

MINUTES
Special Meeting Board as a Whole For Finance
Friday, March 4, 2016
West Haven Board of Education

A Special Meeting of the Board as a Whole for Discussion and Vote on the Superintendent's Budget for 2016 – 2017 was held Friday, March 4, 2016 on the second floor of City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, Connecticut. The meeting was moved from the Board's Meeting Room to the Harriet North Meeting Room due to the number of attendees. Chairman of the Finance Committee Patrick Leigh called the meeting to order at 4:01 PM and stated this Special Meeting has been called for discussion and vote on the Superintendent's Budget for 2016 – 2017.

**BOARD MEMBERS
IN ATTENDANCE:**

James W. Morrissey, Chairman
Robert Guthrie, Vice Chair
Susan Walker, Secretary/Treasurer
Patrick Leigh
Patricia Libero
Mark Palmieri
Karen Pacelli
Rosa Richardson
Rosemary Russo

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Anne Druzolowski, Assistant Superintendent
Matt Cavallaro, Director of Finance

CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT: Mayor Edward M. O'Brien

**STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES
PRESENT:**

Chairman of the Finance Committee, Patrick Leigh asked if anyone would like to speak during public session.

Kristen Malloy Scanlon, 77 Court Street, President of the West Haven Teacher's and School Nurses gave a printed copy of what she read and it can be found at the end of the minutes. Applause followed her speech. Thank you Kristen.

Teresa Heaney, 98 Cynthia Drive, President of AFSCME the non-certified union for custodians, maintenance, secretaries and food service. The numbers 16 to 28 signify the next 12 years. What you are doing signifies the future, my future, the city of West Haven

even more importantly the future of our children. You have chosen to cut the Superintendent's budget significantly. This has been the job of the city council members in all past years. She understands that you are trying to be responsible members of this community that is struggling with its finances. When you became board members you pledged to work with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for the betterment of the kids. This budget you are going to vote on would cut the recommended budget by more than 3%, 3 million dollars, you must understand the catastrophic effect this will have on the future of West Haven. She is speaking not only about the jobs but about the quality of education in our city. West Haven struggles with low test scores. Reducing the number of employees and services they provide will hurt the children of West Haven beyond repair. We have gotten through the closing of schools, redistricting and other struggles but the damage of this budget will be irreversible. Students will be in overcrowded classrooms and electives will no longer be available. She asked that the board does the job that it was elected to do and that is to stand by the budget as is. Let the City Council do their job and then fight for the budget to keep our students whole in our schools. Applause.

Sandra Lorusso, 75 Tuthill Street addressed comments to the new board members and urged them to support what the Superintendent put before them. Your job as board members once this budget goes to the mayor is to fight for every penny that is in there and make sure he has the money to run the school system. She is a former board member and knows how this works. They fought to reduce classroom size and a lot of the studies that were out there stated that you needed to get classroom size down to 20 and under as a goal. Our 5th grade size at Carrigan is 24, eight classrooms of 25 and six classrooms that have 26 students. If you have to lay off one or two teachers at Carrigan our class size will be back up to around 28 students a classroom. Do you think teachers can teach in classrooms that large? She told the Mayor that she hoped he looked over the budget closely because in his first two years as Mayor he added almost two million dollars in salaries and benefits to the city side of the budget; how many of those people are you willing to layoff. Applause.

Marilyn Halligan, 220 Richmond Avenue requested that other options be considered to meet the BOE budget shortfall that does not involve eliminating positions. As paraprofessionals we are part of a multidisciplinary team whose goal is to educate the children of our city. We dedicate our time and energy to those students in our care while meeting the individual needs of many all at the same time. Paras are a vital part of the complete educational process. Please do not leave us out of the educational equation. Today with increased class size paras are more important than ever and are needed to provide instructional support hence creating a highly qualified support staff. We provide individual attention for children with special needs; assist English language learners all while assisting to the needs of all the other students in the classroom. We along with our teachers feed the minds of our students every day therefore if any of our positions were to be eliminated it would be detrimental to the entire student body that we serve. A recent study of paraprofessionals by Connecticut Legislators cites paras's vital role in special education and has made recommendations for improved training and staffing. If any para

positions were to be eliminated West Haven schools would be at a great disadvantage compared to other districts in our state. Applause.

