

Mayor Scott D. Jackson
Budget Delivery Remarks
March 18, 2014
as prepared for delivery

Thank you for coming out tonight. Members of the Legislative Council, you have available on your iPads the full array of budget documents. For those who prefer paper and pencil, printed binders will be available for you in the Council office after lunch tomorrow. For members of the public and other interested parties, copies of all documents will be available at the Town's website, www.hamden.com, tomorrow morning.

What the members of the Council have before them is a copy of my delivery remarks and summary information, as well as a word cloud of my remarks. For those who do not know, a word cloud is a weighted diagram of commonly used words in a paper or a speech or a website, intended to visually identify those words or themes that recur.

As those who have served on the Legislative Council for some time know, and our newest members will certainly discover over the next few short weeks, the window of budget deliberations offers a unique period of reflection and introspection. We decide whether or not to cling to an old practice, jettison an asset that may have been better suited to the 20th century than the 21st, or embark upon a new way of business, one that makes the other 168 municipalities in the State of Connecticut stand up and take notice.

We decide how to court excellence and measure progress. We remember the multitude of reasons why each of us has not only chosen to stay here in the Town of Hamden, but also participate in this yankee tradition of “home rule”, for the people and by the people.

We take stock of our successes and stand eye-to-eye, unflinching and without excuse, before our failures. Here in Hamden we do not cry or beg, we do not cower or obfuscate, we do not threaten or bully. As professionals, we analyze our lot, project the likely outcomes, and take the rational steps necessary to ensure Hamden’s success as a family-friendly community far into the future.

Yet we have no magical protection, no enchantment that protects us from the economic realities facing our region, our state, our country, and our globe. At every level, governments struggle to keep pace, to balance their books against a rising tide of fixed cost escalation, of an ever-increasingly litigious society, and of a series of complex, and frequently extensive mandates. As you may know, for the last year I have served on the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, which is charged under Sec. 2-32b(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes with creating a compendium of state mandates on municipalities. The 2010 edition of the compendium is 570 pages long and the 2013 supplement is another 32 pages. For those who believe that the delivery of government service is regular, simple, and unchanging, let me assure you that it is not.

Which puts a greater and greater emphasis on quality planning and trend analysis. I am proud that 18 months prior to the state electrical utilities issuing their Enhanced Tree Trimming proposal that caused such statewide consternation, the Town had already promulgated its first-

ever public tree removal policy, and this policy sets a very high bar for the removal of public trees. Tonight, I am announcing more on that front. I have been working with the Hamden Alliance for Trees to establish Hamden's first ever Commission dedicated to planning and preserving our tree infrastructure; in parks, in our rural areas, and along our streets. In the coming weeks I will be forwarding to the Legislative Council a proposed ordinance establishing this Commission, which will work hand-in-hand with our Public Works Department and a consulting licensed arborist to preserve the distinct quality of our neighborhoods.

As a municipal government, preservation of this neighborhood quality is job number one. Which is why the budget proposal before you actually adds jobs in the core Town-side services that our residents need the most: police protection, fire protection, and even a dedicated blight, litter, and graffiti removal officer within the Public Works department. This, literally, is where the rubber meets the road and we must acknowledge that our growing community has growing needs in this arena. But not all neighborhood quality issues require funding; the recent Planning and Zoning Commission action regarding a moratorium on additional student housing permits in our residential neighborhoods—a decision endorsed by university leaders—stands as an example of administrative efforts that can have real impact.

And just today, a neighborhood cleanup effort spearheaded by our Director of Public Works, Craig Cesare, yielded more than 4000 gallons of litter removed from Hamden's roads and parks in its first five hours. This is an effort that should make us proud, an effort that makes our Town look the way we want it to look.

This proposed budget acknowledges what may very well be the most significant threat to our civic health. When I was growing up in Hamden, everyone – without exception – read the Hamden Chronicle. Most also read the New Haven Register or Journal-Courier. But today, the delivery of timely and accurate information in a broad way to every household in Hamden is challenging. There are fantastic email lists in Whitneyville, Spring Glen, and West Woods. There are dedicated print reporters at both the Register and the Post-Chronicle. WQUN radio has its eyes on Whitney Avenue twenty-four hours a day. But the delivery of information is fragmented at best; this is our new reality.

A case in point is the roll-out of the trash and recycling bins. Despite the fact that the Council funded this program over two years and the hard work of the Solid Waste and Recycling Commission for much longer than that, the new program came as a surprise to too many Hamden residents. And while the vast majority of Hamden homes were able to manage the transition with no assistance, those homes with special circumstances, those homes with consternation and confusion, are pretty loud. We needed to do a better job.

