TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID MEETING – VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON
April 9, 2025
Special Town Council Meeting
Council Chambers

APPROVED MINUTES

1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Black-Burke called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present: Mayor Nuchette Black-Burke, Deputy Mayor Darleen Klase, Councilor Kristin Gluck Hoffman (came in at 6:40 pm), Councilor Anthony King (virtually, left at 7:30), Councilor Ojala Naeem, Councilor William Pelkey, and Councilor Walker (virtual)

Absent: Councilors Armstrong and Eleveld

2) BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board President, David Furie: Board Secretary and Finance Chairman, Leonard Lockhart; Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Terrell Hill; Director of Business Services, Danielle Batchelder were present. Mr. Lockhart and Dr. Hill discussed the budget process.

The proposed budget for the 2025-2026 school year, $89,275,124, represents an increase of 5.88% or $4,961,785 over the 2024-2025 budget.

The major drivers of the 5.88% increase are increases in contractual obligations and employee benefits. The increase is due to high insurance claims and contractual salary increases. The inflation rates are at an all-time high for utility and supply costs as well. Another budget challenge is student transportation/fuel and Unfunded State mandates (Elementary Reading program.)

Details of budget expenses include:

Salaries: 2025/2026 Contractual obligations of all bargaining groups = $1,624,357 or 2.03% of the budget

Benefits: Includes employee health, dental, life and disability insurances. Also includes worker's compensation, unemployment, social security and non-certified retirements benefits. Employee benefits = $1,990,143 or 2.35% of the budget.

Professional and Technical Services: Includes legal, consulting and rehabilitative services performed by outside contractors. Included software license, substitute services performed by outside contractors. Includes software license, substitute service and professional development. District Software Licenses = $234,036 or 0.26% of the budget.

Property and Purchased services; supplies and equipment = $1,113,249 or 1.24% of the budget.

Councilor King stated that his biggest question is around the educational cost sharing grant. Councilor King asked Ms. Batchelder if she had mentioned about it changing since 2019. When was the last time the educational cost sharing grant rose? Was it prior to 2019? Ms. Batchelder said that it has not changed since she's been here and she's going on her 11th year, but she could definitely get back to him and give him that number.

Councilor King said that he just wanted the public and his fellow councilors to recognize that the educational cost sharing grant, if it hasn't changed since 2017, that the rate of inflation has been over approximately 30% since 2017. So that is a transfer of almost $4 million in tax liability from the State to the local municipality. Other towns are also dealing with this. There's been articles about this across the board that keep those things flat when we have rising costs which effectively transfers that tax burden onto the local property owners. Our increase would be around 1% if the educational cost sharing grant has kept pace with inflation. The reason he raised that point is to understand that he recognizes the Superintendent and the Board are doing the best they can with these budgets as far as not adding anything and not limiting roles. They talked a lot about state mandated funding. He thinks, they also owe it to themselves after we get through this budget season to really hold our state representatives accountable for why these grants are increasing and why it's acceptable for the state to continue to shift the tax burden from the state to local taxpayers.

Mayor Black-Burke asked if there are any other upticks that the public should know about in regards to instructional services, because she knows that's a sizable chunk as well. Ms. Batchelder stated the mandated reading program is costing us over $300,000. Dr. Hady had to cut other areas in her budget in order to just get through at the $146,000. Mayor Black-Burke thanked Ms. Batchelder for adding that piece of context. She thinks it's important for folks to hear that.

Deputy Mayor Klase stated that she understands that any further reductions would result in staffing losses. Can you please tell me what are your class sizes at the elementary school, the ratios? Dr. Hill said somewhere between 20 and 22, depending on which building. Deputy Mayor Klase said to get to another $1 million, how many positions would probably have to go? Dr. Hill answered about 12.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the student enrollment and does that track with recent history, that decline? Ms. Batchelder said 23 of those students are in Windsor schools, but the remaining are not in Windsor schools. So those are our students in magnet schools and just moving so they're actually not in our buildings. It's really only the 23 number of in-district kids that have decreased or are projected to decrease.

Councilor Pelkey asked how does that align over the last several years that the change is where the trend line is on that and how big is each step year to year? Ms. Batchelder said that number has been pretty flat. Most districts, except for a handful, are decreasing and that's what we and NASDAQ always project is that we're going to decrease and we never do. She stated that she can get him very specific numbers. Councilor Pelkey said in other words, we're not seeing some dramatic decrease. We haven't lost 500 students over the last three years. Ms. Batchelder said no, we haven't. Councilor Pelkey stated that sometimes that is something that he hears from people that our student enrollment is crashing. It may be going down in a given year over a two, three year period, but we haven't been drastically going down.

Dr. Hill stated that last night at their board meeting, Mr. Kearse, the residency officer, presented his residency report. When you see the number drop some, some of those are because the residency officer is on top of people who really don't live here. This is why people will see movement. It's a pretty flat number. I just wanted the public to know that these moving people don't live here. So, people do leave as the result of that.

Councilor Naeem asked if they are seeing anything happening in a more collaborative effort to combat that in terms of licensing costs? Ms. Batchelder said no, unfortunately, when it comes to technology, it's almost the opposite. There are a handful of these big companies and they're buying up all the little ones. One contract actually raised by $30,000 for a software program. They're holding the market. She thinks, it is the worst area right now, even over utilities.

Board President, David Furie, stated that a number of years ago (based on the technology line item), they started looking at a couple of different programs that look similar. They said, wait a second, we can't have one program that only a handful of teachers are utilizing as much as they could argue why they needed that different program. They told us it didn't make sense and we had to trim that. When we saw the line item again for the technology side and the software side, we would have liked to have been able to find savings there, but we asked those questions and it wasn't there. If anything, as Ms. Batchelder mentioned, a lot of the costs are going up well beyond what inflation is.