Sandy McCauley, 86 Richmond Avenue a school nurse at Washington School and the President of the Nurses Union has been an employee of the BOE for 25 to 30 years and has never seen a board cut the Superintendent's Budget before it went to the Mayor and City Council. The board should support education in West Haven. Eliminating positions will be devastating. The kids are making fantastic strides and everybody is working hard and being supported from the paras to the teachers to the nurses. We all work hard and our goal for these children is to be successful. In order for them to be successful they need support. Applause.

Public Session ended at 4:15 PM.

Superintendent Cavallaro stated there were a lot of discussions over the last month on the budget. The board has asked a lot of questions and we have provided a lot of information. The message was clear; see what you can do to reduce the proposed budget which was approximately 4.41%. Matt and I along with Kevin McNabola in conjunction with the Mayor's office worked to reduce the budget. This budget which will be presented to you and will ultimately be your decision now has a proposed increase of 2.97%. Neil summarized the budget and explained how they came up with the numbers and opened it up to questions.

Winkle Bus was supposed to get a 2% increase next year and they have taken a freeze which reduced the overall amount by about \$137,000.00.

We have taken out the long range study which was estimated around \$150,000.00. We feel there are some ways to get some of this accomplished by looking at some of our equipment and vendors who are willing to come in and take a look at some things.

We have cut back the instructional line items to the amounts in this year's current budget. While we are concerned that the amount the operating budget has for instruction we do have other revenue sources such as Title and Alliance Grants to get some instruction so this is not the only place where we get instructional supplies.

Neil thanked the union heads who are in attendance. Since the initial budget proposal came out and the board has asked a lot of questions which they should we have had a lot of frank discussion and talks about possible incentives; retirement incentives and other ways we can reduce the budget. Neil believes everyone understands where we are financially with the city however we still need to support our education system and we can show you some areas where we are making very good progress so we don't want to cut or lose any positions. We came up with a number of about \$700,000.00 that would be safe as far as retirements and people living the school district even with some replacements. This number is based on history and discussions with the unions. We have two or three contract negotiations this year and we are in a pretty good position to bargain because we just don't have the money and we are hopeful some agreements can be worked out. We have taken out the anticipated raises we have with the unions that were going to be negotiated. We have reduced the amount on salary about \$892,000.00;

almost \$900,000.00. We feel safe with this number because with this number there are no layoffs.

Rosa Richardson said we received this recommended budget today. There were members of this board who were very upset when they received the budget with five days to review the Superintendent's recommended budget yet our board members didn't have a problem with getting this to us today at 12:00 PM for a 4:00 PM discussion and vote and Rosa is very upset with this. She had far less time to scrutinize this proposed budget than she had to review the budget in its entirety. Is this budget the new recommended budget of the Superintendent or is this the recommended budget of the finance committee? Patrick Leigh said it is the recommended budget from the Superintendent. Rosa said it is the new recommended budget from the superintendent at 2.9%. Superintendent Cavallaro stated based on our conversations we have been very upfront with what our needs are and have had several meetings in the Mayor's office; would we like more yes and he would not recommend anything less than this at this point because there would be layoffs. We feel this is the best we can do today however we are committed to working with anybody and listening to any ideas right up to June 1st or there about when we have to do an operating budget. There are other things in the works right now but they can't be guaranteed right now. This is the best that can be done today. Of course we would like more money but if you are telling him to reduce it this is the lowest he will reduce it and recommend it to you. Rosa thanked Superintendent Cavallaro.

Mark Palmieri made a motion to accept the Superintendent's original budget and to work together after everything is negotiated and retirements are done and we have a better understanding of where we are. (Item 16-08 from the regular board meeting on February 1, 2016 which didn't pass).

