskos asked if there is any more likelihood on the one-month delay that was being talked about. John Elsesser replied it became extremely political. The Democrats in the Senate tried to run it as an Emergency Certification bill. They did not reach across the aisle and have discussions, so there were concerns by the Senate Republicans. They started making amendments to the language and after about a 90-minute debate, the bill was pulled by the Democrats. It could be resurrected if they really hear from towns and boards of education, but the Republican side would have to raise it - the Democrats aren't going to do it again. Whether they can set aside their issues will remain to be seen - plus there were a lot of towns that were opposed to it because they didn't want the State meddling in their business. Matthew O'Brien said the bill didn't require anything. Mr. Elsesser agreed, saying most of those towns are statutory towns which can wait very late to do it. Charter communities have timeframes, for example Glastonbury already had to put through their budget. We are very close to Tolland, but Tolland has a worse situation if it gets voted down. They have to bring a budget back within 10 days and have another vote, so they could theoretically keep voting every two weeks with the expenses that go along with that. Coventry has to go through a vote and if it gets voted down we don't have a timeframe for how fast we have to come back so we could stall for a while. It's distressing to come up with something that gets voted down - it creates an atmosphere that you're not listening when you don't know what to base your decision on. It's not that you're not listening to the public, it's that you don't have the right information to make a good decision.

Jennifer Beausoleil asked if we don't have budget by July first, what is the practice to govern the town? John Elsesser replied there are two sets of laws. One governs the first 90 days and after 90 days a different law kicks in. Basically during the first 90 days you spend that which you were allowed to last year. After 90 days it allows the fiscal authority - in this case the Council - to establish things like adding in union contracts and so forth. There is a period of time where you are tightly constrained, with a 30-day budget that you do three times. It's very difficult because you really can't do things like road improvements or summer labor hiring. You may not be able to hire teachers for next year until a budget is adopted, so you might not get the best and brightest because they've been hired elsewhere unless other towns have the same issue. It's just not pleasant.

Matthew O'Brien asked to clarify that Coventry is the 17th hardest hit under the Governor's proposal. John Elsesser said yes. Matthew O'Brien said Tolland is even worse, but Coventry is 17th out of 168 in terms of impact.

Richard Williams said he wants to go in a couple different directions. One is special education and the other is enrollment. He felt we came up with set of questions prior to this meeting that were presented to the Board of Education for a response. It was almost like the responses

were sub-standard. If we were to ask the Police Chief what would be the impact of people changing positions he would be able to give an exact total. He would say "this person is being replaced by this person and we're doing different things to get to a number that makes sense." The Council asked a lot of questions and when you go back and look at the responses, it's like he has to hunt for information to get the answers. The Council asked the Board of Education for a narrative explaining what happened to the surpluses from 2015 and 2016, and how they were going to impact your budget request for 2018, and you give us a bunch of different directions to go find the information. He finds that unfair because the amount of time it would take to go through your budget and pull items from different sections - it's all over the place. Why is he supposed to go and find the information when clearly you have it? Why wasn't it given to us in the format we requested? Why do we have to hunt for information? Mr. Oros replied the information is provided to you via the budget. We don't have the time or the staff to bring all this stuff together so you can have a specific report. This is our best way to get the information to you, directly from the budget you see there. We just don't have the personnel or the time to pull stuff from previous years. That is why he made the point of concentrating on this budget.

Matthew O'Brien asked how you interpret the language in our Charter that says the Board must respond to questions from the Town Manager and the Town Council. Mr. Oros replied we did respond to you. Mr. O'Brien said not with answers that are accurate or full. He is certainly not pleased with many of the answers that he was given. When he asked for information about changes in staffing since your last budget he got a sheet that has very little information - it doesn't tell him when they resigned, when they were replaced, it doesn't tell him what level they were at. There is all kinds of information that is pertinent to their budgeting - and our budgeting - that we don't get. Mr. Oros asked why you would want to know all that information other than the bottom line and the number of people. Mr. O'Brien replied in last year's budget you reported a \$375,000 surplus in your salary accounts, the year before was two-hundred-and-something thousand. He is not saying those numbers are inappropriate, he is just saying there are areas that cause him to want to see the specifics. In this year's budget you show a budgeted amount for salaries and your expected spending is \$247,000 less than what you budgeted. So there is something going on in his mind that he should take a look at - not that there is anything right or wrong - but he would like the information so he can justify it for himself and be comfortable that he is making a reasonable decision.

Jennifer Beausoleil said if you also look at the transfer information that the Council has been provided, some of that certified salary funding went toward certified sub funding, because of a shift in need for that. Mr. O'Brien asked which year she is talking about. Ms. Beausoleil replied multiple years in the past. Mr. O'Brien said last year it was the net of your salary accounts.

David Petrone said our staff is encouraged to announce their retirements as early in the year as they can. Some people choose not to do that. We base the budget on what we had last year. Last year we knew about 3 staff retirements ahead of time and adjusted the budget accordingly. The challenge lies in certain positions. Ordinarily people talk about vacancy savings and sometimes when a teacher leaves after 30 years and they were making "x" amount of money we can hire a new teacher for less money. In some of the more challenging areas like math, science, special education, and speech and language, it tends to cost us more money to get that position replaced and no savings are realized. In cases where we had any kind of vacancy savings they usually resulted from someone being hired after the budget was approved. With the number of employees we have it is hard to forecast who is going to

decide to leave during the summer. One year we had 5 people move out of state during the summer and we were scrambling to find people in August. With a \$26 million budget it is very difficult to try to pinpoint it. Mr. O'Brien asked if they track those as they happen. Can we get information about what has occurred since last year? We'd like to know the number of resignations, what those positions were replaced with, how long the positions were vacant - there are different things that all impact salaries. That is the information he is requesting. He is not saying they did anything right or wrong, but the two areas that seem to fluctuate widely every year are staffing and special education. When he is putting together a budget he would like to be able to justify his own decisions rather than guessing. Mr. Petrone said you probably see the most fluctuation there because those are the biggest line items. We tried to provide information in a manner that was easiest for us without spending a great deal of time because although this is an important thing it is not the only thing going on. Historically we've done a really good job of announcing any retirements that we've had and vacancy announcements we had and making budget adjustments accordingly. If you go back to the minutes from last year you'll see we made adjustments to salaries. Mr. O'Brien asked when someone does announce their retirement and you budget for the next year, would you budget it at the top of the salary range? Mr. Petrone replied in most cases we budget for a certain level - he believes it is \$46,000 but referred to Robert Carroll for specifics. Mr. Carroll said it is a Bachelors Three or Masters One, unless it is one of those positions identified, such as a psychologist that has to have a six-year degree. Mr. Petrone said he thinks a question came up at this meeting last year regarding the new Director of Pupil Services and we said we had budgeted at the top of the step, and he thinks we came in fairly close to that number when we hired the person. High School Principals are another area where it is very difficult to fill the position. We have 42 applicants for the Elementary School Principal position that will be open. If it were a High School Principal position that was open we would only have a fraction of applicants for that. It depends on the position. The general rule of thumb in budgeting for a teaching position is \$46,000. Mary Kortmann pointed out that \$250,000 - \$300,000 in the whole salary account is less than 2% of the account. There is a separately elected board that oversees the education department and if we're within 2% of the salary account, she thinks that the fiscal authority should just look at the fiscal dollars and not worry about what people we swapped. Mr. O'Brien said he doesn't agree but he is not the one making the decision. Ms. Kortmann said that's what we think that (*Charter language*) means - that when the fiscal authority looks at it, it's within 2% of the salary budget, or less than one percent of the overall budget. There are 200 people and we are within 2%. She thinks that's pretty good.

