

TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FY 2023-2024 BUDGET DELIBERATIONS
May 10, 2023

***To view the recording, please click the following link and observe the instructions when/if prompted:**

https://hamden.zoom.us/rec/share/nDv7O_2asTqoUAsvVf7IDMKoRA20i5KdxjRmExugsQxYdHz41TTj_QR8gAjjAgIA.LG6Gd9sVhSGp14ou?startTime=1683755747000

**** If you are reviewing a print copy of these minutes and wish to view the meeting recording, please visit the Agenda Center at www.hamden.com/agendacenter and click the MEDIA link found next to this agenda under the meeting date. OR download the digital version of these minutes and click the link above.**

Legislative Council budget deliberations were held on Wednesday, May 10, 2023. This was a hybrid meeting held both in person and electronically via Zoom. The meeting was called out of recess at 6:09 P.M. by Council President Dominique Baez.

Z = Zoom P = in Person

<u>MEMBERS PRESENT:</u>	Dominique Baez (P)	Paula Irvin (Z) approx. 8:30pm
	Katie Kiely (P)	Jeron Alston (Z) approx. 7:15pm
	Sarah Gallagher (Z)	Abdul Osmanu (P)
	Ted Stevens (Z)(P)	Laurie Sweet (P)
	Kristen Zaehring (Z)(P)	Cory O'Brien (Z)
	Bob Anthony (P)	Ms. Wetmore (Z)

Mr. Stevens and Ms. Zaehring started on Zoom and joined in person at approximately 6:20pm

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lesley DeNardis; Justin Farmer; Adrian Webber

PRESIDING: Dominique Baez, President

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Sean Grace, Chief of Staff; Curtis Eatman, Finance Director; BOE Superintendent Gary Highsmith; Tom Ariola, BOE Finance Director; David Panico, Bond Counsel

PUBLIC INPUT: There were 11 in person speakers and 4 speakers on Zoom.

BOE:

Mr. Highsmith gave a presentation and highlighted the following: Personnel cuts between 1.5M-

1.8M; additional Alliance funding of 1.2M; took the Mayor's recommended 2.3M increase and added it to the budget deficit; no more 6th grade into the middle school and they are asking for 1.8M to be returned to the proceeds from Wintergreen; requesting 3M for Capital projects; they have to consider closing a school.

Expenditures:

Ms. Baez requested a motion to open the expenditures. Moved by Ms. Kiely, seconded by Mr. Osmanu.

Ms. Kiely thanked the administration for setting up tonight's technology so they could hear everyone's voice and also thanked the Mayor for working with everyone. She asked that they don't attack each other and make light of the needs for the most under valued section of Town. She then pointed out how as a Council they can't say how to spend but can make resources available.

There was discussion about Wintergreen funds and positions. Mr. Highsmith mentioned the 9M needed saying of his ask he got 1.2M from Alliance, 1.8M from ESSRS, and 3M from Wintergreen leaving 3M left over.

Mr. O'Brien said this is a complicated issue and he thanked Mr. Highsmith for all the effort put in and mentioned the 2019 infrastructure when he fought hard for them, and he is saddened that we're still not investing in our schools and wants to make sure we're investing in our infrastructure. He then asked Mr. Panico if we can reallocate funds from the 3R school improvements. Mr. Panico said you can reallocate them to another project but the ordinance restricts it to capital projects. There was then discussion on matching grants and reimbursements explained by Mr. Ariola.

Mr. O'Brien said this infrastructure is important to him and he isn't adamantly opposed to Wintergreen funds in their operating fund like he normally would be but he knows the chances are there will be an ECS increase.

There was some discussion on personnel cuts. Mr. Highsmith explained there could be cuts across the board (teachers and administrators) with the exception of nurses. He said they have about 500 teachers and 37 administrators. Cuts at 10% would mean 55 teachers and 3.6 administrators.

Ms. Baez called for a break at 8:35pm.

Return from break and back in session at 8:50pm.

Mr. Stevens asked about electricity costs and if they could get better rates if they shopped around. He also said he hears there is a lack of aids at Bear Path and sees a \$400,000 cut over last year. Mr. Highsmith expressed his concerns with staffing and vacancies. He said it's difficult filling the positions. Mr. Ariola then explained the electricity partnership with Energistics.

Ms. Gallagher stated this is a complicated conversation, the closing of 1 or 2 schools and downsizing staff. She asked is it budget constraints or the desire to achieve other goals? Mr. Highsmith said it's budget constraints, they need the 9.2M. Ms. Gallagher asked if the population is increasing, decreasing or is flat. Mr. Highsmith said they're told the numbers are going down but it's not true. There was some discussion about a maintenance budget and that it's been flat for

a couple of years. Ms. Gallagher asked what portion of the Wintergreen funds would he allocate to planning and restructure. Mr. Highsmith said of that 3 million approximately 2.5 or 2.6 would be used for operating expense and the other \$400,000 would be to help get the support needed for state required racial balance. There was then some discussion on the capital plan.