Board Secretary and Finance Chairman, Leonard Lockhart, said to piggyback on what Mr. Furie said it was documented in executive session just to prevent any competition issues or pricing issues that Windsor may have negotiated for themselves and not be in competition with other towns. All of our software packages and the vendors and the reason why they're there were definitely presented to the Board in executive session. In his opinion, Dr. Hill justified those that he felt were one off and that he cut off and made sure that we shored up the technology that we need so that our district is not held hostage. Especially in the area of data. We are responsible for maintaining the data and it's a lot more expensive to get it back than it is to maintain it. So, we're investing heavy in that. And he believes the whole board was definitely thinking that was a non-negotiable, that if we have to invest in that area to protect ourselves, it's well worth the investment.

Deputy Mayor Klase said that she appreciates how they are committed to keeping programs in the schools going like challenge programs, gifted STEM counselors, and SEL.

Things that the town has always asked for and they have really done a good job at keeping those programs going at the request of parents and other people in the community while maintaining safety as well. She thinks that they’ve been talking a lot about deficit, but there are really strong things in this budget as well that you've been able to maintain, which is really very nice. So, thank you.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman wanted to piggyback off what Councilor Naeem was saying regarding the technology. She knows how they all have worked tirelessly over the last couple of years. Can you tell the public, because they've had to do away with some of these programs because of the cost? She thinks the public needs to know that.

Dr. Hill stated it's the initial cuts a few years ago that were really the biggest hurt for folks. What it was is that a lot of people just lost the pet peeve programs. We literally had programs that two or three people were using in the whole district. When we went through them, he had the Information Technology folks be honest with him about it. So, he thinks we're past that point and the software that they have now, it's what they need. The teachers are able to do what they need to do and if there's something new, we have to make sure that we can sign the agreements with this particular company. We can't just use any software. It has to be approved. He hasn't heard anything at this point, but it's usually an outcry at first and then people kind of get quiet because they realize what they can work with.

Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, Dr. Noha Abdel-Hady added that she thinks they're really trying now to focus on programs that they're cutting. We have this huge focus and push on going back to the basics where good teaching can never be replaced by a piece of software. So, if we have to cut a piece of software, we provide resources to teachers on how you can do it without that software by just going back to good teaching and small group instruction. She doesn't know how we're going to do without it. The CMAP is one of these programs that when we first got two years ago, everybody found a better way to make sure that students are getting their tier two instruction using good teaching, our interventionists, and our people that we hire.

Dr. Hill wanted to clarify, that when they say getting back to basics, which has been the focus for two years and he told his team, we are not going back to chalkboards or chisels. We'll still be using our computers and we're still using the software. In fact, there's going to be a big push for AI in our classrooms throughout the district for this upcoming year. We have a task force that's on it now to present a policy to the board before we close out in June. The kids need to be able to use the technology in a way that's productive for society as we move forward.

Councilor Gluck-Hoffman stated that they are just streamlining it and she loved everything he just said about getting back to the basics of teaching. She knew that's where they were going and she wanted the public to hear that. She thanked them again for all that they do.

Councilor Pelkey said that it wouldn't be reflected in this budget, but he’d be remiss to not at least touch on it with what's been going on at the federal level in the Department of Education and funding and grants to Connecticut. What is the potential from what has actually been sort of announced or seems darn near likely to happen, what would be the financial impact to the school system and/or town in terms of a rough dollar amounts with what has currently been out?

Dr. Hill stated that he sits on a 58 member committee for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). That is the big superintendent association for the country and the government committee. Executive orders are not laws. Dismantling the Department of Education, the federal laws do not change all the title funds that are still going to flow. Ultimately, they could end up flowing from various departments. People need to understand that. The Special Education laws, that law has not changed and the government is going to pay would they have to pay for that. A lot of people think the money is just going to disappear. The focus in terms of drying up funds or cutting funds has been going after those things that the President feels are connected to DEI efforts or anything like that, that's where the funds are coming from.

Board President, David Furie, said that people may have heard that it was $14 million in COVID funds, what we call the ESSER funds, that were going to the board that has been taken away. He thinks the federal government initially said you could spend them. Now there's a freeze on those funds, but none were from Windsor. We spent our money, but there are a number of cities, including Bloomfield that now have some funds that they were hoping to have but they don't appear to be getting. So at least we're not part of that. The other thing that could happen is even though Dr. Hill's correct about those monies flowing, certain title monies should be flowing. There may be delays because the people who used to push those and if you're cutting half the staff of the Department of Education, it may impact the flow of the funds when we receive them.

Board Secretary and Finance Chairman, Leonard Lockhart, said that he has personally been in touch with leadership and ranking members of both the House and the Senate in Hartford. He stated that a lot of them are in the ‘wait and see’ mode right now. We may have to lobby the legislative and executive branches of the government in Connecticut to consider some stopgap funding. He’s not sure how they're going to access it through the rainy day fund, but it might be some type of a state of emergency declared in order for that to legally happen. For the most part, we know that appropriations come from the U.S. House. Those funds are going to flow and we just have to figure out how it's going to directly impact folks right now, but a lot of towns are hurting. Thankfully, Windsor is not.

Councilor Pelkey stated that if he’s hearing this correctly from everyone, there's no certainty involved with any of this. We're not staring at some fiscal cliff. There is no dire emergency.