Matthew O'Brien asked why social security was under-budgeted and had to be added back in both last year and this year. Robert Carroll replied we budget for a teacher - they don't pay social security, they pay teacher's retirement. If they take maternity leave - and five of them did this year - and they stay home, we hire a long-term substitute. After 31 days, they are making a Bachelor's step one wage, so they are making a salary. We are paying full FICA. David Petrone said he thinks we had more than five this year. Mr. Carroll said more are on the way. We also hired a part-time nurse, and had to put that in our budget. Mr. Petrone said para-educators are another group where we pay FICA. Mary Kortmann said this is why we almost always have a surplus in certified salaries and a negative in temp. We don't budget as much in temp as we would expect to use because when teachers go out on maternity leave you can move the money down to temp. Mr. O'Brien said the \$375,000 surplus was the total of all the salary accounts, not just an account that was in the negative.

Hannah Pietrantonio said last Thursday at our hearing, a citizen spoke up and said she would like to cut the education budget by \$1.6 million. She asked where this would come from - what programs would it affect and what impact would it have on our system? David Petrone

said it would decimate the school system. To put it into perspective, we have a \$130,000 operating budget at the grammar school, so it's not going to come out of paper and pencils. The same thing at the Robertson School - their budget is a little less than the grammar school. We have a \$300,000 range at the middle school and then the high school. So clearly you are talking about staff. If you look back 7 years ago where we were with our test scores, 50% of the kids were reading at grade level at the high school. There were similar numbers at the other schools in various areas. So we had a problem with test scores. His goal was to put a plan and team together to build collaboration and capacity in the district and he thinks we have done a great job doing that and our test scores show it. He showed you last week the numbers of how we are doing compared to others in our DRG (*District Reference Group*). We are doing incredibly well. You may disagree, but the biggest driver in maintaining real estate values is the school system. Everyone talks about a school system, and maintaining those property values whether you have kids or not, so you will not take the biggest hit when the economy fails. With that in mind it goes back to what he just said - it would mean deep cuts to staff and eliminating much of the structure that got us where we are. It wasn't class size that improved our test scores, it was putting the right structure in place to improve our test scores and putting the right supports in the right places. In addition, we will probably save millions and millions of dollars each year as we address the early childhood issues that exist, in every district, not just ours. If we leave those challenges unaddressed we can expect to see them compounded and become bigger issues. We talk about special education being the biggest driver of the budget, that line will probably double or even triple in the next 10 years if we don't address the needs of our early learners. Ms. Pietrantonio asked if it would be programming, like sports or band that would get cut. Mr. Petrone said yes, it would be sports, band, before-and-after school programs, our Academy, AP offerings - it would be everything. Everything would have to be touched at a \$1.6 million reduction. Ms. Pietrantonio noted it would lower our NAEYC accreditation and put us at sub-standard education. Mr. Petrone said the bigger challenge is, whenever you undo something, the time to rebound from that. He has been here for 17 years and can speak from an informed position - when he has watched positions be cut, and watched programs be eliminated - it takes a decade to get them back. You have to fight at each step to get each piece in place. He thinks we have put together a very fiscally responsible budget over the years that reflects what is going on out in the community. This year is really an outlier in the sense that it is really uncharted territory that we're all entering. The important part is that we work together to try to figure out what the best steps are as we try to meet the needs of our kids but also be responsible to the community.

Richard Williams asked for an overview of each location for special education. He would like a definition of what a special education student is and how you address them. We have all these different programs now to address special ed. He assumes there are different levels, and how do you equate a dollar figure to those children. According to what he has reviewed, it appears there are 220 special ed students. Mr. Petrone said approximately. A special education student is anyone who qualifies under the Individual Disability Act. These students would be considered a special education student if they have an IEP - an Individualized Education Plan. There is testing that occurs initially to determine whether you would qualify for special education and then a PPT - Planning and Placement Team - is formed to do a comprehensive evaluation of the student. We review all the academic and cognitive testing that is done and the child's developmental history to determine whether there is a disability. If yes, the IEP is developed to address those areas of challenges. Those challenges never go away, but if you give kids the skills and resources to mask those challenges, then the next time they test they don't present themselves in the same way. The goal is not to identify the student as a special education for life, but to give them the skills and resources needed in order to be exited from special education and go out into the general population without

needing different supports in place. Determining the level of support is based on testing - we put the proper supports in place to legally support the student's needs, rather than making the student fit into a certain program. Special education is the biggest driver in the budget. Mr. Petrone is doing a comprehensive analysis of each student to determine the associated costs of each program. He is starting with the autism program, because that is the program that tends to need the most supports and can be the most costly when students are out-placed. We are comparing the cost to provide programming in-house with all of the associated services that are needed in outplacement. Mr. Williams said the bigger question is that we have 220 kids. Mr. Petrone said we are at or slightly above the state average. Mr. Williams asked why you think special ed needs continue to increase. Mr. Petrone replied that the autism population continues to increase exponentially. He has been here 17 years - we have 13 students now at the grammar school that are defined as autistic. The needs are great. The children walking through our doors are coming in with an incredible amount of challenges - more than he has ever seen in all his years in education. One in every 68 children born now has autism. Years ago it was one out of every thousand. Mary Kortmann said that Mr. Petrone takes all the hours of PT and OT and paras and adds it all up. Someone who delivers physical therapy has so many hours a day that they can deliver PT - and we add up the number of students who need hours of PT and that tells us what plan we need to put together. We work with parents in developing the plan, and we must legally provide these services or we can be sued - and we will lose. Mr. Petrone said the biggest challenge we have is that the burden of proof in Connecticut lies with the district. We've had cases where we've said we are providing the best possible program, and the parents have disagreed. The next thing you know you are in mediation, which could end up in arbitration, and the bill goes up to \$70,000 or \$80,000. In some cases it is cheaper to settle because we may have to pay not only for our legal fees, but the parents' legal fees, and then deliver the programs that are associated with that. It is incredibly challenging. He tries to make the best business decisions for the district, and he thinks he is very well versed in special education and in the fiscal needs of the district, but there are students for whom it is cheaper or more educationally appropriate to be educated outside of our school district because there are services we simply can't provide. It would just be too costly or serving them here might not be what is best for the kids. He believes we provide better programs than many outplacement facilities and he thinks we have proven that by keeping many children in district. He believes we will prove that in time by beginning to accept tuition-paying placements from other communities, which may help to spread out and defer some of the associated costs for the programs we provide. That is a long way off and it is a decision for the Board to make. His goal is to try to find creative ways to bring resources back into the district that are not always on the backs of the taxpayers. In these challenging times you have to be really creative.

