

**MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION AND SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2019 AT 7:00 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION AND ROOM 207 (FOR AGENDA ITEM #5), TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410**

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Paul A. Bowman, Vice Chairman; Jeffrey Falk, Sylvia Nichols, Thomas Ruocco, Timothy Slocum; Peter Talbot; David Veleber.

Absent: Patti Flynn-Harris

Staff: Sean Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Assistant Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director.

Dept. of Education – Supt. Jeffrey Solan; COO Vincent Masciana; BOE Members Kathy Hallen, Anne Harrigan, Adam Grippo.

Chairman Oris called the public information session to order at 7:01 P.M.

**1. ROLL CALL**

The clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

**3. RESOLUTION RE: CONNECTICUT TOLLS**

MOTION by Mr. Ruocco; seconded by Mr. Bowman.

WHEREAS, the Governor and the State Legislature are considering the placement of tolls on Connecticut' major roadways to generate revenue for the State; and,

WHEREAS, the implementation of tolls will put a significant cost burden on our Cheshire residents and businesses, which will result in higher costs for products and services, and will result in an increase in traffic and infrastructure maintenance costs and public safety issues for Cheshire town roads as drivers attempt to avoid tolls; and

WHEREAS, the Town Council of the Town of Cheshire feels that the residents of our municipality should not have to shoulder the additional tax burden of tolls, and that Cheshire will be disproportionately burdened due to our geographic location relative to the proposed location of tolls;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council expresses opposition to the implementation of tolls by the State of Connecticut, and urges our elected representatives to oppose their imposition.

Discussion

Mr. Ruocco stated this issue is striking the heart of Connecticut and Cheshire residents. He has heard from town residents and they are requesting a Council resolution in

opposition to the tolls. He commented on the misallocation of transportation funds, and mismanagement of this fund. Mr. Ruocco said people in Cheshire already have a significant tax burden, the toll proposal is the final straw, and people are, rightfully, against the imposition of tolls.

Mr. Talbot read a prepared statement into the record. He stated his objection to inclusion of agenda item #3 on the Council agenda and knows the Chairman was obligated to include it due to the policy of adding an agenda item requested by three (3) Council members. This policy does not mean an item should be added to the agenda. In his eight (8) years as a Councilor there has never been a resolution (outside of Legislative Package) dealing with a piece of the Governor's proposed budget. In his statement, Mr. Talbot said there may be election year motivation for this resolution; he has received requests from residents on his opinion on tolls, which are not relevant; Councilors are local legislators representing constituents; and he questioned whether the resolution is reflective of the majority of Cheshire residents. He talked about hearing one person's opinion, and if it is opposed to Council's opinion, whether a resolution would be passed. Mr. Talbot said residents of Cheshire and the USA have the right to express opinions on issues before a legislative body, and people can contact legislative officials (State and Federal) and ask them to act on our behalf. If they do not, there is the ballot box to insure representation which reflects our collective issues...and the Town Council is the Cheshire body for these issues. He said a precedent could be set by voting on State issues.

MOTION by Mr. Talbot; seconded by Mr. Falk.

MOVED that the Town Council table agenda item #3.

VOTE            In favor – 2 (Talbot and Falk)  
                  Opposed -6 (Bowman, Nichols, Oris, Ruocco, Slocum, Veleber)  
                  The motion failed.

The Council went back to the original motion on the floor.

Mr. Slocum clarified Council actions on behalf of residents which make their way to the State Capital. The Legislative Package/Requests have Council vote, which was amended to incorporate the Teacher's Pension Payment which would be burdensome to Cheshire taxpayers. The subject motion is somewhat different, but within the realm of reason and the Council's responsibility to advance and vote on it.

Mr. Veleber has received comments from constituents. He does not consider this a political issue, but one of fairness and over-taxation, with residents already paying higher taxes. Tolls on the highways will have a significant impact on Cheshire residents

as the town is surrounded by roads with proposed tolls. Cheshire will be an alternative travel route with more vehicles and traffic using our town roads. Mr. Veleber stated there should be other sources of revenue found before imposing this solution on our residents.

Mr. Bowman recognizes and understands some of Mr. Talbot's comments, and agrees to some extent with them. In reality, Mr. Bowman does not support tolls, unfunded mandates, school regionalization, raising minimum wage, and noted the State is now business unfriendly. There is a large burden on Connecticut residents, and businesses cannot operate in the State and our community; they are leaving...and this has to stop somewhere. The message must be sent to the State, which is in a real mess, and needs to be turned around. He is not sure the tolls are the solution, and there is more of a spending problem than raising taxes problem.