Councilor Naeem said she knows that we are in year two of our phase-in with the health cost increase that has been super drastic. We're seeing that on the town side as well but if we were in a world where we were not dealing with those things what are the top three areas for investment to continue strengthening our school system? Ms. Batchelder asked, not including the insurance, correct? Councilor Naeem said let's put all that aside. If those factors weren't at play, where would we invest more funds to strengthen the school district?

Dr. Hill stated that he didn't think about any investment. He knew what they were dealing with last year and he knew what was coming because it was just going to be a repeat of a year ago.

Mr. Lockhart interjected and talked about spending the ESSER funds. He made a point that he wanted to buy hard assets with the ESSER funds while they had them. So, they have five vehicles that can now be used by the town and not just the school system. He knows they have their beautiful planetarium as well. So that's what he wanted to do was something that would be beneficial in the long-term to the town versus just enjoying three years of a little extra money and hiring some people.

Mr. Lockhart answered Councilor Naeem’s question by saying that number one is always going to be the physical plant. We never want to be caught in a situation where the physical plant is lacking or you walk into one of our buildings and it does not look like a school. That's number one. That is our responsibility to make sure that the upkeep of the school is done. Number two is we've been asked to address student gap achievement. Dr. Hill felt that we should be addressing it at pre-K to the three years old level. He put a lot of interventions in place to make sure those type of things were happening. But sadly, due to the interventions, at times they have to cover classrooms. So, we're hiring them to do 100% of a job but probably 30% of the time they're covering a classroom and they're not delivering their full enrichment at tier two or tier three. Therefore, when that child is going back to the class, that child is frustrated and trying to be reintroduced back to the tier one environment and they're lost. Now that they're lost, they're going to be frustrated and now they're going to be struggling to maintain and catch up and it just creates a snowball effect. Finally, for him, if he had a magic wish, he’d like to see the students not having to fundraise for anything. That includes all of the student groups, whether it's theater, whether it's band, whether it's the sports teams, and robotics. At the end of the day, we should be able to fund them and if we say we're going to support STEM, we should be supporting and providing the band equipment, uniforms, and other opportunities for these kids. Just like we do for our sports teams to travel to competitions instead of them fundraising and not being able to go because they can't afford to do so. We have very talented athletic students, just like we have talented students and we should be investing in them so that they can actually find the genius, justice and joy in the educational process. He believes that Windsor believes in that. But if he had a magic wish, he would be investing in those three things.

Mayor Black-Burke asked about instructional supplies and wanted to know a little bit about what is the process as we were thinking about that refresh for musical instruments? How is that done? Is it done on a time period? Are we putting out an RFP? Are we working with the service? She thinks that's important for folks in town to know because our students don't pay to play.

Ms. Batchelder responded that it is part of a cycle, just like the uniforms for the sports. Students do purchase their own, but we always have a good amount that we purchase as a district. We use funds at year end if there are any in the schools. So, each school, if they have a couple thousand left, they will order extras in case students forget to bring them. We're always looking at that first when we do need to refresh, but it is a every year purchase. We're never way behind. We're always keeping up on it.

Mr. Lockhart stated that every year they go through, at the beginning of the year, there's this misconception that we don't provide supplies for the teachers and the classrooms. That is far from the truth. We ask the Superintendent every year, will our staff have enough to open the schools and to provide everything they need for their children and it's always been told as a resounding yes. So, when you're seeing a lot of these fundraisers that are going on, there's nothing wrong with parents wanting to supplement what's being provided but we do not want the public to believe that we are not providing these supplies to our children. It seems to be something that we have to address every single beginning of the school year. Teachers have what they need to provide for their classrooms in this budget as presented.

Mr. Furie, President, Board of Education, said that they've had for several years now a back to school party at Windsor High School for all the schools. Amazon and many others donate backpacks and supplies. We have the Lions Club and the Kiwanis Club filling backpacks along with our staff at the central office. There are supplies ready on day one in addition to what the schools have spent money on through the great organizations in this community. There's also this past year, where the Windsor Education Foundation funded for a strings program, some electric string items. Their program at Windsor High School this year has really incredible sounds with these instruments.

Deputy Mayor Klase said that she loves the Board of Education website. She remembered when her kids went to school and the website was not like this. It's phenomenal and the instructional wheel where you took the mission and vision and turned that into consideration and aligned it with curriculum writing she finds it outstanding. She loves the dashboards that they publish regularly. I just wanted to point out that those are things that you continue to have, high quality things with the means you have. She also wanted to share, and people may not know, that the town also spends a significant amount of money on making sure the buildings are up to date. A lot of the projects on the Capital Improvements program are school building projects. So, there is a commitment in the Town to Windsor education on both sides. She’s very happy to see these kinds of things coming out of the school still. Thank you.

Dr. Hill wanted to state that the website was completed by their Communications person, Gianna Gill. They've won awards nationally two years in a row for our website and we won CABE awards for it. He believes she's doing a great job with that, as well as she's the one that came up with the idea for the podcast and she produces it as well and won a national award on that as well. He also stated that Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Hady, took his vision and words and she and her team created what he had envisioned.

Mr. Lockhart stated that they need to be bold in their vision and they appreciate the work that's been done through the Town Council and through the Public Building Commission. He's also looking at where we are going in the next 10 to 15 years and he knows that process is in place. He truly believes that we see towns around us that are building new buildings. We have an age infrastructure. He believes Poquonock Elementary is about 70 years old, and Oliver Ellsworth was built in the early 70's, so that's about over 50 years old. It's probably time for us to be refreshing elementary school buildings across the board. We should be setting the trend for universal pre-K. Our parents are clamoring for it. They've been asking for it. It's a huge investment. He truly believes that Windsor is the first town in Connecticut, and that we can, again, be leaders and set the trend the Governor has been talking about universal pre-K. We can go down this path. He would like for us as a collective Windsor as a Board of Education, as a Town Council and as a community is to really look at our buildings, not just the schools, but all of our town buildings and invest in our infrastructure and definitely listen to the citizens in the area of universal pre-K. They're asking for it loud and clear. We just have to come together and make it a reality for our citizens.