Pat Libero seconded the motion

A roll call vote was taken

Pat Libero	Yes
Patrick Leigh	No
Rosemary Russo	No
Susan Walker	No
Jim Morrissey	No
Bob Guthrie	Yes
Karen Pacelli	No
Rosa Richardson	Yes
Mark Palmieri	Yes

Five voted against the motion

Four voted for the motion

The motion doesn't pass

Patricia Libero wanted to make a comment on that and said she has been in public education for thirty some years and this is her second term on the board and agrees with the people who have said they have never seen any board not accept the budget. We accept the budget the Superintendent presents to us and send it to City Hall and they send it back and then we always work within it. This budget today is being presented with a lot of ifs; if this happens and this; then we will be able to work with it. If we don't accept the

original budget and accept a budget that isn't going to meet our needs and then it comes back cut then we look like a bunch of jackasses when we go to city council in January and say we don't have any funds. Applause

Bob Guthrie asked on the 2.97 does that include any additional ECS money that may come along or is that not included in it. Neil said it has been made pretty clear that it is going to be flat funded. Everything we have seen says it is going to remain flat. Bob then said he also has a few comments. Bob said thank you for moving the meeting from Wednesday to Friday as half the board would not be able to make it. He believes his fellow board members support our children. It is our role to advocate on behalf of our children and on behalf of public education. To cut education's teaching supplies and textbooks does not seem like a good place to start cutting. The amount of supplies that each teacher and each student brings to school both at the beginning of the school year and during the school year is incredible. I wish we could be provided the cost of the supplies that each teacher and student will provide to the start of the next school year. Just to share some numbers the total budget in 1997 was 55M with 1.2M for instruction fast forward twenty years later and the budget is up to 91.6M with only 1.5M going for instruction. The budget submitted by the Superintendent listed 2.3M for contractual raises. To set a budget on anticipated retirements and contract freezes is a dangerous accounting practice. It is shortsighted to cut the long range study of \$150,000.00. How do we get ahead to plan for the needs of our buildings in the district. If we could get a handle on our long term needs it would benefit us all as far as boilers and projects. If we look at other districts Hamden is looking at 3.58%, North Haven considered five budget options finally approving 6% and Milford is proposing a 91.8M budget. At the same time we are considering our budget we thank some of our staff for winning 30 chrome book laptops and 500 books. Bob thanked the Mayor for working with the Superintendent on the budget. Based on the Mayor agreeing he could not guarantee a bottom line number on the budget, to approve a budget of 2.97% concerns Bob. He feels there is a better chance of moving the district forward with a 4.41% recommended by the Superintendent. Thank you.

Jim Morrissey thanked Superintendent Cavallaro, Matt Cavallaro and Mayor O'Brien for their hard work over the last several weeks on trying to come together and formulate a budget. Superintendent Cavallaro came up with a budget of 4.41% and Mayor O'Brien has said repeatedly that the city is just not in financial shape to give that amount of money at this time. The city is not financially in the shape we want it to be in. Both the Superintendent and Mayor have worked really hard and at this time the budget is down to 2.97% and Chairman Morrissey believes the Superintendent feels that he can work with this number at this time. He is sure this board would like to give 4.41% if we could but being realistic the money is not there at this time. As taxpayers, and we all our taxpayers on this board, we know that people in the city of West Haven are struggling. Chairman Morrissey is hoping we can continue to work with the Superintendent, Mayor O'Brien and the administration and see if we can come up with additional, cost cutting savings. There has been no number set that some speakers have come up with (1%) this is news to him. He doesn't know who started this but if someone knows this then they know more than this board. We are trying to work hard for our children. He has had three children in

the school system, three nieces and three nephews still in the school system, along with many friends whose children attend our schools. We have worked hard together as board members to accomplish this goal and make this budget work for everybody. No one wants to lay anybody off and that is our goal. We just can't accept a 4.41% budget and he told the Superintendent that it was too high and hoped we could work together and that is what we are doing. We are trying to come up with a budget that the taxpayers in the city of West Haven can work with. Chairman Morrissey thanked the board. Chairman Morrissey stated the reason the Special Meeting today on Friday afternoon was called because a lot of the teachers get out of class at 2:45 PM or 3:00 PM and it would be a lot easier for them to come right from their teaching jobs to city hall school to a 4:00 PM meeting rather than to a 6:00 PM meeting where they have to go home and come back and obviously the teachers and city employees did come to this meeting and I thank you. He knows the people in this audience are good, hardworking people and he promises everyone that we will do the best we can. Thank you for coming out this afternoon.