Ms. Gallagher asked will the litigation plan avoid concerns brought up around potential closing, decrease in mental health, etc. Mr. Ariola said with Wintergreen funds it would return to what it was prior, yes. Ms. Gallagher shared her concern that 5-6 million of this plan are one time funds they won't have next year and asked if they receive the \$3,000,000 in their budget does that change the plan on closing schools, etc. Mr. Highsmith said yes. He said he wanted it from Wintergreen so it didn't have to be a reoccurring thing for the taxpayers. Ms. Gallagher stated she wants to make sure they're not creating a reoccurring deficit process.

Ms. Zaehringler thanked the community, BOE members, Mr. Highsmith and his team, as well as the administration for coming out tonight. She went on to say you're at 6M and want to get to 9M and she wants to help. She asked if they add an extra 3M to the budget would this avoid more closings, layoffs and provide more mental health to the students? Mr. Highsmith said he cannot say dollar for dollar, some reductions have to be made for long term instead of a big adjustment this year. There was then discussion about not having the 1.8 from ESSRS at that point. Mr. Highsmith said with the 1.8 from ESSRS, the 1.2 Alliance, the 3M from Wintergreen, and the Mayor's 2.3 totals 8.3M. (Audio is bad) Mr. Highsmith said it would provide them (unintelligible) but he can't say for sure he won't make any personnel cuts.

Ms. Kiely moved a motion to increase the Mayor's request of \$2,300,000 to \$3,100,000. The motion was seconded by Ms. Zaehringler.

Mr. Anthony stated he thought they were voting on taking out all raises, there are raised in this budget.

Ms. Sweet said this will raise the mil rate and asked is it possible to see money come out of Wintergreen to offset (?) to increase the \$3,000,000 to more. Mr. Highsmith asked the 3.8 from Wintergreen? He'd certainly be open to that.

Mr. O'Brien asked for an update on what the State budget looks like right now. Mr. Highsmith said there's a 2 billion surplus but no allocation so he doesn't know what they're going through. He said all superintendents are asking questions but no answers are given. Mr. Grace said they're more optimistic because the house democrats and republicans support an increase, the question is how much and whether we'll get to where we need to be over the next couple years, or this year, people lean towards a couple. Mr. O'Brien said he feels more comfortable now with a one time injection to make the Board whole since some of the money comes from the State, and only for the Wintergreen funds if they can transfer 3R in capital. Mr. Highsmith stated it's be an immediate fix from Wintergreen but not long term.

Ms. Gallagher wonders **if a friendly would** be accepted to 1.1M from the proposed \$800,000. There was discussion on this. Mr. Stevens said he's comfortable with the \$800,000. Ms. Gallagher said she added in the \$400,000 for planning. Ms. Sweet asked if it was possible to add the \$400,000 to the Wintergreen and leave Ms. Kiely's \$800,000 alone on top of the Mayors number. Mr. O'Brien stated they're not voting on Wintergreen money tonight.

There was then discussion on consensus and no vote.

Ms. Kiely and Ms. Zaehringer accepted the friendly amendment to increase the Mayors proposed from 2.3 to 3.4, an increase of 1.1M.

Mr. Stevens spoke on no raises and said he'd like to reduce the proposed amount of non-union raises. He then **offered a friendly amendment** to lower the number by \$35,000 to \$1,065,000. Ms. Kiely and Ms. Zaehringer accepted the friendly amendment.

After some more discussion Ms. Baez stated they're ready to vote on \$1,065,000 over the Mayors proposed budget. She took a vote and announced it failed with a tie. Mr. O'Brien requested a roll call vote. A roll call vote was taken and it passed with 5 in favor (Gallagher) (Irvin) (Kiely) (Stevens) (Zaehringer) – 4 opposed (Alston) (Anthony) (O'Brien) (Baez) – and 2 abstentions (Osmanu) (Sweet)

Ms. Baez then called for the vote on the expenditures as amended and it failed with 6 opposed (O'Brien) (Alston) (Osmanu) (Sweet) (Anthony) (Baez) – and 5 in favor (Gallagher) (Irvin) (Kiely) (Stevens) (Zaehringer)

Ms. Baez stated it reverts back to the Mayors number. She then moved a motion to open revenues but then retracted it saying since they failed the expenses they will go back to it. Ms. Kiely stated she would appreciate taking the vote on here original motion. Ms. Gruen explained you can make a different motion, it can't be the same.

Ms. Kiely **moved a motion** to increase the Mayors number from \$2,300,000 to \$3,000,000. The motion was seconded by Ms. Sweet and approved with 3 opposed (Anthony) (O'Brien) (Alston)

A vote was taken on expenditures as amended and approved with 1 opposed (Anthony)

Revenues:

Ms. Baez requested a motion to open revenues. Moved by Mr. Stevens, seconded by Ms. Kiely.

Mr. Stevens asked if there were any changes to the estimates since this was put together. Mr. Ariola said no.

A vote was taken on the revenues as proposed and approved unanimously.

Ms. Baez announced the Board of ed budget is done for tonight but on the 15th they will hear more about the Wintergreen money and that the budget is not closed until the 17th and they will be going back to departments because of this thing about raises.

There being no further business Ms. Baez recessed the meeting at 10:22 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Renta
Clerk of the Council