Mr. Furie stated as to our buildings, when he first started saying this is slightly less than a maintenance budget, we've held the line, which is great on major maintenance. We have the same numbers this year, but for everything else, all the costs have gone up. The cost of labor and the cost of supplies. So, we're holding the line, but we're really doing less. That's his reason and agrees wholeheartedly about the pre-K. It was really hard to see the cuts that were recommended to us and that we agreed with by not having any other vote on the budget. It became so difficult because it was a lottery system. They have requirements regarding, he believes, English language learners and others that could get slots first. The chances of getting those slots were very difficult and very unlikely. So clearly the need is there. He agrees wholeheartedly that our buildings need to be a priority. He'd love to see at least one more nurse in a future budget. We did have to cut a nurse position and he thinks what nurses do now is just like teachers. The teachers of today are not the teachers of 20 years ago with all their responsibilities and the same goes with our nursing staff.

Mayor Black-Burke said that she agrees with them about the work that prior Councils have done, reinstating the joint Council and Board of Education Committee being able to have those conversations about other Capital Improvements and the major maintenance. She wanted to understand more about what Mr. Furie meant when he stated that they'd lose the pre-K? From her understanding, they still offered pre-K, but it's now a half day. Dr. Hady explained that they still have their half day program. However, the half day program is only for IEP students. So only for our students with special needs. If it is part of their IEP that they have for example, like two hours a week or three hours a week for speech or social play or whatever their IEP calls for, we still provide these services. Our full day program, which priority was given to students with English as a second language and our students who are income qualified so it's on an income base. These were the students that could get into that lottery and get a place for one of those four classes. These are the four classrooms that we had to cut, which is our Smart Start program but our half-day pre-K only for our students with special needs is still running. Mayor Black-Burke thanked Dr. Hady for clarifying what was said.

Councilor Pelkey asked how many more vacant positions currently exist that could be cut if they needed to be? Ms. Batchelder said none. The only positions currently that are vacant are Special Education teaching positions, which unfortunately we are in desperate need to hire Special Education teachers. Councilor Pelkey asked so that's the only position? We don't have 17 other positions? Ms. Batchelder said no. Councilor Pelkey said that he just wanted that information to be said publicly so that people understand that.

Dr. Hill thanked Councilor Pelkey for making sure they reiterated that. Dr. Hill stated that the four Smart Start teachers, we could cut the program, but the teachers were assured, they were going to work in Windsor Public Schools because of their certification.

Councilor Pelkey asked President Furie if they would be looking in future years to come to have maintenance plus budgets? Mr. Furie said that if Mr. Lockhart had his way as the future president of the National Association of Schools, that would be the case. He also stated that this is why Mr. Lockhart sits in as many, both the Capital Improvement plan meetings and PBC meetings to try to figure out firsthand what is going on. Not that we don't have great representatives from both the school side and the town side at those meetings, but we want to be able to get board members to digest it themselves and talk amongst themselves about what those needs are. Just recently, there was a project down in Madison, which our former superintendent is down there, Craig Cooke. They did quite a good study because the board wanted new school buildings and knew the cost of them. They paid for a study that showed having new buildings with the fact that the State will pay a good chunk of money for the cost over five years, they'd be saving money by having the brand new buildings. This is versus the major maintenance costs, additional costs and capital improvements that would be needed in the older buildings. So that convinced their Town Council that's the way to go. We want to save money and that was a better way to save money.

Councilor Pelkey added that he wants to continue the collaboration between the Board of Education and the Council. He very much agrees with Councilor King that we need to work with our state delegation on whether it's the cost sharing grant amounts or whether it is some of these unfunded mandates, so to speak, that end up costing us real money. If you look at the average homeowner here in Windsor, depending on a real world current value of a $400,000 house, taxes on that are going to be $8,000. Every time we spend $8,000, that’s a property owner who didn’t have to pay tax that year necessarily. He thinks that's something that we might want to look at because it will definitely help this budget. It will help the town's budget, if you will, if we can get more of a fair share out of the State as well. We can continue to work on that. He thinks it would be beneficial to all our neighbors and especially to our children and our students here in town.

Dr. Hill stated that he is on a committee with a few superintendents in the area and that is their goal. We've been before the legislators a few times and even hosted legislators here in Windsor to bring up these very concerns. He can tell you that HASA, the Hartford Area Superintendents Association, is focusing on more and more of our meetings when we meet with them. We've also talked a lot about the outplacement piece and establishing some kind of controls. I know that we have Representative Khan, she is the co-chair of that subcommittee for Special Education. She's become extremely well versed and educated around this topic and has shared information. The costs around the state are just astronomical for people and we have venture capitalists starting to look at these outplacements.