William Oros said one of the things we could bring up is the whole aspect of the Governor's idea of removing excess cost, which we did from our budget. Excess cost helped us deal with youngsters who come in later on. We develop a budget - and Mr. Petrone does a good job. When you see the special education accounts every kid is accounted for. Mr. Petrone confirmed that every kid is accounted for but then we get students who show up at our door. We have seven no-nexus special education students in our district right now that we didn't plan for - that's a lot of money. That means they are not associated with any other town, they reside here, and we have no way of planning. Matthew O'Brien asked if we know what attracts them to Coventry. Mr. Petrone replied sometimes it is group homes, in some cases it's foster families. Thomas Pope asked if they are all State placements. Mr. Petrone said no. Mr. O'Brien said if they are State placements, no-nexus, then there is some level of reimbursement, correct? Robert Carroll said there is a one-time reimbursement. Mary Kortmann noted the reimbursement is under today's excess cost formula - under next year's

proposal things may change. Mr. O'Brien said they understand that excess cost helps them with their budget. Mr. Petrone said we monitor our high-needs students under excess cost to see if they qualify for reimbursement. We thought we had one last year, but you come close but not close enough because it is 4.5 times per pupil expenditure (*to qualify*). It is a moving target. It is hard to plan. We are trying to plan how we are going to pay for these new kids this year and then next year because they weren't in the budget but they showed up. Mr. O'Brien said we saw the news today about how the State said excess cost grant applications were lower in December but the eventual reimbursement might be 25-27. That would be in line with what you've budgeted but I guess it was supposed to be higher. Mr. Petrone replied 73. Mr. O'Brien said in the worst case it will be at 73 but it may be a little higher. Mr. Petrone said originally it was 77 but they bumped it down to 73. Mr. O'Brien said if you think about the logistics of the Governor's budget going through with no other safety valve, every time a special education student moves into your town you would have to go to a town meeting and referendum just to provide services. Then if it fails you would have to go to court. It would be totally unworkable - nobody could run a budget that way.

Richard Williams said it seems like 14% of our population is special ed. How do you track it? David Petrone said by student, by service. Matthew O'Brien noted that the PPT basically drives the budget. Mr. Petrone said he is a big believer in not over-servicing kids. We pride ourselves on meeting the needs of the student and not over-doing it. There's no benefit to over-doing it. We take a hard look at every kid and evaluate that every year. If you could look at the IEP you would see that the supports slowly decline over the years as the student gains skills and advances through the grades. We also try to do a good job in early literacy intervention, especially at CGS - we service approximately 100 students a year through that program. If you don't address those needs then gaps in their learning are created and you are probably looking at special education costs (*in the future*). Mary Kortmann noted that the services we provide are tracked and maintained in a computer program. This data is sent to the State and it is audited.

Richard Williams asked for an explanation of the special ed component at the preschool. David Petrone replied we have a legal obligation to provide support for three and four-year olds. The State program is birth to three. The challenge for the district is when students are receiving support from the State birth to three, there is no obligation for the State or the parents to notify the district that they have a child who is receiving services from the State and that they will be coming into your school system in six months or a year. They show up on our doorstep as three year-olds with no notice and we are legally obligated to provide programming for them. Part of that programming is having them interact with typical regular-education peers. That is how we entered into the agreement with CECC almost 40 years ago now. Our summer school program used to be four weeks. Now we are legally obligated to provide programming for children who have the potential to regress over the summer. We began at four weeks, now we are expanding to five-six weeks because the needs are so great. Julie Blanchard asked if this is mandated by the State. Mr. Petrone said yes. Mrs. Blanchard asked if they pay anything for the summer or if the State provides any support. Mr. Petrone said no. It is our legal obligation. You want to do what's best for the kids but you must also weigh the pros and cons of battling those types of issues out. Matthew O'Brien asked how many students are in the preschool. Mr. Petrone replied 47. Mr. O'Brien asked to clarify if that is Smart Start and our special ed and if there are any outside tuition-paying students. Mary Kortmann noted that number does not include the CECC students. Mr. Petrone said he doesn't keep track of CECC but he believes there are about 100 students. Mr. O'Brien said he had indicated during previous discussions that if we lose the Smart Start grant he would like you to continue to attract tuition paying students. Mr. Petrone said he had mentioned that

some districts that have the obligation to service three and four-year olds may hold a lottery for preschool students to attend for free to provide the typical regular education peer students that are required. Mr. O'Brien said he had voiced his objection to that approach. Jennifer Beausoleil said we didn't previously allow students to attend tuition-free either - that is why we started the relationship with CECC.

Justin Trzaskos said he knows that teachers pay in 7.25% of their salary now (*toward pension*). Matthew O'Brien said he believes it is 6%. Robert Carroll said there are two aspects of pension now: 6% and 1 1/4%, so their paycheck is reduced by 7.25%. Mr. Trzaskos said all that money is going to the State now. Is any portion of that is going to come back to the towns when we begin paying a third of the teacher pension cost? Mary Kortmann replied nobody knows. Jennifer Beausoleil speculated that the State will keep it. Ms. Kortmann said neither will the State allow us to negotiate it. Ms. Beausoleil said it's a great program for the State - they negotiate it, they don't fund it and then they pass the buck to the towns. David Petrone said he believes the negotiated settlement amount is locked in for 5-6 more years. Mr. O'Brien said if the burden falls on the town it will go up every year. In 15 years it goes up 600%. On top of that they also cut our regular education money. It's not just one thing. After they cut the ECS grant total, they shifted more funds to the cities so the percentage we are getting of the total grant has gone down. John Elsesser said last year they cut student transportation and made mid-year cuts to ECS after we adopted our budget. Mr. O'Brien said so the current numbers they are publishing don't show what was cut from us last year and during this year as well. They keep publishing numbers - our numbers are a little higher than that.

Matthew O'Brien said he found out from Beth Bauer in one of our meetings that there was \$87,000 that came to the town for tuition for special ed and those funds were never requested. Robert Carroll said we requested up to \$150,000 last year. Mr. O'Brien asked if they were talking about December, when the students never showed up. Mary Kortmann said they showed up - the students were here the whole time. Mr. Carroll said the motion allowed us to collect the tuition for the two students that were placed in November. Mr. O'Brien said you withdrew that request if you go back and look at the notes. He wants to show that the services you provided to the students who came in were above and beyond what was already budgeted, in other words if the taxpayers were already paying for those services with existing resources then he thought those funds should go back to the taxpayers. So all they have to do is justify it, and had they done that then you would have received perhaps as much as \$87,000 more which you spent out of your budget to pay those bills. You've reported a \$533,000 surplus - if we had added another \$87,000 it would have been \$620,000 last year on top of the \$200,000 that we reduced your budget. Mr. Carroll said if you look at the audit you would not see a \$533,000 surplus. Mr. O'Brien said you gave us the document, called "Highlights from 2015-16." We asked what that was from and you said it was from surplus funds. Mr. Carroll said if you look at the audit, the Comprehensive Annual Financial Statement that shows budget vs. actual expenditures, you won't see a surplus. Mr. O'Brien said he knows they did not spend over their appropriation, that is not what he is questioning. Mr. Carroll said if you look at the financial statement, it says your expenditures are "x", your budget is "y" and your surplus or deficit is the difference. Mr. O'Brien said so this is a definition of surplus you are trying to get to? You created a budget that we presented to the taxpayers, and after providing those services or not during the school year, monies that were left were not used for the purposes put in that budget - he is calling that surplus and that is what many of your documents called it in the past. That is the amount of money you reported to us - "surplus." You can call it whatever you like. And that was after we reduced your budget.