Mayor O'Brien stated he and Superintendent Cavallaro have worked well together and have been working right up until the last second and that is probably why the budget was given to you at 12:00 PM. He spoke to the teachers, nurses, paraprofessionals and all the unions stating the last thing we want to do is see layoffs. One of the parameters the Superintendent and I set up when we first started was what kind of budget can put in place where we can function as a quality board of education with no layoffs. We have worked by those guidelines with no layoffs. The last thing anybody wants to do is to lay anybody off. Mayor O'Brien stated that he values the work that is done and has children who were or are currently in the school system and he knows a lot of people in the audience also. The fact of the money is that there is not an endless pool of money. It is absolutely not the case that there is money that we are not spending. The way the city was run this last decade there have been financial problems and there are financial problems. There is only so much money to go around and believe me if I could give you a 10% increase I would do that. We are continuing to work and are turning over every stone and are waiting for a plus to come back in health care and might have some substantial savings there. We are talking to the unions and are looking for money everywhere we can find it. You have my word that I will continue to work with Neil and if during the process and if we turn over a rock and we come up with some kind of savings somewhere or new revenues we will put it towards education. The goal is no layoffs with a quality education and I want to make this very clear. Mayor O'Brien thanked Superintendent Cavallaro and Matt Cavallaro and stated they have worked many, many hours during the last two weeks and he plans on working many hours right up until the end of this budget with Neil and Matt.

Jim Morrissey said the Mayor just said he wants to continue to work with Superintendent Cavallaro to talk about some additional cost savings and the goal is to have another meeting to see what the Superintendent can come up with.

Superintendent Cavallaro said another reason we are here is because we are under a charter deadline and we need to meet that deadline so we need to pass a budget. It was made clear through the Corporation Counsel that doesn't prohibit us to continue to work

right up until the last minute to change or amend a budget. Chairman Morrissey said we have until March 16th before we submit it to City Council and we can continue to work until then. Our goal is to work together to see if there can be any additional savings; right now it is 2.97%. Mayor O'Brien wanted to make it clear to everyone that 2.97% is with no layoffs. Superintendent Cavallaro said exactly.

Rosa Richardson said are we insuring that the budget will be no less than 2.97% if approved today. Mayor O'Brien said he doesn't think we can make that promise but it is our goal to have no layoffs and not have major cuts. Rosa said but it still goes before City Council and can get cut. Mayor O'Brien said the City Council are all good people who don't want to cut education or see layoffs and a lot of them are union officials also. Rosa stated but they are looking at a whole budget not just the Board of Education's Budget. Absolutely. Mayor O'Brien stated he thinks we all have the same goal in mind that is his point.

Chairman Morrissey would like to adopt this budget at 2.97% right now but would like to have another meeting prior to March 16th to see if there are any other additional cost savings possible. There are possible savings with the health benefits.

Patricia Libero stated do you mean you would present another budget for us to vote on after this one. There would be another meeting sometime before March 16th. We have to meet today to satisfy the charter because we only had a 29 day extension to March 4th. We are here today to satisfy the City Charter. Pat said so if we vote on this and pass it then you want to have another meeting after this if it is reduced again. Yes, if there are more cost savings absolutely. Mayor O'Brien said we are waiting for numbers to come back from our insurance carriers and he thinks there are substantial savings there. Pat understands this but it is March and if people are retiring they usually don't make that decision until May or June so there are a lot of ifs in this thing. She thinks there is a disconnect. She understands and she lives in West Haven and pays taxes so she knows that taxes are high and people don't have money but she doesn't think that when we put our budget together that we have to sit here and say on my God there is no money. It is not like we are asking to build five or six brand new schools. We are asking for what we need and I think that is the budget that we need to present to City Council; the original budget and say this is what we need and when they cut it we work on it. I have never been in a position where we cut the budget 1,000 times before it went to City Council. We always work within the parameters of what City Council gives us. We need to take the budget that was originally presented, vote on that which we already did and it went down but that is really what we should be working on because we keep cutting and cutting and we need to know what you are going to give us and then we will work within the parameters of that. That is what we have always done. Neil has worked with the union presidents and has gotten it done when you give us the money. Pat thinks you are putting the cart before the horse because she has been on the board and in the school system and that is the way we have always done it. To keep cutting the budget before it goes to City Council is just not the way to do it. Applause.

Mayor O'Brien said certainly you can give us a budget, we can increase the mill rate we can make it work. We can be the bad guys and the City Council can make the cuts and we can give it back to you and you can work within that parameter or we can spend this time that we have to work together and come up with a budget that you can work with and that the city afford and the BOE feels comfortable with and the City Council feels comfortable with and we can get it done that way. You can be a part of the process of making it work. Pat Libero said but you are not guaranteeing us the 2.97% and she knows you can't. Mayor O'Brien said we are waiting for phone calls from insurance agents and there are other cost savings we may have. We are in a very unfair situation where we don't know what we are getting from the state and we are right in the middle and have to formulate a budget and we don't know our expenses and our revenues. So the easy way is to shoot for a high number and let the Mayor and City Council cut it and then give you a low number and blame the City Council and the Mayor and that just doesn't work. A better way is let's all work together and do something we can afford the you can work with and work together to craft a budget that makes sense from everybody's point of view with no layoffs because that is a very high priority of his administration and with Neil.

Rosemary Russo agrees with Mayor O'Brien and this is her third budget and we have always sent it off to City Council expecting City Council to make the cuts for us. When City Council makes the cuts we don't discuss it anymore with Neil. It is not like it is a budget that we have dissected and looked at. She feel that this time the board has taken a really active part and looked at each aspect of the budget. We do not want layoffs and we are trying to save money for the city but also give our children the quality education that they deserve. We don't want the teachers to make sacrifices on their backs; they have done it too many times. As a board we need to look at the budget and we need to have a reasonable budget. The budget goes before City Council as Neil's budget but adopted by the BOE. Rosemary wants her name on a reasonable budget and she doesn't think 4.4% is reasonable; you all know it is not going to come back like that. You are saying give us a guarantee for 2.97% and he can't give us a guarantee for 4.4%. At least we have worked on 2.97 and come up with a reasonable savings. That is how I feel.

Rosa said it has been discussed over and over again that the city is looking at giving the BOE a 1% increase. We sit here today and Rosa stated she was not part of any of the meetings which involved the Superintendent, Mayor O'Brien and whoever else was there but the bottom line is the city can afford 1%. She didn't make this up it was told to her. Whether or not we put forth a budget as originally proposed at 4% or we put a budget that was reduced to 2.97% the end result is the city can only afford 1%. Her point to Mayor O'Brien is that they can continue to have meeting after meeting and the end result is we aren't going to get anywhere anyway. We don't have the final say. Rosa agrees that the Mayor has to work with the Superintendent to come up with something reasonable but the end result is not ours so it doesn't matter whether we approve a budget at 4.1 or 2.97%. It still has to go through a process that none of us are in control of. Rosemary Russo said then why do we have a Board of Education. Chairman Morrissey said that is a good point. Rosemary said really we have to...Rosa interjected we have no control of it. Rosemary said we need to have control of it. Rosa stated the end result is not ours.

Rosemary said the end result will have your name on it and she wants her name to be on something....Rosa interjected that is clearly up to you....my opinion absolutely.... and that is clearly your prerogative....you are absolutely right. The fact of the matter is that we can sit here and do this for another 15 sessions and in the end we are going to get handed a budget. Applause.

Chairman Morrissey stated Rosa came up with 1% and must know more than I know because I don't think anything has been established yet as we speak. Chairman Morrissey doesn't know where that number came from. Rosa said Mr. Finance Chair can you clarify that please. Patrick Leigh stated there has been no dead set number. There has not been a number that was given to us that said we are going to get 1%, one whatever. Chairman Morrissey said if anything the process that we are doing right now is a better process because just to hand off to the City Council 4.41% to have them do deliberations for a month in a half and then they come back with their number he thinks is unfair to the teachers in this audience to find out then exactly where they stand. He thinks we should be up front with everybody and let them know what the situation is at an earlier stage instead of at a later stage because they are going to cut the budget there is no question about it. He thinks as a board we are better off doing our due diligence and let you people know where this board stands instead of just rubber stamping it and giving it off to the City Council at 4.41% and everyone in this room knows you are not going to get the 4.41%. Then it will come back to us sometime in May and no one wants to see any layoffs and we are up in front and have been very transparent. During special meetings with other boards you could not even address the board. He thanked Patrick Leigh for opening up public session and we are trying to do different things; you might not agree with us but the fact of the matter is at least you know today what our number is right now and it is a fair number at this point but we have until the 16th to keep on working on the budget and then it goes off to the City Council but at least you have an idea of what is happening as we speak right now at this stage. Thank you.