Mr. Lockhart said that the state legislature commissioned a working task force on funded/unfunded mandates currently within state law in the budget and to work on the current year to make sure that there's no other unfunded mandates coming down. Patrice McCarthy, who is the Executive Director of Connecticut Association of Board of Education, (CABE) is the chair of that particular group working on behalf of Boards of Education and she is responsible for pulling that group together and making sure that there's recommendations on what's currently on the books that's impacting all districts within the State of Connecticut. They give real testimony about what's going on and then go through each of the bills that are passing through right now and call out if there's anything else that will provide an unfunded pressure on the local taxing authority. It's a work in progress. That report should be coming out sometime within the next 30 days and it should be taken into consideration as they debate the biannual budget. There are a lot of hurt feelings about calling out some of the unfunded mandates because local municipalities, whether you have the ability to pay or not, are hurting. Especially the rural towns. They're hurting just like the urban towns. There have been discussions on how the suburban towns should have the ability to pay, but that's not the case. We may have the ability to pay, but we still have bills to pay just like everybody else but we also understand that any decisions we make as a town, it could adversely help another town. We want to be collaborative in this to hold the state government accountable.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman stated just for public knowledge, what is the average cost per student? Ms. Batchelder answered and said the cost is $22,687. Councilor Gluck Hoffman also stated that she will personally help Mr. Lockhart raise the money for the instruments and for everything, because she believes it is extremely important to have that part in the school. She agrees wholeheartedly with kids not fundraising. She mentioned that her daughter attends a school where they just focus on academics, arts, and music and it has enhanced her life profoundly. She thinks it needs to happen here in Windsor and she will personally make it her mission to help do that.

Councilor Walker said that he has been listening intently to what was being said this evening and he will remain in listening mode.

3) REVENUES

Jim Bourke, Finance Director, stated the following:

For fiscal year 2025, the adopted budget totals $143,315,840. We are estimating revenues for this year to be approximately $670,000 more than what was budgeted.

- Revenue for Special Education-Excess Costs is expected to provide additional revenue of approximately $428,000. This is mainly due to recently enacted State legislation that provides for an increased pool of funds State-wide.
- Other State Aid categories are expected to come in on budget.
- Prior-year levies and interest penalties are expected to bring in additional revenue in FY 25. This is a result of certain tax payers bringing their accounts current on property taxes owed in arrears, and thereby avoiding their property being included in the delinquent property tax sale.
- Interest income is expected to bring in less revenue as compared to budget of approximately $370,000. This is due to federal reserve rate reductions during the early part of the fiscal year.
- Conveyance fees are expected to be more than budgeted by $165,000, due to several large corporate real estate transactions.
- Most of our other revenue categories are relatively stable, and are expected to come in slightly over or slightly under budget.

For fiscal year 2026, the proposed General Fund revenue budget totals $152,222,470. General Property Taxes are expected to contribute approx. 87% and State Aid is expected to contribute 10%.

- Interest income is projected to see a general decrease, in anticipation of possible federal reserve monetary policy easing.
- Building permit revenue is expected to see a nominal increase, which is due to a proposed increase in the permit fee, from $14 per $1,000 of construction value, to $15 per $1,000.
- No revenue is budgeted for the Municipal Transition Grant, which is the State grant that provides reimbursements to cities and towns for lost revenue resulting from the State-mandated motor vehicle mill rate cap of 32.46 mills. Our FY 26 mill rate is expected to be lower than this level, so consequently there will be no cap on motor vehicle tax revenue collections.
- No use of opening cash is included in the Town Manager’s proposed budget, as per Town Council policy.
- Most other non-tax revenue categories are level funded to FY 25 budgeted amounts, or seeing small to moderate increases.

Town Manager Souza stated that Loomis Chaffee is exempt under State law if their building has to do with education or related use.

Councilor Pelkey said that we have Loomis houses on Broad Street for example, their homes as far as we know. He stated that he did not know one way or the other but unless they're actually for education, they should be getting taxed. Town Manager Souza said they are exempt under State law.

Deputy Mayor Klase asked about the pilot funds for State owned property. She knows we have 55 Meadow and then we have the horticulture center. What other State property do we have in town? Town Manager Souza stated we have part of Matianuck State Park, State owned land along the Connecticut River, then we have the District One maintenance garage at Bloomfield Avenue, Exit 37. There are other scattered pieces that are exempt.

Councilor Pelkey said as a follow up to that, are those properties assessed in the same way as if he owned any of those properties? Town Manager Souza stated they are not. The Assessor puts a value on those properties, but the State of Connecticut does not pay full tax liability. It's a percentage that's probably closer to around 40% or thereabouts.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the estimated rate of collection. How is that calculated? Mr. Bourke stated that it's a rate that the Town Council sets during the budget process.

Councilor Pelkey asked how is that number derived? Town Manager Souza said it's based upon our trend. We've consistently been at that 98.5% range, or even some years above and that mixes in motor vehicles.

Councilor Pelkey asked if the number is based on the past five years, 10 years? What is the sample size? Mr. Bourke stated it's 5-10 years that we've been in that 98.8% range.

Councilor Walker asked about the decision that Loomis is non-taxable for their private homes if they were used in the past for educational purposes. Now that they don't have it, is it grandfathered in or is it just a blanket statement that once the private school owns it, it automatically is non-taxable. Which is it? Town Manager Souza said it is based upon the interpretation of the Court's decision that was made 30 years ago that they are considered tax exempt.

Councilor Walker asked about the Airport Development Zone. There were funds for fiscal year 2024 but then it's zero moving forward. Can that be explained? Mr. Bourke stated there were companies that were located in the economic development zone that ran their course through the program. It's a 5 year program. They apply to the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and they're granted an 80% property tax exemption on real estate and personal property. So, there was a handful of companies that ran their course through the 5 years, and there's been no new applicants that have come forward within that economic development zone to this day. So, there's nobody new to take advantage of that.

Mayor Black-Burke asked about licenses and permits. Is that a preset number for all the licenses or is that driven by the State? She's trying to figure out what's the configuration.

How do we get to whatever the dollar amount is? Mr. Bourke stated there's a variety of departments that charge these fees. They're in the price guide. Some of them are set by State statute.