Mr. O'Brien said the other reason he asks about special education, and he is curious because we never got an explanation from last year, after we reduced your budget by \$200,000 and passed our budget you cut \$94,000 from special ed within a few days. What is the reason for this? Did something happen from the time we passed the budget? Mary Kortmann replied yes - two of the out-placed students left and went elsewhere. The timing was such that we were very lucky. David Petrone noted that we received three new students over the past two weeks. As fast as they go, they come in. It is a moving target. Richard Williams asked what are the needs for those three students. Mr. Petrone replied they vary. In terms of dollars it is \$450,000 worth. Mr. O'Brien asked if that is between now and the end of the year. Mr. Carroll replied no. Mr. Petrone said next year that would be the all-in number, including transportation, that is not in our budget. Mr. O'Brien asked if they will be making changes to their budget. Ms. Kortmann replied we can't. Ms. Beausoleil said we already sent you the number. It was based on the students in the district at the time. Mr. Petrone said that budget was prepared a long time ago. In previous years we used to have placeholders to address these kinds of issues because populations were pretty fluid. Our population used to be very stable here - that's changed. We have a lot of kids coming in and out. When he first got here the group of students that started in kindergarten was same group that graduated. That is no longer the case.

Richard Williams asked how do we get the answers to the questions we have asked in the format we're asking for. Is that just not going to happen? Jennifer Beausoleil said in the past you have said you didn't want us to create special reports. If you are changing your mind and you want special reports, then that's a burden of extra work on the district that was unanticipated. Mr. Williams and Mr. O'Brien asked for clarification as to when the Council indicated that. Ms. Beausoleil replied last year during budget season. Mr. O'Brien said we never said we didn't want special reports. He asked for them again and then he asked for them at Fiscal as part of the budget. That's why we asked in December and then it takes 3 months for you to pull some information together. In the end, it comes down to that we have to make decisions based on the information you give us, and if it's not adequate then we just will have to make a guess.

Richard Williams asked how do we get the responses to the 20 questions that were given to you originally in the format that we asked for, so we can take that information and help drive a budget. Michael Sobol said he thinks we have answered a lot of those questions. Just because you don't like the answers in the format you were given does not mean we haven't provided the information. We have provided links to the data and the documents were provided. All of the information has been handed over time and time again. The same questions keep getting asked over and over again. We are here to talk about the budget for the year that is coming up, and you keep wanting to dwell on the past. We have to look forward. We went through a four-hour interrogation last year. Mr. O'Brien questioned the term interrogation. Eugene Marchand said that's what it was. We are an elected body here - a bipartisan, non-partisan board of experienced people from all different walks of life. We were elected by the taxpayers of Coventry to look into these things. We go line by line on these budgets. We spend an inordinate amount of time and to have to come before the Council in this accusatory tone is very disturbing and troubling. Mr. O'Brien disagreed that they are being accusatory - he is just looking for information. Mr. Marchand said it is very accusatory. He said that Mr. O'Brien sat in on the negotiations with teachers and saw the level of detail that we got into with our attorney, and he hopes that was a snapshot of how we look at everything. Mr. O'Brien said he believes they do all that and that's why it should be simple for you to provide us the data we're looking for. Mary Kortmann said it's because it takes hours

and hours of synthesizing it and working it in order to understand it. We're not taking all those hours to rewrite essays to answer questions. We spent all the time. We looked at it.

Thomas Pope thanked the Board of Education for coming tonight to try and provide information. He said this is an unprecedented budget season. The Governor has proposed a budget and created his own version of "March Madness" all across the state. Richard Williams had asked a question, which is really very simple, and that is, "Did you create any new positions?" You don't need a report, you don't need a page. We just need a yes or no answer. In all this discussion he just heard somebody could have said yes or no to that question. Instead of an answer all we get are piles of baloney. Did you or did you not create any new positions from last year to this year? That is the question. Yes or no? Robert Carroll replied yes, a half-time nurse. Mr. Pope said that is all we want to know, but your answer says to look at item #1, position tracking. On there you list everything as a replacement, which would tell me that there is nothing new. On the other hand, 14 of them are identified as new. He doesn't know whether they're new, or replacements. He is looking at what you gave us. Can you explain it? Jennifer Beausoleil said there were two questions related to staffing. It was thought the single report answered both questions but it's obvious that wasn't sufficient information from your perspective. One question was if there were new positions, and one question was for the people that retired or resigned, how much did their replacements cost and when did all of that happen. It was our belief that the one piece of information covered that. Mr. Pope said so from this information it appears you created 14 new positions that you added in this budget that weren't there last year. Mary Kortmann asked what difference does it make. Mr. Pope said it makes a lot of difference. Ms. Kortmann said If we're within budget and we have a head count of FTEs - we have a certain number of people and a certain number of FTEs - which may be multiple people, and we're within the salary budget, what difference does it make if one person left and we hired two half-timers, or one-and-a-half people left and we hired two 75-timers. What difference does it make. With 200 people it is way more complex than that. The deal is to stay within the budget. Mr. O'Brien said it is our job to set the budget, so we need information. Mr. Pope said so if we listen to somebody over in the other hall, who wanted to reduce the education budget by \$1.6 million, which he thinks is rather ridiculous, but they've given us a number. Now we're trying to justify that it should be something higher than that, and you're saying, "You don't need that information. Just make the decision." Ms. Beausoleil said if you look at the proposal the superintendent gave at the town hearing, it doesn't show a 14 FTE increase in the budget it shows less than two - actually a 1.24 reduction. Mr. Pope said he agrees but the problem is this is what you hand us for justification. Ms. Kortmann said we are here to talk about next year, not this year. Mr. O'Brien said every budget we go through includes a look at past performance and current performance of the budget in order to get an idea where we should be. Ms. Kortmann said she watched the last budget meeting and they didn't talk about the past budget with the police department. She watched it - there was not a discussion of how many FTEs they changed. Mr. O'Brien said we already have that. Ms. Kortmann said you already have that because you run the police. The schools are run by the Board of Ed. Mr. O'Brien said so you have the information, you just don't want to give it to us. Ms. Kortmann said no; it is all in the FTEs. Mr. O'Brien pointed out they just went back and revised the FTE count for five years of audits. Ms. Kortmann said that is not the one in the budget.

Richard Williams said there are several ways to look at it. There has been a great deal of improvement in the schools. He sees it. He went to one of the college planning meetings and wandered around the halls. You get a completely different vibe. He feels it and he is only in that school system for a limited amount of time. When he was at the grammar school you could see a huge amount of improvement. But when you think about staff, it's "outplacements

and this and that.” The reality is for every student, there are five-and-a-half people. It’s one to five, or one to five-and-a-half. Where is the line? How many people do we need? He knows there is an average, and you give a DRG average, but when you look at the DRGs that were presented, North Branford has 3100 kids. And then you look at another district that has 800 kids but they don’t have a high school - they’re going to a regional high school. He doesn’t know how the comparisons of anything would match up. David Petrone said we don’t set the DRG, that’s set by the State but he is sure Mr. Williams saw in his research it is by socio-economic makeup for communities that look like us, with similar populations, etc. We don’t determine what DRG we’re in. When we show comparisons it is only to districts in our DRG that have a middle school, or a high school. Mr. Williams asked how expenditures are calculated. Mr. Petrone said the State does it. Mr. Williams said within that DRG, some have high schools and some don’t. Mr. Petrone said so what is the cost to educate that student? Even though they don’t have a high school they still have to send them to high school. What tuition do they pay to Norwich Free Academy or Woodstock Academy? Those schools that are out there, or E.O. Smith/Bolton High School - what is the cost to educate that kid? That is the per-pupil expenditure. Mr. Williams said when he went to look at it, you have so many kids - so many are out-placed, so many are in-placed, you can look at enrollment numbers in a multitude of different ways. He knows that when he gives them the number he came up with, it doesn’t make a lot of sense. Are the preschool kids - some of them - included in the enrollment? Mr. Petrone said the kids we are responsible for are included in the enrollment. Mr. O’Brien said Mr. Williams is asking about per-pupil expenditures. Mr. Petrone said the per-pupil expenditures includes 22 of the preschool special education students, not all 47. Mr. Williams said the other 126 children that we farm out to technical or magnet schools - he couldn’t figure out the number because when he looked at that list it looked like \$327,000. Mr. O’Brien said he thinks that is magnet schools. Mr. Petrone confirmed that is magnet schools and tuition. Transportation is a different line item in the budget. Mr. Carroll said the transportation breakdown is shown on page 87. Mr. Petrone said we are not legally required to transport students to magnet schools so a couple years ago he did away with that. Ms. Beausoleil said we are required to transport to the technical schools. Mr. Williams asked what the tech school transportation costs. Mr. O’Brien said he thinks it is \$150,000. Mr. Carroll said you have to go through a calculation because there are kids on every single school bus. Mr. Williams said when he looks at all this it is over \$500,000. Does that include the total cost of tuition? There were some other categories too that he cannot recall. He will come back to it when he finds it. Mr. O’Brien said last year magnet school tuition was about \$4600 per student. Are they included in our per-pupil expenditures too, or is it just our in-house students? Mary Kortmann said the State calculates the number. Mr. O’Brien asked if the Smart Start grant money is included in our per-pupil expenditures. Mr. Carroll said he would not want to comment on that. It is a very complex formula performed by the State Department of Education. Mr. O’Brien said if other towns have fewer out-placed students, or don’t have a Smart Start grant and if they are all included then our per-pupil expenditure is artificially lowered. Mr. Petrone said our per-pupil expenditure is not artificially lowered - every school system has the same challenge we do related to magnet schools. Parents can choose to send their children to magnet schools at any time. If a student gets accepted we don’t have any control over that - we have to write check for whatever that tuition is. Mr. O’Brien said he thinks we have 148 students in magnet schools. Mr. Petrone said it is a challenge that has existed for a while. Mr. O’Brien said he was not making any comment about Coventry schools regarding the number of magnet school placements - he thinks they are doing a fine job. Mr. Petrone said it wasn’t that long ago that the State was initially requiring towns to pay for magnet preschools, and a lot of magnet preschools were opening up. The towns fought back and ultimately ended up winning.

Richard Williams explained how he calculated per-pupil expenditures. He took the total number of students that are in Coventry that we paid for, which was 1614 for 2016. Then he backed out the magnet school kids, which were 126. Then he backed out the total dollars that were associated to the magnet schools. He ended up with a budget of \$28,087,514. We educated 1591 children in our system K-12. That comes out to \$17,654 per child. There's no denying that - that's what it costs. Mr. Petrone said he can't verify any of the numbers Mr. Williams is using, but he can give him the contact information for the person at the State who is calculating it and you can compare your numbers with theirs. Mr. Williams said if you back out the magnet school children that is the actual per-pupil expenditure that we spend. Mr. Petrone disagreed. Mary Kortmann asked what does it matter. Mr. Williams said it matters to him because you are reporting one number but the true cost is different. He asked if Mr. Petrone agrees with everything the State does, or whether he agrees with every number they toss out. Ms. Kortmann asked if Mr. Williams agrees with the State's equalized grand list. They take a bunch of numbers and create a number they believe can compare. Mr. Williams said but that isn't the true cost. Eugene Marchand asked Mr. Williams what his hypothesis is - does he think we're overspending? Mr. Williams said he does. Mr. Marchand said you look at all the State data that is put out there for comparison purposes that we have no control over. It was put together to make comparisons, and as Mr. Petrone pointed out in his presentation the other night, in our DRG we are 27th out of 33 - there are only six school systems that spend less - and we're 109th out of 166 towns and your hypothesis is we're overspending? You think Coventry spends too much on students? Mr. Williams said we do. We spent \$17,654. Mr. Marchand said that is based on Mr. Williams' own formula, which none of us understand. Mr. Williams asked if he understands backing out the magnet school tuition. Mr. Marchand questioned to what end. Matthew O'Brien said he understands what Mr. Williams is saying: take your budget, take out any money for students who are out of district or in preschool that are not part of the K-12 system, and then you know what the budget is for the K-12 system. That's all he is saying. Maybe he wants the public to know we are spending \$17,654 per student. Jennifer Beausoleil said that some kids cost \$100,000 and some kids cost \$4500. Mr. O'Brien said that's not special education. Mr. Williams said he just came up with an average. The average is \$17,654 and that's probably low, because if you back in the grants it goes up even higher, so then we go to \$18,200. Mr. Marchand suggested that Mr. Williams calculate the DRG then - take some random selection with his formula and do the same calculation for other towns in our DRG and see how we compare. Mr. Williams said he can't do that because they don't have high schools. Ms. Beausoleil said then pick one with a high school. Mr. Williams said he is just telling them what we spend in the Town of Coventry. He has seen the other data that shows a per-pupil expenditure of \$15,000 but when he calculates it, it comes out much higher. Robert Carroll asked if he is backing out the special education tuition. Mr. Williams said no. Mr. Marchand said this goes back to the point he made earlier. We were elected by the town. In his time with this group, we haven't made one decision based on politics. It's been based on what's best for kids. You've got an experienced group here. We go over the budget line item by line item and challenge everything. There have been adjustments every year based on questions, and based on suggestions. This feels to us like a criminal investigation. Last year and this year, it's like, "I know they're overspending, they've got money hidden and we're going to find it out." That's the way he feels. You've got a dedicated group of people here - four Republicans with a Republican Chair, and three Democrats. Our decisions have been based on what's best for the kids and what's best for the taxpayer. So personally when he comes here and it feels like an investigation, he takes issue with that. We were elected by the citizens of Coventry to present the best possible education for our kids in the most cost-effective manner. He feels really good about what this board has done, it's why he stays on the board even though he doesn't have kids in the system. His kids are gone and he has no skin in the game. He is really proud

of what this school board has accomplished for the money we put into it. He has worked with kids and families for 43 years. He is a State Dept. of Children and Families employee, so he knows a little bit about kids and families. He is extremely proud of the cost-effective services we have been providing, and that's why he takes issue with this kind of an atmosphere. Mr. Williams said he sees Mr. Marchand's point but we look at it from a different perspective. We're not saying you don't do a great job with education, but we are just trying to get the expense down. Mr. Marchand replied our expenses are down. The only comparison numbers we have are provided by the state. There may be some imperfections but at least it gives you a comparison. They don't have variations - they apply the numbers across the board. When he looks at it, and when he speaks to constituents, he can very proudly say, in our DRG, we are 27th in spending out of 33. Statewide we are 109th out of 166. Those are the state legitimate comparison data. Mr. Petrone said you bring up the per-pupil expenditure that you calculated - he would have greater understanding of your concern if we were doing the calculations and you were calling them into question. This is completely out of our hands and we don't have any influence over this process. It is an audited process every year and we don't get to choose who is in our DRG. We are grouped by the State into similar districts. He has no idea what Mr. Williams is using for numbers and if they are valid. Anybody at this table could throw out a number for per-pupil expenditures and say how they calculated it, but in his opinion the fairest way is to use the same numbers that the State prepares. Mr. Williams said but the actual expense is higher. Mr. Petrone said Mr. Williams is telling him that - but he doesn't know that for himself. If you want to calculate per-pupil expenditures then you should apply the same formula to every other district. You can't take it in isolation. Mr. Williams said he is not looking to rank us, he is just looking at the cost. When you add back in your grants, then the cost is over \$18,000. He can send his kid to a nice college for that. Ms. Beausoleil pointed out that room and board alone for college is almost \$18,000. Mr. Petrone reiterated the offer to put Mr. Williams in touch with the State official who does the calculations. They can validate it for you. We have no control over that process. We only give them the components that go into that calculation. Based on the state ranking Coventry does not spend a lot of money compared to districts in our DRG.

Thomas Pope said to Eugene Marchand that he understands he was elected and that he has a problem with us asking questions. Mr. Marchand replied it isn't the questions; it is the level of minutiae, and the tone and the attitude. Mr. Pope replied that just wondering if you have new positions isn't a lot of minutiae. Governor Malloy was also elected and he has a budget. If we don't ask questions of Governor Malloy and we don't ask questions of the Board of Education, we bring to the taxpayers a 16.1% increase. If there is anybody in here who thinks that's reasonable, and we shouldn't ask questions, then stand up and say, "I think we need a 16.1% increase here in Coventry." He wants to hear the person who wants to say that. Jennifer Beausoleil said that one of the things she thinks is really important as we're all sitting here trying to figure things out as a collaborate group, is that nobody is happy with the Governor's proposed budget and the effect it has on local towns and municipalities. Coventry is not alone in their anger toward that situation. It is a difficult situation we all have, but you are attacking proposals that were developed by the Board of Education based on what we believe the needs of the school district are. She asks that you not take your anger out on the volunteers who have taken their time to try to come up with a proposed budget. We are not the only group in town that's coming to you over the next few weeks. She would hope that you would all have respect that what they are proposing is what they believe is needed. If it can't be paid for because the Governor's budget comes to pass because the legislators can't get out of their own way to come up with an alternate solution, then everyone in town will have to figure out what their threshold of pain is to solve the State's problem locally. But this isn't something we created. We provided a 1.86% increase in expenditures based on contract

obligations, and real need within the district. If as the fiduciary body you say that the town can't afford that, based on what you think the legislature will come up with for revenue to the town, then we will have to abide by that and find a way to make it work while still meeting our State obligations to educate the students. She asks that you don't take your frustrations over the revenue problems that the State is passing on out on us here at the table and others who will come to the table.

Eugene Marchand said he would think the Council would have some real serious questions of the Board of Education if we came in year after year at 6-7% increases. But we are coming in with one of the lowest if not the lowest. He thinks this sends a strong message that this Board of Education has done a pretty good job at holding down costs. When we start the budget process, he goes through the newspaper every day and looks at every town to see what they are coming in at. Historically he may find one or two towns that come in similar to us, maybe one that comes below, so again if we were coming in high compared to our neighbors the Council might have some serious questions, and want to get into the details. Mr. O'Brien said so you don't want us to ask any questions? Mr. Marchand replied no, and you know that's not what he's saying.

Thomas Pope said that we are not asking questions necessarily to cut the budget, but to justify it or even say maybe they need more in an area, but we can't even get the answers to find out. Look at what happened in this town right after we met with the Police Department, and there was a proposal for a new police cruiser to replace a cruiser that is seven years old. Go onto Facebook and see what people were saying about replacing a cruiser that by all police standards needs to be replaced. He has talked with various police departments, and officers and supervisors at different levels, and every one of them says that it's a no-brainer decision. And yet we are getting crucified for even thinking about replacing it. Now we're sitting here tonight as a Council and we're hearing, "You've got a lot nerve to be asking us questions and think you're going to get a yes no answer." We know you have fewer students. You hired 14 new people with fewer students. Mr. Marchand said we did not hire 14 new staff. Mr. Pope said that is what you just said. He knows you did not hire 14 new people, but that is what you said. Robert Carroll said if you look at page 43 you can see current FTE vs. proposed FTE. David Petrone said nobody said we added 14 new positions. You asked us if we added any new positions and Mr. Carroll said yes, a half-time nurse.

Hannah Pietrantonio said this is a no-growth budget. You have allocated a nurse by need, and a new reading program. That's pretty much all there is. The town likewise comes in at basically zero. We have to look at what we're doing now and go forward. We're not going back. Let's try and move forward instead of rehashing it. Eugene Marchand suggested taking a look at test scores and look at what's happening in Coventry compared to other towns. Along with a no-growth budget, how we are spending our resources and what are we are getting for it? Ms. Pietrantonio also said to take a look at all the building permits. There is a reason a lot of people are moving to Coventry - we have a good school district. If we were to take \$1.6 million out of it, she is curious to know what would happen. She doesn't think anybody would care to move here. Mary Kortmann said if you look at certified salaries, when you approved the new contract according to the original calculations, the increase for this coming year was 3.45%. We are coming in at 1.36% in certified salaries. So work has been done to not make that 3.45%, which was the base of teachers that was negotiated.

Andy Brodersen said he comes from the business sector, and when times got tough we did things to reduce costs. We had cost savings initiatives. We evaluated how things were being done, and how to do them better or more efficiently. David Petrone replied we do that

constantly. The Coventry Academy is one big example. It brought back 15-16 kids to the district over 2-3 years. We are addressing high autism costs by serving students in the district. Currently he is doing a breakdown of every special education student in the district and what the cost is. He has identified many areas along with the Board of Education for efficiencies. We are doing that with special education now – it requires a comprehensive analysis. Eugene Marchand said we also challenge staff to develop grant writing. One of the slides in the Superintendent's presentation shows all the grant money we brought into town. Mr. Brodersen asked if they would agree that we have people on fixed incomes in town that are having problems, and businesses that would collapse if we brought these types of increases to them. Mr. Petrone replied that we feel we brought in a fiscally responsible budget as did the Town. Neither the Town nor the Board of Education developed a reckless budget or did anything wrong. It is hard to imagine what may be handed to us (*by the State*). We have to work together. To push this type of burden down to towns in one fell swoop is unconscionable. Mr. Brodersen said if you were sitting in my seat what would you do? If we say yes and take the money from the people we can't take it back. Mr. Petrone said we always look at different types of areas to save money. He cited the consolidation of alarm companies as an example, which saved \$10,000. We try to consolidate and create efficiencies wherever we can. These are tough times for everyone. He has an oil bill to pay and a daughter in college. Everyone is being faced with this. Mr. Marchand said as a citizen of this town, this state and this country we have to educate our young people. We have to stay competitive on an international level. Kids don't get a do-over. He has seen the atmosphere in a school that failed their NAEYC accreditation and it was not a positive environment. As board member he feels a real obligation to families in town to educate their kids in the best possible way. Mr. Brodersen said and when they go out in the world they will have to work to pay the taxes that you created.

Thomas Pope said he has received a question from a constituent, who heard that surplus equipment including furniture and supplies, was put on the stage at the grammar school and staff was allowed to take what they wanted. Is that true? David Petrone replied no. He has to sign off on every piece of equipment that is disposed of and he doesn't sign off on anything unless the value is zero, and if we do, we work through the proper system. We buy our furniture at Transfer Enterprises, and have furniture that is 30 years old in many cases. We had some E-waste waiting for pickup and we had to bring it back inside because it didn't get picked up promptly and people thought they could just take it. Hannah Pietrantonio noted that the furniture on the stage at the grammar school was for five new staff members who didn't have furniture or equipment in the budget. The other teachers pooled their items together to give them some things to choose from for their classrooms.

Thomas Pope asked if we could come to an agreement that if there is surplus this year, that rather than buy things that weren't on the budget this year, that the surplus comes back to the taxpayers. We are going to go to the taxpayers this year and there is a good chance they are going to see a tax increase. The only way we cannot give them a tax increase is to do severe damage across the board. He would prefer not to do severe damage across the board. We would like to be able to tell taxpayers, "Last year they had \$600,000 extra, the year before it was \$300,000 extra and whatever it is next year, instead of spending it on something that wasn't approved, they said they're going to give it back to the taxpayers." He thinks the taxpayers deserve that, particularly in a year as stressful as this. He would like to see the Board commit to doing that this year. Jennifer Beausoleil said over the last couple of years we have done that through the 1% account. Mr. Pope replied they contributed unexpended funds of \$7500 to that fund, out of a surplus of half a million dollars. Ms. Beausoleil said she would be in agreement to put unexpended funds into the 1% account. It is often discussed at the

Board level that this is a good place for unexpended money to go. But we also have a lot of uncertainty in the budget, like three special education students that were not budgeted for. There is a lot of fluidity in the budget, especially based on when it occurs. She is not trying to hedge the answer; she is just saying it's too hard to say we can make that commitment one way or the other. This Board does not go on a spending spree at the end of the year. Mr. Pope said he is only talking about the money that's left over at the end of the year, not the things that spring up during the year. Mr. Marchand said we are not disagreeing – we have had things that weren't in the budget that we addressed when we've had a surplus. One year we did electrical switches for the computer system – we spent surplus funds to get out ahead of that, rather than paying twice as much if they were to blow out or break down. Mary Kortmann said the way we don't over-budget in temporary salaries is the same conservative approach we take for contracted services and repairs in our warehouse budget. A number of things on that list, especially things that cost less than \$20,000 because we can't put them on capital - the Town can do \$10,000 for capital but we can only do \$20,000. There are items that cost in between a tiny amount and \$20,000 that we don't put in here because we don't want to burden the taxpayer with stuff ahead of time. But if we have efficiencies during the year and don't end up spending all that we budgeted in the categories that we budgeted, we try to tackle our list of things that don't fit but we don't want to add to the budget ahead of time. Mr. Pope asked wouldn't it be better to tell the taxpayers that you want to spend it on that? Ms. Kortmann said if we did that it would drive the budget up. Mr. Pope said it's not going to change your number though. Ms. Kortmann said yes it would. Mr. Pope said you're paying for it at the end of the year anyway. The only difference is you haven't told the taxpayers what you were going to spend it on. If you don't spend it, it should go back to the taxpayers. Ms. Kortmann said it is going back to the taxpayers by us spending it on things that need to be done in the building. Then we won't have to budget it for next year or wait until it breaks down. If we tried to budget for this kind of stuff the budget would be \$150,000 instead of \$50,000. We don't think that's fair. Mr. Pope said the converse to that is to say it looks like they have a half million a year extra; that's a half million we can cut right before we start. Ms. Kortmann replied then the building will fall apart, because that's how we tackle stuff. Mr. Pope said you would be able to do everything that's in your budget. The only thing you wouldn't be able to do is the stuff you spent the surplus on.

Matthew O'Brien asked where we are on the iPad replacement plan. He didn't see all of that in the budget and it appears to be different than what he thought the plan was. He had asked for it again and never got another copy. The plan he has said we were going to buy 365 iPads this year. He didn't see that in the budget so he is just curious where we are with the plan and replacement. David Petrone said he will email a clean copy to the entire Council, but provided a print-out that he had on hand. Mr. Pope asked if it is included in this year's budget. Robert Carroll said the information is on page 117 under instructional supplies. He outlined the plans for year five of the initiative. Mr. O'Brien asked if 410 iPads were purchased this year. Mr. Petrone said he believes so. Richard Williams asked how the iPads are doing. Mr. Petrone replied really well. Instruction using them is higher than it's ever been. Training for staff has increased their use. Kids are using them for organizational purposes. They have reduced some textbook costs. Mr. Williams said he was amazed - his kid got a Chromebook at South Windsor schools. He uses it for organization and communication and it is amazing. It is the way of the future. It is good stuff.

Matthew O'Brien mentioned the enrollment projections and asked if the Board is considering there will be 47 fewer students next year. Robert Carroll replied we are not going to see it all in one year. We were expecting a similar reduction in the current year but there were only nine.

Richard Williams said regarding enrollment, when you go back in time, in 2009 we had 1009 kids enrolled. Going forward in 2022 we will have 1554. We have dropped 455 students. We don't really have a school that holds that many students. Something's got to give. There are not that many schools across the DRG that have 4 schools. David Petrone replied that enrollment is declining everywhere. It is not unique to us. The challenge is just like the buses. We started with 20 buses, there are 19 now. The pain that resulted generated many complaints about the reduced services families are receiving. Whenever you reduce services it creates challenges. We're doing the best that we can with what we've been given. The problem is we are not losing 100 kids out of one grade level; it is spread out. He is a big believer in preparing the kids that are coming out of our schools for the next level of challenges. He believes we have an obligation to see that kids leave our schools with the same skill set or opportunities that other children get in neighboring towns. If you look at this budget we have reduced our regular ed staff to address the declining enrollment, and next year when he presents his budget to them, we will probably have a reduction in our regular ed staff again. But he is also a big believer in putting the right supports in the right places. He could say we are going to eliminate the early literacy program at CGS but the next year you may be wondering why the special ed budget went up by \$200,000 - \$500,000. We may be saying we have to increase class size because we have cut staff. We reduce staff at every opportunity we can, but in the same breath we are trying to preserve programs so as not to put our kids at a disadvantage. This is why we think you're seeing great test results, why we're getting national, regional and local recognition, and why the NAEYC evaluation is the best it's ever been. Those are the reasons why - we're putting the resources in the right places. Mary Kortmann said to your point on the building, in 2009 when we started to look at full day kindergarten, with the enrollment we had, we wanted to do it but couldn't figure out how. We didn't have the space. As enrollment went down, classrooms freed up so we got full-day kindergarten in that same building, adding four classes of kindergarten because everything shifted over. We also added the autism program in that building. That building, although enrollment has gone down, has added an autism program and full-day kindergarten. In the middle school enrollment has gone down. We were looking at a \$5 million building if we wanted to get that preschool out of the church basement. We had a study done. Mr. Petrone also noted we were paying \$25,000 for rent in addition to custodial and maintenance services to address the needs we had down at the church. We eliminated those costs and repurposed the classroom space at the middle school to develop the preschool. When he started we didn't have enough lockers for kids. Times have changed so we repurposed the space and I think you're going to see that continue, which is why we may look at proposing to the Board an autism program that allows us to bring in some tuition by taking on some students from smaller towns. Mr. Williams asked if we develop good programs for autistic children - won't it be a draw for more families to move here? If he had an autistic child he would do everything to get his son or daughter the best possible services. Do we run into creating a larger special ed requirement? Mr. Petrone said the other side is if we don't create a program, we are paying to out-place every kid to the tune of \$200,000, and we've got 13 kids at \$200,000 each. If he were a parent in another town with an autistic child and wanted the best possible program for his child, if that school wasn't providing the best possible program, he would do the outplacement in a high quality program and make his town pay for it. He wouldn't have to move his house to do that. Mr. Williams asked if we tried that a couple years ago with Donovan Art. Mr. Petrone said yes - we partnered with Eastconn at CGS and at that time he thinks we only had one student. He is not going pass judgment on what happened there because he wasn't involved. He doesn't think that would be fair. We develop programs, and we take a lot of time to do that. We really vet the various pieces that could impact the budget. He does not move quickly because that is where you can fall short sometimes. He learns