So trash and recycling are pretty simple concepts. It costs money to dispose of trash, we earn money on recycled materials. We need to recycle more and throw away less; it is the right thing for our children and our pocketbooks, and only someone who is not paying attention would dispute that statement of fact. Every ton of trash that we move to the recycling stream saves taxpayers \$90. This is a cost containment measure with immediate results. The new program was designed to achieve this specific goal, and early data says it has done exactly that. In the first week of March 2014, the Town recycled 66 tons. In March of 2013, we recycled 44 tons. A fifty percent increase. Extraordinary positive news. But let us speak for a moment about the

impetus. From July to December 2013, we threw away 15.65% more trash than we did the prior year. If you run the numbers, that year-over-year increase cost more money to taxpayers than our entire economic development program. I want to be clear: just the increase in trash cost more than our economic development program, not the baseline. It would be fiscally irresponsible to ignore those trends. It would make us bad stewards of the public purse and bad stewards of the earth.

Nonetheless, the roll-out should have been smoother because we relied on other sources to carry the message. Circumstances require us to engage in this government enterprise in a different way, and part of what we need to do is change the way we think about messaging. This is valuable information, and it is not getting into the households in any organized way. So the budget before you establishes a Program Specialist for public information, whose sole duty is to provide citizens with the timely information that they need. At the same time, it establishes a new technology department headed by a Chief Information Officer. With the ascendance of digital delivery of information, we need to coordinate and enhance both our technical efforts and our citizen outreach. If in 2014, an app is the best way to push out critical information to residents, then we need to be developing it. The time for these changes is now.

Another critical need of our neighborhoods and our communities is enhanced traffic safety. And while we have been rolling out traffic calming measures for years, we need to make this someone's everyday job, not an occasional duty. In this budget, I am requesting a full-time Traffic Calming Program Specialist to advance this agenda, as well as formalizing the participation of the Chief of Police as liaison to the Traffic Commission and presenting a stipend for this critical work.

Having presided over five federal disasters in my years as Mayor, I am also presenting an Emergency Management stipend for our Emergency Management Director and Director of Public Works. In time of disaster, these positions are here hour after hour, day after day, and their roles in saving both property and lives should be acknowledged.

As Chairman of the State's Sandy Hook Advisory Commission, I have spent hundreds of hours receiving and reviewing testimony in various subject areas, some of which impact us right here in Hamden. Last year, the Council authorized funding for school and building security improvements. Today, I am asking your support for enhanced mental health services. In this budget request is a small request to help support the Regional Mental Health Board, an organization created by State statute to ensure a system of comprehensive, recovery oriented mental health services. There is also additional funding requested for licensed social worker support for our Elderly and Community Service departments to fill a need clearly articulated by the outreach counselors and program specialists providing front-line services to our neediest residents. John Stuart Mill said, "a person may cause evil to others not only by his actions but by his inaction, and in either case he is justly accountable to them for the injury." As it pertains to our most sensitive populations, this budget acts.

Among our most sensitive populations I include our children. We are all intelligent and rational people; we understand that dollars into an education system do not necessarily yield outputs. But we also understand that absent investment, our classrooms are doomed to failure. I am proposing in this budget a movement of all Board of Education retirement obligations,

\$600,000, to the Town. I am also proposing a single line expenditure to the Board of Education of \$81,950,000. When combined with the offset of expenditures, this equates to a Board of Education real dollar increase year over year of more than \$1 million. Along with funds already held in capital reserves, this provides the Board of Education with the dollars necessary to complete the programs identified in its budget request.

I happened to be discussing this very issue of retirement funding with the State Department of Education. They were confused that I, as a Mayor, would take on something that could be considered a Board of Education obligation. When I first arrived at Government Center as Chief Administrative Officer in November of 2005, the Finance Director at the time, Mike Betz, said something that resonated with me: “the Board of Education and the Town are just two pockets in the same pair of taxpayer-funded pants.”

I propose to you that the singular job of the Board’s Central Office to educate children. Nothing else. I am willing to take the retirement obligation on the Town side not only to do the right thing, but to open the door to a series of conversations with the Board of Education on a host of efficiencies that we can realize together and collaboratively. I propose to you that it is not the job of the Board of Education to cut grass, paint walls, or manage roof warrantys. Those duties should be managed by a consolidated department of facilities management. I propose to you that it is not the job of the Board of Education to manage fiber optic services or string network cable. Those duties should be managed by a consolidated Office of Information Technology. Purchasing, Finance, and Personnel are central service functions that we should do together. And to make this all work seamlessly, Board of Education’s Central Office should be moved to Government Center. Under one roof, we can foster synergies because we all have a singular goal. To improve our Town and the capacity of our residents to achieve success.

My two beautiful, funny, compassionate, and whip-smart boys attend public school here in Hamden, the same elementary school I attended many years ago. We owe them the tools to succeed. Let’s live up to our obligation. I pledge today to work with Interim Superintendent Melillo, Board Chair John Keegan, and the incoming Superintendent to make these things happen. On their own, Superintendent Rabinowitz and Library Director Marian Amodeo worked together to marshal the resources necessary to improve the children's room at Miller Library, a valuable project that will move forward this year. We must all continue to mine our efforts for synergies and efficiencies that can continue this progress on behalf of our residents.