Councilor Pelkey said with the change that we've had in some of the tax exemptions, particularly with the veterans, it looks like what we have proposed in front of us is kind of in line with previous years. Is he just misunderstanding our timing of when these go into effect? His understanding is that the changes wouldn't actually happen until FY 27. Town Manager Souza said the State has made adjustments to the interpretation and provided guidance relative to the recent veteran's benefits. Originally the interpretation was that we were going to see a bigger 'impact', and we would provide a greater benefit. But that's been clarified by the Office of Policy Management, the State, and so that reduced our 'level of benefits' that we would have to provide based upon that new interpretation.

Councilor Pelkey then added but for the veterans themselves, do they get less of a benefit? Town Manager Souza stated it's the eligibility. The eligibility changed. In the interpretation of the way the General Assembly wrote that law last year, they've clarified what that level of eligibility would be.

Councilor Walker asked about building permits. Do we have inspectors going out to make sure that folks who are buying the buildings that they're actually taking out permits? Are we getting what we should be getting in that bucket?

Town Manager Souza said if the inspector, in their normal course of being on the road is doing other inspections, if they notice any building or renovation activity, they can look it up there and see if this property currently has a permit that's been issued. He explained the process of contractor's work and what they need to do when getting a permit.

4) HUMAN SERVICES

Jasmine Hall, Social Services Coordinator, and Entia Jubrey, Assistant to the Town Manager, stated the overall FY 25 expenditures are expected to come in under budget by $4,190 or 0.7% as a result of using grant funds as well as a partial year vacancy. The FY 25 General Fund expenditures are expected to come in under budget by $6,910 or 1.2% for the year same reasons. The overall FY 26 proposed budget reflects an increase of $17,550 or 2.9% as compared to the FY 25 budget primarily due to the increased Personnel cost offset with the use of grant funding. The FY 26 General Fund budget reflects an increase of $22,220 or 3.9% compared to the FY 25 budget primarily due to Personnel costs.

Ms. Hall gave the following highlights of FY 25 to date.

- A representative from Community Renewal Team (CRT) is available to assist with the growing number of energy and utility requests

- Last month, we successfully launched our 'client shopping' process at the food bank. This new process empowers clients to make food choices, resulting in enhanced autonomy and a greater sense of dignity.
- Our partnership which began last year with the Hartford Community Court involves one of our caseworkers integrating, into the court process twice a month to collaborate with judges and attorneys, with the hope of preventing recidivism.

Ms. Hall went over what their goals are for FY 26.

Mayor Black-Burke said Human Services in our town is such a value and she thanked the department for all they do.

Councilor Naeem had a question around casework services. How many people would you say we are able to support under that larger umbrella of casework services. Ms. Hall said that we track our casework under the key statistics with the walk in cases. Right now, we're projecting to come in over budget at around 8,000 and with that, when she says 8,000, it's the amount of people that call in for services, whether it's walking in or on the phone and receiving that casework type of service. That also includes whether it's an application processing, whether it's a connection to a program or whether it's information about medical or housing.

Councilor Naeem stated that can range from a quick response and answer to a more dedicated, longer term kind of relationship with the caseworker and the individual. Ms. Jubrey said that was correct and it also included referrals to other agencies, the State or otherwise.

Councilor Pelkey said the department does great work and he thanked them on behalf of himself and his neighbors here in town.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the energy and utilities bill. How do you manage the savings or keep it the same as last year, that $8,900 number? Ms. Hall said that energy and utility is not from our client requests, it’s for the operation budget.

Councilor Pelkey stated the Windsor Food & Fuel bank has a projected revenue for FY 26 with a $3,600 decrease. He’s curious as to where that is coming from? Ms. Hall stated it’s due to a grant which supports a part-time position temporarily funded by the Food Bank. For FY 26, that position is not fully funded for the whole year. So, it's only funded through the calendar year. So, it's going to impact the numbers and the FTEs.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman thanked them for all they do. She has a question about the grants and contributions. Are you concerned there will be decreases in grants or contributions? What do you see going forward? Ms. Hall stated that part of their grants come with NCAAA federal dollars. So right now, they’re telling us to continue business as usual. We’re keeping an eye on it, checking our emails, and making sure we connect with our direct contact over there just so we can be ahead of the game.

5) PUBLIC WORKS

Director of Public Works Mark Goossens, Public Works Operations Manager; Jesse English, and Building and Facilities Manager Marco Aglieco were present. Mr. Goossens gave an overview of the budget as follows:

FY 2025 General Fund Expenditures are expected to be under budget by approximately $141,000 (or 2.0%). This is due primarily to savings in Personal Services. We had position vacancies, employees receiving workman's compensation, retirements, and hiring of new employees, all of which contributed to Personnel Services savings;

In FY 2025 we will have performed or assisted with the surface restoration to approximately 6 miles of roads, sweeping of about 160 miles of Town roads, repairs & replacements to more than 120 catch basins, the Welch Pool House Renovations, Phase 1 of the Clover Street ADA restroom upgrades, Phase 2 of the LP Wilson Community Center HVAC renovation project & interior finishes, and the Wilson Fire Station roof replacement & interior renovations, and several other projects

The proposed FY 2026 General Fund Budget reflects an increase of approximately $254,000, or 3.6%, due primarily to increases in Personnel Services.
Mr. Goossens outlined what is expected for FY 2026.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman said she loves Public Works and they've always been a great help to her during Shad Derby. She's very thankful for all the years she's been involved and seeing all the work that they do.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman asked about the Veteran's cemetery. Public Works does cover all the grounds and parks in the community. Regarding the Veteran's Cemetery do we receive grants for assistance with that at all? Do we receive reimbursements for the stone markers? Town Manager Souza stated we receive reimbursements for the stone markers. That's through the veteran's administration. They cover the cost of those for the veterans. Other than that, it's built into the General Fund budget.