Mark Palmieri didn't want to put Mayor O'Brien on the spot but wanted to ask a question. We are getting this number and we are all taxpayers here; do you feel as though there will be a tax increase so we could work something else out into this. We had a re-evaluation of our homes and normally a tax increase follows this. Could this incorporate some more money here from the revenues you collect on the tax side? Mark asked where we are with this could the Mayor give us a ballpark figure. Mayor O'Brien said there was a re-evaluation on properties in West Haven and our grand list has dropped so there is going to be a mill rate to offset that but you are paying the same amount of taxes that is just an offset. This increase is over a mill increase and if we have to do that and the city of West Haven wants to do a mill increase to increase the BOE that is an option and we can do that. Mayor O'Brien thinks it is better to look for cost savings with our health care to lower it that way rather than just putting it on the backs of the taxpayers but he doesn't think it will ever be near 1% and doesn't think you have to worry about that he....Rosa interjected that she was told that by a board member sir so....Mayor O'Brien said listen we are all in West Haven and he is told a lot of things but....well I'm just saying. ...we get told an awful lot of things and it is checking your facts so as to not start a problem that is probably the most important advice I can give you but if we can do

2.97%.....Rosa interjected wow. Mark Palmieri knows how hard it is he has been here ten years and knows we closed schools.....Mayor O'Brien said we have cut everywhere we could cut there is nowhere left to cut.....Mark said he understands but he hasn't been involved in any of these meetings and was wondering what else might have been discussed because it should have been a board meeting with regard to the budget. Mark mentioned a cost savings by paying bills with a credit card and the credit card company will give you a reimbursement when you use the card. The American Express Card will give you 3% back with a new card when you spend \$1,000.00. If you are a company and pay your bill within ten days, 20 days or 30 days they give you a percentage off. Have we looked at anything like that which is generating revenue back into our town. Mark has been involved in many of these things and would like to present them now while he can and hopefully we can think outside the box and try to move forward with different ways of bringing in income. Mayor O'Brien said we are looking outside the box and said to Rosa he apologizes and didn't mean to have it come out the way it did. His point is that we hear a lot of things especially in City Hall... Rosa interjected she heard it from the Chairman of the Finance Committee and would think that would be.....Patrick Leigh stated he never said it was 1% and even invited you to come with us and when you denied to come with us telling me that you weren't invited to these meetings...you didn't open up those meetings.....Patrick said he spoke to her the other night and she said no, no I'm not even going to bother.

Patrick asked if there was anyone else. Alright moving on to item #16-09 Vote on the Superintendent's Amended Budget for 2016 – 2017 at 2.97% is there a motion.

Rosemary Russo made a motion to accept item 16-09

Karen Pacelli seconded the motion

A roll call vote was taken

Pat Libero	No
Patrick Leigh	Yes
Rosemary Russo	Yes
Susan Walker	Yes
Jim Morrissey	Yes
Bob Guthrie	No
Karen Pacelli	Yes
Rosa Richardson	No
Mark Palmieri	No

Motion passes Item 16-09 the Superintendent's Amended Budget for 2016 – 2017 at 2.97% is approved.

Rosa Richardson made a motion to adjourn.

Pat Libero seconded the motion.

Chairman Leigh stated he was going to read a letter. Rosa said OK she is sorry. Patrick said this comes from Vincent N. Amendola, Jr., Corporation Counsel addressed to the Honorable Edward M. O'Brien, Mayor of the City of West Haven and to Mr. Neil Cavallaro, Superintendent of Schools. The subject is budget estimate for the 2016 Grand List. This letter can be found at the end of the minutes. Patrick stated in reading this letter he would like to see the city and board administration continue to work together to see if more cost savings are available. He would like to hold a special meeting at 6:00 PM

on March 15th to vote on an amended budget estimate if a new one is available. If there is no amendment made to this budget he will cancel the meeting and the budget estimate will be passed on to the Mayor and City Council as is at 2.97%
The meeting adjourned at 5:00 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Secretary