Mr. Falk said this is a proposed Governor's budget, and a few years ago Cheshire was faced with a \$2M State cut. The Council talked with legislators on actions for the best interest of Cheshire, and things worked out. The State has many issues, towns are getting more of the burden, and Mr. Falk said resolutions can be made monthly or weekly imploring State representatives to oppose or support State issues.

Ms. Nichols sees this developing into too much of a political issue, and said it is time for our State legislators to stand up for the things which affect our residents. Perhaps this is the line in the sand, and the time is here to stand up for our citizens in the best way possible, in a forum that is away from this table and what is important to the people in town. The motion is a statement which says Cheshire is opposed to tolls, and she hopes legislators can find other ways to solve the many State problems. Ms. Nichols will support the motion, not as a political issue, but knowing it will affect her and many people traveling the State roads. She cited the importance of standing by our town residents.

Chairman Oris commented on the Councilors being elected by the people, and hearing from many of them about inclusion of agenda item #3, the proposed tolls. Every Council member has a meaningful seat at the table, and this issue is no different. He received Council input for advancing the issue and that is why it is on the agenda. There is an opportunity to decide whether tolls are good for the community...or not. Mr. Oris wants to insure the voice of all Councilors is heard; there should be talk about the toll issue; this type of debate and conversation is important, and the way government should work. He would like more opportunities to engage with the public on any matter. Mr. Oris stated his opposition to the tolls. Connecticut has one of the highest gas taxes in the country, and Mr. Oris questioned where this money goes. There is no assurance this toll money will go to infrastructure. With Cheshire in the middle of the State, the town will be impacted by tolls, with the amount of traffic diverted into the community affecting and impacting everyone. The Council is here for the

residents and businesses; this matter was requested for the agenda; and Mr. Oris said tolls are not in the best interests of the community.

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tucker Deming, 230 Oregon Road, appreciates the Council talking about the toll issue, and sees the Council opposition magnifying and embellishing the voice of the people. He wants the Council to be active, address issues, and not hide in a corner. Tolls are a license to steal, and will create an immense bureaucracy at a \$1B cost. Mr. Deming said the State has one of the highest gas taxes, the toll proposal may be unconstitutional, millions of dollars have already been spent on studies, and spending must be attacked before raising taxes on the public.

Robin Emond, 2060 Waterbury Road, said she has been vocal on the tolls, it is not a partisan issue, and there are many Democrats and Republicans who do not want tolls. Waterbury Road will have a major impact with imposition of tolls, along with road maintenance, added traffic, and reduction in property values in this section of town. Ms. Emond asked about a mill rate vote for more road work, and believes Cheshire will be hit hard with imposition of tolls on the highways.

Anne Harrigan, 720 Ward Lane, thanked Mr. Talbot, her district Councilor, for his words on the tolls as an agenda item. She expressed concerns about town resolutions being made instead of going to the State legislators, without knowing how the people feel. No one wants tolls. She hears about spending problems not a revenue problem, and disagrees because spending cuts affect the school and BOE budget. Ms. Harrigan said we need to consider what toll revenue will do to the State budget, not just Cheshire, and this decision is made through our legislators not town resolutions.

Maria Ecke, 448 Mixville Road, said this is not just tolls but about spending money. She talked about proposition 2.5 in Massachusetts which does not allow raising taxes more than 2.5%. Ms. Ecke said she represents all Cheshire citizens who become loud voices of concern. She mentioned power making decisions for staff pay raises, political hurdles, more dollars means more taxes, 3 out of 10 people struggling with bills, highest town house taxes in New Haven County, and asked Council to not raise the budget.

Diane Pagano, 48 Walnut Street, informed the Council about an informal meeting on April 18<sup>th</sup> in Cheshire on the issue of tolls. She noted Wallingford CT held this same information session, and one Wallingford Council member (D) changed his vote after the presentation.

Stanley Emond, 2060 Waterbury Road, stated the importance of everyone realizing the harsh impact the tolls will have on Cheshire. He said the red herring in the State is the bus system operating with empty buses, and the tolls are a way to get people off the

roads and onto riding the buses. Mr. Emond hopes the Council will vote against the tolls.

Jamie Ferguson, Copper Beach Drive, commented on the April 18<sup>th</sup> presentation, and asked Council to table the resolution vote until there is more information before them.

VOTE           The motion passed 6-0-2.  
                  In favor – 6; Bowman, Nichols, Oris, Ruocco, Slocum, Veleber.  
                  Abstained – 2; Falk and Talbot.

#### **4.       PRESENTATION AND PUBLIC COMMENT RE: TOWN COUNCIL           PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020 OPERATING BUDGET.**

Budget Chairman Slocum explained the Council had the initial FY 19-20 operating budget, has received the department head information, and is looking at where the budget impact will be for a no or close to no tax increase. He noted that the information in the budget handout for this meeting is not an official document.