lessons from others - he will go out and visit other towns that have programs in place that are similar and ask what went well and what didn't go well. If he can avoid those pitfalls he will do that. Right now we are looking at whether or not we want to offer more STEM programming to our kids. Right now it is one of his goals. It's a 3-5 year goal. It may go nowhere, but he is going to spend some time researching and looking at what other districts are doing to consider offering it at the middle school or possibly at the K-5 level. We are just trying to figure out what that next gem is going to be in the district's crown to help us keep kids here instead of spending so much to send kids to magnet schools. Kids will want to stay here which is why you see our enrollment is starting to stabilize and increase. We have kids who are not leaving the district - they are staying. Mr. Williams said he doesn't think Mr. Petrone is correct in that - if you send them out it is cheaper. Mr. Petrone disagreed - in the big picture it is more economical to keep them here.

Thomas Pope asked what the capacity is for the system we have now in terms of the building. How many students could we put in? Mr. Petrone said he would have to analyze that. He would have to look at staff, contract obligations, class size, and the needs of the kids coming in. He could say it's 50, but maybe it's only 25 when you evaluate the needs of those kids. Mr. Pope said he means overall size - how big of a system could be put in all three schools. Could we put 2,000 kids in? The reason he is asking - he knows of a district that has expanded their offerings, particularly at the high school level, by actively recruiting students from out of town and gaining tuition to subsidize theirs, and they have brought their school up to be one of the top 10 in their state. Also, one of Governor Malloy's proposals is to reduce funding for renovations and new schools to districts under 2500, and driving those districts into regional schools and closing down districts with less than 2500 students. Ben Barnes said the incentive was for districts to regionalize. He just wondered how big of a district we could create before we have the State tell us we keep dropping so we have to regionalize and send our students to E.O. Smith. Mr. Petrone said he would have to look at what we have for resources, class space and who we have for staff. Sometimes there is a balance when you take kids in with the expenses being greater than what you actually bring in. He thought the incentives to regionalize were for districts with 500 students but he could be wrong. Mr. Pope read aloud from a document that said, "For Connecticut's poorest communities, the state would pick up 70% of the cost as opposed to the current 80%. For the wealthiest it would drop from 20% to 10%. Starting in three fiscal years, districts that enroll fewer than 2500 students would be eligible for much smaller reimbursement than they currently receive." That is his concern. Mr. Petrone said the challenge we have in breaking into the territory of getting tuition students is many of these agreements have been in place for decades, so it's hard to crack into. Columbia is one that comes to mind - they have had an agreement with E.O. Smith, and Bolton and Windham at one time were in the mix on that. He had a lot of parents approach him three years ago and say they wanted to send their kids to our school system. They asked if we would be willing to send a letter to Columbia, so we did. It got a few people's attention, and it makes people nervous because the pot is only so big for kids. Mr. Pope said you don't want to give up your local schools. He is looking at this and seeing three years down the road they're already telling us they are looking to get rid of school districts with under 2500 students. Mr. Petrone said he is looking at that a little differently. He thinks they are trying to provide incentive for districts to regionalize and build a regional high school, but he could be wrong. Mr. Pope said he doesn't want to see us lose our high school to go to a \$1 million high school at the old training center. Mr. Petrone said we are certainly working really hard not to have that happen and we are always looking for creative ways to bring kids in. We have even explored Open Choice as a way to bring kids in. He tries to find creative ways to bring kids into the district, and we also want to keep our kids at our high school and not to a magnet school because we have a great program to offer, as evidenced by our most

recent accreditation process. While some may say it doesn't make sense to keep schools open that only have 100-200 kids, a kid could be on the bus for two hours. They looked at closing down Willington, and having Willington kids go to Mansfield. It went nowhere, because people want kids to be educated in the town where they reside. He is very aware that enrollment is going down all over the state. He is trying to find creative ways to keep our kids here, and also bring kids in and he will continue to do that. Eugene Marchand said we have looked at this repeatedly over the past several years and came up with a policy about how much we could charge for tuition. It's something we look at on a regular basis. Mr. Petrone agreed that it is a problem and that the State is trying to force the hand of the smaller districts.

Julie Blanchard said she understands that after your budget was prepared you had some savings in things like health insurance and perhaps fuel oil. Have you quantified any of those savings? Jennifer Beausoleil said there was a reduction in the line item related natural gas based on anticipated savings. That was already included. Robert Carroll said we do have an adjustment - Mr. Elsesser just signed a contract today for heating oil at a couple cents less. We are also meeting with the health broker to get the final numbers for health insurance. Mr. Petrone said we expect to realize some savings there as well. We will share that with you if that is the case. John Elsesser said we are exploring an alternative dental program for the first time in a long time. They would have to match the benefits we have. We are still looking at it. The health insurance program has been hugely successful. He would hate to see this budget without that. Early indications are we will be able to go to zero. We have been able to negotiate a lower price with Eastconn and are working with our broker to make sure it all works out. So there is going to be some money there. Mrs. Blanchard said those are really good things that are happening in town, that we've worked on and we should be proud of. Mary Kortmann mentioned a potential new solar project at the high school with very competitive rates may also provide some additional savings. Matthew O'Brien asked about the status of the work being done by the School Building Energy Efficiency Committee. Mr. Elsesser replied they are meeting Wednesday night. They are trying to put together a total package that the architect and engineer have put together, packaged in various pieces that could be done as one big bite or several smaller bites. The goal is to get to the Council soon with a presentation.

Julie Blanchard asked about the custodial contract and what percentage they contribute to their health savings accounts. Mr. Petrone said he will provide the information. Mrs. Blanchard said she is curious what percentages people are contributing. Robert Carroll said the teachers contribute 24%. It usually goes up a percent every year.

Julie Blanchard mentioned an article in the *Journal Inquirer* about top paid people in town. She thinks the superintendent's salary was listed differently than it is shown in the budget. Which information is correct? Mr. Petrone replied the figures cited in the article came out of the business office and came from Box 1 on the W-2 form. Ms. Blanchard noted it wasn't apples to apples because the Town submitted their numbers for the police and included the amounts they made for special duty. Mr. Petrone said he doesn't know what information the Town supplied. We tried to be very consistent and transparent with the information we supplied. Mr. Carroll said the gentlemen called him and he requested that (*the newspaper*) be very specific in the question that they were asking. The first question we received just asked for names, not dollar amounts. Then the reporter sent a follow-up email and asked for dollar amounts.

There were no further questions. The Council thanked the Board of Education for attending

the meeting.

2. Adjournment:

Motion #16/17-151: The meeting was adjourned at 9:29 PM on a motion by Matthew O'Brien, seconded by Hannah Pietrantonio and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone
Town Council Clerk

Note: These minutes are not official until acted on by the Town Council at its next regular meeting. Those meeting minutes will reflect approval or changes to these minutes.