

MINUTES

2015-2016 Fiscal Year Budget as proposed by the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools

March 26, 2015 2:00 p.m. Legislative Chamber

2:06 PM Public Hearing Called to Order

Present: Councilors Barnes, Cantor, Captain (by phone), Casperson, Davidoff, Doar, Hall and Slifka. Absent: Councilor Kindall

President Slifka: We are going to call the Public Hearing to order. This is on the 2015-2016 Fiscal Year Budget as proposed by the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools. Roll Call Please.

Thank you. We will go to the sign up sheet and there is one name on the sign-up sheet. Mr. White, welcome. The floor and entire meeting is yours. Hit the button on the mike, and though we know you well, please state your name and address for the record.

Mr. White: My name is Richard White, I live at 76 Mohegan Drive in West Hartford and I'm hoping to speak into the microphone so Mr. Captain can hear me. I support the proposed budget. I support it based on the details I know, but more on the process or method by which the budget is devised. I've seen the budget process in person by going to many town meetings in the past year and a half. The process starts with what town staff proposes as the best balance between spending and taxes. That balance is based on what town staff believes is the best for the common good of all of West Hartford residents. The staff budgets has some line item reductions and some item increases from the previous years. I saw that many of the cost increases are controlled by union contracts or other uncontrollable cost increases. The next step of the process is a detailed review of each section of the budget by the appropriate town council committee. At those meetings I've seen town councilors ask detailed penetrating questions about many line items in the budget. The questions are always aimed at the common good for all West Hartford Residents. Mostly, staff answers lead to the town councilors agreeing with the line item, but sometimes changes are suggested discussed and approved by the town council committee. The next step in the budget is meetings like this. Residents give their budget opinions (maybe the evening one will be better attended) for what they believe are the common good of West Hartford. You listen and sometimes adopt suggested resident changes. I believe this budget process works because of what I see in West Hartford today. I see people and businesses choosing to improve their properties or move to West Hartford. In 2014 I saw an example of town staff to suggesting a way to slightly reduce taxes. It was a way to lower the deficit of operating the town skating rink. Even before it was discussed by the town council, town councilors got lots of emails from rink users protesting any changes. As I recall, rink operating expenses were reduced, thus reducing taxes. I am pretty sure rink users are satisfied with the changes. In 2014 I also saw a town board recommending something for the common good of residents that would slightly increase taxes. The Pension board recommended lowering how much pension investments were projected to

grow during the upcoming year and the Town Council did not in any way object to that recommendation. This would prevent future hirer taxes to pay for contractually agreed upon pension benefits. I know that all the present town councilors pushing for future town union contracts to have lower cost health and pension benefit more in line with the private sector. This will lead to future lower taxes. The last step in the budget process is for the Town Council to vote on the revised budget. I'm sure of two things about that vote. First I'm sure that the revised budget will lower be than the staff proposed budget. I'm also sure that not all council members will vote to approve the budget. Based on the many town council full and committee meetings I've attended in the past year, I believe each town council member ill vote in what they truly believe is in the best interest of the common good of all West Hartford residents. And that's all I really have to say. If maybe I have a few more moments, I've always been interested in government, and especially good government to see how it works and that's why I apparently am much more unique in my retirements years in enjoying almost using it as a spectator sport that's for free...and coming to your meetings. But because I really see good government and democracy overcoming problems that's why I have and will continue to be a spectator. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you very much Mr. White and thank you for giving us a reason to actually open the hearing and keeping it going for a little while today. And since the only other two people who could speak, are our Library director and our intrepid reporter, I'm going to guess we have no further speakers on the budget, so with that we will close the public hearing and thank my colleagues for taking time out of their work day to be here. Thanks.

Public Hearing Closed at 2:13 p.m.

Essie S. Labrot
Town Council Clerk