Councilor Naeem said she just wants to make sure she understands regarding paving. We made significant cuts last year that impacted our ability to pave as much as we did the year before. What would the cost be to cover that additional 2 plus miles of road that needs to be paved? What does the $2.7 million for FY 25 allocated for paving include? Town Manager Souza explained the $2.7 million for FY 25 will include monies that are either bonded, or town aid for roads, or the other program that we utilize is a state program for local capital improvement program or LOCIP. In FY 24 there's a large amount of $5.5 million. There's another State grant that we used in local bonding that we used to do International Drive. There are many sources that get built into it.

Councilor Naeem asked right now do we have a sense of this year? How much total pavement we were able to cover with that $500,000? Town Manager Souza said he would have to get that figure but estimating it, we’re going to be doing roughly 6 miles of roadways but that is through three or four different funding sources.

Councilor Naeem asked what does the number need to be today to get that work done? Town Manager Souza stated he does not have that number available right now but will work with Suzanne Choate, Town Engineer, to get it. Part of it is the definition of level of service. For the last several years, we’ve been doing about six miles or so through those combined services. On top of that, we’ve been very successful in getting State grants.

Councilor Pelkey asked about the See Click Fix response times. He understands that there is a season for paving. You just don’t go out in the middle of December and put patches down unless it’s really bad. He’s wondering what is the process for the response time on that? He’s also wondering if that's leading to something maybe not being addressed to further cost us money down the line. It doesn't mean that Public Works isn’t addressing it, but from a public point of view, they feel like they're not being heard.

Mr. Goossens said that they have taken some steps recently to try and improve in that area. Our secretary typically will receive those and will try to acknowledge them a lot quicker now. Just to say, thank you very much for letting us know and we'll address this at the earliest convenience. He also said that the seasonality in a lot of these things whether it's planting grass in the spring as opposed to January, paving and things like that, we try to explain at a minimum, we're trying to improve the initial acknowledgement.

Councilor Pelkey commented on how bad the conditions were at the tennis courts at Welch Park and how they are about to put several hundred thousand dollars into redoing them. He wanted to know when they are out taking care of the grounds or mowing the lawn, is there any sort of directive of any kind of policy for them to start mentioning these sorts of things before it becomes more of a problem?

Mr. Goossens said that they are trying to encourage their crews who are out there to be proactive and identify these issues. If they are out addressing something different, then they can bring it to Jesse's attention and it will certainly get put on the list. Part of the culture we're trying to create is when someone's out doing a pavement job and they see a problem with a tree, that they identify it. I think we're getting better at that as well.

Mr. English stated that for the tree issues, a lot of it comes down to accessibility, trying to get behind some of these fences and getting in there is very difficult at times. For Welch Park, it was exactly that. We walked it and went through everything. We looked at all the trees and noted which trees need to be addressed and how to make sure that this doesn't happen with the new courts that are going in there. There's a clear line in between the fence and the tree line so we can get equipment in there. We can maintain it a lot easier. We can get mowers. We can get equipment behind that fence to clean that area up. Decker's Brook is a bit more complicated. I think we're looking at another project cost there getting into the brook and getting down there with equipment and personnel safety. It is unfortunately not that simple as just going and clearing. We do everything we can as safely as possible to get a lot of those culverts cleared out as soon as we get notified. A lot of homeowners will reach out to us and I'll go and find an access point, go in there and look at it and then we develop a plan to get in there safely.

Councilor Pelkey asked if Mr. English feels that he has the resources to track that whether it's some sort of tracking program software or you know is there anything that would better assist him for any of these projects? Mr. English said that currently, they are looking and shopping at the moment. They have met with a company and the company showed them a program. They let the crew leaders mess around with the program a little bit to see if it's going to work out. It's going to work directly with SeeClickFix so it'll help the response times and it'll help us be able to track those a lot faster and more effectively.

Councilor Walker said that he doesn’t have any issues with the Public Works Department. He wants to echo the sentiments of some of his colleagues about the Public Works crew, and he wants to thank all of the staff at Public Works. He also wants to salute Mr. Goossens who he has known for a while.

Town Manager Souza stated that we’ve had a very basic work order system and it has been a low cost solution and we've outgrown that. We are looking at a much more robust asset management system that has a work order component to it. It is not inexpensive, but it can be done in kind of modules. So that's what we're exploring now is to be able to look at all the different assets and something that we can build on over time. Our goal is to be able to provide the crew leaders or foremen in the field with that technology so we’re not touching that work order three or four times. If we do decide to go down that path, it will take some time to build that but the software system that we have now is very limited in what it can do. So, we’re looking hopefully to upgrade that in the next six months.

Councilor Gluck Hoffman asked about the products that we use here in the community for snow removal for the roads. Mr. English said they are using salt and a product called Clear Lane, which is a magnesium. We put it down at roughly 400 pounds per mile. Councilor Gluck Hoffman said it's working and she appreciates it.

Deputy Mayor Klase wanted to thank them for all the services they provide. She also had a question about Northwest Park not being in the maintenance budget part of Public Works but it was in the Recreation budget instead? Town Manager Souza stated that it was more of a cost accounting perspective. The maintainer that's assigned to Northwest Park is basically their costs and more of a cost accounting perspective and that was established probably 30 years ago just to show the real cost of operating Northwest Park. Our folks are doing a fair amount of the mowing in that area and as well as other maintenance activities.

Mayor Black-Burke thanked Public Works on a job well done with the work they did on the medians, curbs and planters they put in. She is looking forward to seeing the perennials blossom. She also wanted to ask about the Wilson Park if that will be any extra cost to maintain it? Town Manager Souza stated that they have hired one full-time and then a seasonal position. That's with the anticipation of bringing on Millbrook open space as well as the park there. So, it will be an extra workload, there's no doubt about that. This is also an opportunity that looking forward is how we might be able to continue to build partnerships with some of the groups in town to be able to adopt the park or adopt part of that effort. We're looking at how we can contract out certain functions like turf management. We're doing more of that in the last five years than we had done pre-pandemic. There are just some things that we are not as efficient doing but obviously this first year, as we take on that, we'll get a much better sense of that. We added that extra body in anticipation of not only the park coming on board, but also the additional roadways that the town will need to work on between the commons in Great Pond.

6) LANDFILL ENTERPRISE FUND

Director of Public Works Mark Goossens gave an overview of the budget as follows:

FY 25
Revenues for the Enterprise Fund no longer include tipping fees for solid waste disposed at the Landfill. There are now two primary sources of revenue funds. One source is from interest earnings on the “fund balance” of the Enterprise Fund. Interest rates continue to remain very strong in FY25, resulting in approximately **$700,000** from this revenue source.

The other primary source is from reimbursements for the closure and capping work at the site, from a State Grant that has been designated for this purpose. Reimbursement for FY25 is projected to be approximately $450,000, and the total of reimbursements received by the end of FY25 are expected to be approximately $1.8 Million.

FY 26
Reimbursement for FY 26 is projected to be approximately $200,000 which will fully deplete the $2 Million total grant.

The other revenue source realized by the landfill enterprise fund is the $49,000 which was received during the first quarter of for the receipt of soil materials generated from the Town of Bloomfield’s new library project.

Expenditures for both fiscal years are related primarily to the closure and capping work at the site. The FY26 proposed budget includes partial-year funds for ancillary capping requirements such as the grouting of stormwater swales, completion of internal landfill and perimeter roads, the completion of stormwater detention basins and their related structures, and the capping of the tornado debris area. It also includes funds for work designed to address conditions within the adjacent wetlands.

At the end of FY26, the estimated end-of-year retained earnings balance available for future obligations is estimated to be approximately $18.8 million.

Deputy Mayor Klase wanted to give credit to Mr. Goossens for handling the Transfer Station so beautifully. She also said that Mr. Goossens was very responsible financially and doing the best methods and it's really amazing to see it have come so far and really be handled so well. Deputy Mayor Klase thanked Mr. Goossens for all he has done.

Mr. Goossens said that it was a tribute to everybody along the way. The previous Town Councils, the staff at the landfill, and the people here at Town Hall. There's a whole lot of people involved with that.

Mayor Black-Burke said that she agrees with everything that Deputy Mayor Klase shared.

Councilor Pelkey stated that he is very glad with how the Landfill has been managed. He also stated that in the Fiscal Year 25, the estimated loss is $61,000, which is $400,000. What happens to that $400,000? Town Manager Souza said that it goes towards the $18.8 million retained earnings. We as a community in partnership with our longtime neighbors, Bloomfield, have a long-term liability with the landfill. Previous Councils have been extremely diligent in allowing this fund to appropriately build to where it is. We're probably going to have $300,000 to $400,000 a year in maintenance/monitoring costs and we'll be able to draw down on this over time. Perhaps more importantly are the unknowns in terms of regulatory environment. If the State Federal Government changes regulatory regulations over time, that may cost more money. We'll have the ability to go to the reserve, the retained earnings, within the Enterprise Fund first prior to needing to burden the taxpayers with it. He will note that other than the original purchase of the land back in the early 1970's and perhaps the beginning startup costs, there's been no Town of Windsor or Town of Bloomfield tax dollars that have gone towards the operation of this landfill since the 1972 or 1974 timeframe. He thanked Councilor Pelkey for asking that question.

Councilor Walker said that he dittoed the sentiments of his Council colleagues.

7) RESIDENT TRANSFER STATION ENTERPRISE FUND

Director of Public Works, Mark Goossens, gave the following presentation on the Resident Transfer Station Enterprise Fund as follows:

Financial Summary
It is anticipated that the total revenues for the Resident Transfer Station Enterprise Fund will be $359,100 for FY 25. This is under budget by $11,060 and is driven primarily by a decrease in the receipt of construction and demolition materials and yard wastes. The FY 25 operating expenditures are expected to come in under budget by $33,880. When considered with the costs for the Organics Recycling PILOT program, the resulting annual net income of $7,350 is $23,120 better than the budgeted loss of $15,770.

The State of Connecticut remains situated in a waste disposal crisis, and the Transfer Station Enterprise Fund continues to receive annual disposal price increases from its various vendors. Despite this condition, and because the Transfer Station expects to realize a net profit at the end of FY25, the proposed budget recommends that no price increases for any materials be implemented during FY26.

Mayor Black-Burke commented on how the fees and the cost is definitely something that's a value for residents in town if they so opt to use it. She also wanted to let everyone know that the people online that were attending the meeting and had their hands raised. During the budget meetings they are not engaging with the public, but by all means, if there are questions, please share those. You can send them in and we'll try to get to those questions. She stated that the next time we will all be together to review the budget will be Monday, April 21st.

8) ADJOURNMENT

MOVED by Deputy Mayor Klase seconded by Councilor Pelkey to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m.

Motion Passed 6-0-0

Respectfully Submitted,

Rachel Collins
Recording Secretary