So, friends and neighbors, here are the data highlights of the budget before you:

- The budget increases in total size from \$200.1M to \$207.7M.
- The mill rate increases by 1.25 mills, from 38.94 to 40.19.
- The dedicated funds for retirement benefit increase from \$13.5M to \$18.8M. My friends, we have caught the tail of this beast and we will tame it. Incorporated in that \$18.8M is an interest-only payment of \$3.4M for pension obligation bonds.
- The single line appropriation for the Board of Education is \$81,950,000, a cash increase of \$550,000 over current year and an expenditure reduction to the Board of \$600,000.
- Medical projections increase from \$33.8M to \$34.5M. Contract changes negotiated by both the Town and the Board of Education are responsible for this minimal increase.

101% of the year-over-year budgetary increase is in the areas of retirement benefits, education, guardian services, and medical coverage. So, just like last year, budgetary increases can be directly linked to those areas where we must make strategic long-term investments and infrastructure improvements.

You have seen the most recent audit. Year over year over year of enhanced financial stability; three consecutive years of balanced budgets. We've turned a nine million dollar deficit in the medical self insurance fund into a surplus. We have established a plan to repair our broken pension fund over time without massive tax increases to what sometimes feels like an endangered species: the middle class taxpayer. And yes, we have taken on new ways of doing business through public-private partnerships, but we have not eliminated any service that Hamden's families have come to expect.

We have been here for more than 225 years, this home to Eli Whitney and Land of the Sleeping Giant. We grow and expand, adapt and change. Sometimes we act as if a single budget is an end-all, be-all. It isn't. It is a link in the chain between where we have been and where we want to go.

I don't want to end on a somber note, but I need to. A few days ago, we lost one of our own, Jordan Jacques. The son of a former member of the Legislative Council and a 911 dispatcher. Wracked by pain throughout his young life that no one should bear, Jordan carried himself with a grace and dignity that was beyond measure. I like to think that there is something about this special geographic space and the resources—the supports—that we offer our young people, that helped in some small way to make him the very big presence that he was.

I'm not sure what line in the budget is the one that will buy some good, some service, or maybe just someone's time that will help the next Jordan. Maybe it is in the library budget, maybe the arts. I don't know. But I have faith that it is in this book. It can get a little esoteric to talk about millions of dollars. It is less esoteric when you sit in a small room at the Keefe Center or the library or Hamden High School and you can apply even one of these dollars to helping our neighbors. That is very powerful.

I always end these remarks in the same way. Friends, the budget is in your hands. I ask you to review it with your broad understanding of Hamden's history, but I ask you to take action with your broad capacity for charting Hamden's future. I ask you to be visionary, to think big and to be big, and I ask that, in this Town of great diversity, you keep at the forefront those who have the least. I ask that you employ 21st century government thinking to address 21st century government issues.

At its founding, the first President of Stanford University said, "Stanford is hallowed by no traditions; it is hampered by none. Its finger posts all point forward." Here in Hamden we do have tradition, history, and shared values. But still, we must always point forward. Last year 154 out of 169 Connecticut municipalities increased taxes, as did 16 out of 17 regional school districts. We've got to move forward with collaborative, regional, and high-service efforts to make our state affordable and our communities livable. I'd like to take a moment to mention Chief Assessor Ross Murray, whose tenacious support of a new data solution for assessment

purposes means that individuals will be able to look up their own tax bills at home, saving time, money, and effort not only for our staff in the Collector's and Assessor's offices, but also the taxpayers. This is what I mean by "high-service".

But striking this balance means making hard decisions. So I ask that you think about the people who love this Town and contribute to its social fabric as you deliberate. That you consider my friend on St. Mary Street who polices her neighborhood with a firm hand, the World War II veteran on Shelton Avenue, the community activists on River Road, on Wilmot Road, on Dessa Drive, on Carleton Street. I ask you to consider my friend, our friend, Jordan Jacques.

I do not envy you your challenge, just as you have not envied me mine over the last four months of crafting this proposal. But public officials are elected to solve problems, not walk away from them. Not to leave them for another age, another generation.

I and my team stand ready to assist you in any way we can to make this the right budget for Hamden and its future.

And while these remarks have run long, I believe there is always time for thanks. In addition to the department heads and members of the elected Board of Education who worked so hard, I would like to thank Finance Director Sal DeCola, Chief Administrative Officer Curt Leng, Deputy Finance Director Amaechi Obi, Operations Manager Patti Riccitelli, Accountant Beng Kuan, and IT Manager Dave Richards for their help throughout this process.

And, of course, I want to thank you, the Legislative Council, for your time, and thank you in advance for your hard work.