Town Manager's Proposed Budget – General Fund FY 20 increase of \$115,585,211;  
Total FY19-20 increase of \$4,369,908, 3.93%.

Ten Year Budget Comparison – FY 2009-2010 to FY 2019-2020. Over this ten year period the average budget increase range is 1.69% to 3.93%.

FY16-FY20 Five Year Budget Comparison – FY 2016 adopted budget of \$105,613,634;  
FY 2016 Proposed Budget of \$115,585,211.

Proposed Governor's Budget – Town of Cheshire revenue loss of \$140,829 on major State grants; Teacher Retirement Required Contribution FY 2020 \$284,061; total impact of Governor's budget = \$424,890 revenue reduction to Cheshire.

FY 2021 – Teacher Retirement Required Contribution - \$586,613, and for FY2022, the contribution will be \$889,165 (full phase-in under State formula).

Ten Year History Ten Year Taxes – Average assessment, house and two motor vehicles - \$237,441; mill rate 29.09; taxes of \$6,894; \$145 tax increase, or 2.12%.  
FY 2019 – assessment of \$233,074; 32.62 mills; \$7,603; \$179 tax increase, 2.40%.

Mill Rate Analysis @ 33.85 mills – this year's impact is from revaluation year; the burden is showing more towards businesses; real estate values decreased.

Mill Rate Analysis @ 33.08 mills -

Proposed Town Council FY 2019-2020 General Fund Budget - \$113,465,303.

FY 2019 - \$111,215,303; FY 2020 - \$113,465,303; increase of \$2,250,000, or 2.02%.

General Government +\$627,223. 1.97%

Education - +\$1,273,457. +1.78%

Debt - +\$65,262. 0.99%

Capital Non-Recurring – 0

Contingency – 0

State Teacher Pension Contribution - \$284,061. 0.00%

Mill Rate Analysis – 1<sup>st</sup> Council Proposal – 1.41% mill rate increase (.46 mills)  
\$106 per year for average taxpayer w/average house and 2 cars.

Upcoming Budget Calendar – April 11<sup>th</sup>, April 16<sup>th</sup>, April 23<sup>rd</sup> Budget Review  
April 30<sup>th</sup> – Budget adoption (new date).

Chairman Oris stated this information is a starting point for Council consideration. There is much to discuss, and public input and dialogue is welcomed by the Town Council.

#### PUBLIC COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Kathy Hallen, BOE Chairperson, addressed the Council with a formal/written statement. Ms. Hallen cited her support of the BOE FY 19-20 budget, which is a reasonable balance between the school district needs and impact on the taxpayers. The BOE budget increase has averaged 11.6% over the last few years, and is the lowest since 1976. Ms. Hallen mentioned the increase in special education costs, the impact of tight budgets on the school district, higher class sizes, reduction in staff training, maintenance of older school buildings, replacement of equipment. Of the 3.72% budget increase in the BOE budget, 72% is for contractual staff increases, 22% restoration and maintenance of buildings and medical benefits costs, 6% for two school psychologists. The BOE has renegotiated contracts for cleaning services and supplies, and the district is forced to under-fund building maintenance. Ms. Hallen stated the investment in the school system provides a better education for all children.

Mr. Slocum stated the Council appreciates the important conversations the BOE has brought to the table, the impact of special education on the budget, which are issues to be addressed by the community. On the Town and BOE sides of the budget, everything is being examined, more to be done on what is spent and how it is spent.

Jamie Ferguson, 105 Copper Beach Drive, asked about budget meetings open to the public, the Council discussing the BOE budget at the meeting later in the evening, or the focus on the Town side of the budget.

Town Manager Kimball advised there will be updates on the revenue and expenditure items on the Town side of the budget.

It was stated by Mr. Slocum that the Council settles on a BOE budget number, and it is the decision of the BOE on how the funds are used.

Ms. Ferguson talked about the bulky waste program and need for teacher and employees positions which must be filled. She said education is a priority and worth the higher mill rate.

Chairman Oris stated that Council will be engaging in conversations about where the tolerance is for the town as a whole. The Council has heard the presentations, and will review and analyze the information submitted.

**5. DISCUSSION RE: PROPOSED FISCAL YER 2019-2020 OPERATING BUDGET.**

Discussion will take place in Room 207-209.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Mr. Veleber; seconded by Mr. Slocum.

MOVED to adjourn the Public Information Session at 8:00 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Following adjournment of the Public Information Session the Town Council moved to Room 207-209 for Agenda Item #5.

Attest:

---

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk