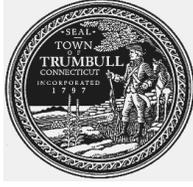


TOWN COUNCIL
Town of Trumbull
CONNECTICUT
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TOWN HALL
Trumbull

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FINANCE COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
MINUTES
MARCH 22, 2014

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman LeClair called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. at the Town Hall. All present joined in a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: Chairman Mark LeClair, Vice Chairman Cindy Penkoff, Tony Scinto, Vicki Tesoro, and Bethany Llodra Gilman

There were fourteen (14) people present to speak:

1. Richard White of 169 Church Hill Road was present and requested that the \$700,000 cut by the BOF be restored to the Education Program Expense line item, bringing the number to the First Selectman's recommended number. Mr. White spoke specifically in support of restoring the 3.5 Technology Integration Specialists and how they will help bring the schools' technology to the level it should be. The recent Gibson report noted numerous shortcomings in the schools' technology infrastructure. Most standardized testing is now done on a computer. Trumbull's children will be directly impacted by cuts to computer instruction and the lack of maintenance of the computer infrastructure. His fifth grade daughter needs instruction with regard to technology, whenever faced with a new task her focus is on the mechanics of the computer and keyboard not on the educational task. There has been zero focus on basic computer skills in the schools. As parents they have focused their children's extra curricular activities on language, dance and sports. Their children have had very little exposure to electronic media and spend very little time on the computer at home. This is by choice. Standardized testing is the rule in CT and are now taken on a computer. The children are not prepared for this. The town of Trumbull knew these changes were coming and failed to provide the instructional support and the computer infrastructure necessary to meet these changes. Mr. Whites requested the council vote to override what the BOF cut and restore to the First Selectman's BOE line item.
2. Stacey Tellis of 40 Valley View Road was present. Ms. Tellis is a parent of a second grader and a 6 year old at TECEC. She moved to Trumbull because of the education system. Her son has Down syndrome and thought it was critical to move to a town that offered an education for him. Ms. Tellis is a teacher in Bridgeport. She teaches in a k-8 school, there are 21 computers in their library, every 7th and 8th grader has a chrome book, each classroom has 4 computers and 3rd through 8th grade classrooms have Smartboards. Her second grader has never touched a Smartboard. Her first Smartboard as an educator in Bpt. was in 2007. There is a need. We are preparing children for a

global world. Smartboards bring a different light to education; teachers do not need to bring out the manipulative. Ms. Tellis noted her shock with how much paper comes home with her child. Bridgeport students are working on computers every day. Trumbull is far behind and can not believe that money is not being spent in that area.

3. Kristin Geraghty of 4 Merrill Road was present. Ms. Geraghty is an educator and looks at education as a partnership. It is not just between the parent and the child but also with the teacher, the parent, and the people in town. That partnership works well when all work together as a team. Ms. Geraghty supports the technology and spoke in favor of restoring the amount reduced. Restoring it will give faith back to the partnership. The system will function well if we look at the bigger picture. Last week she had the opportunity to hear the educators at the budget hearing and spoke favorably of their spirit and energy, noting that technology and the 13.2 positions will be a support to the teachers. In order to keep excellent teachers they must be supported and enhance what is there. Ms. Geraghty asked that what was cut be restored and to consider the partnership because the council is part of that too.
4. Ruth Fontilla of 42 Louis Street was present. Ms. Fontilla agreed with the speakers at this public hearing and urged the committee to restore the budget that was cut from the Education dept. She and her husband moved here 9 years ago before they had children because of Trumbull's school system's reputation and urged the committee to keep that reputation. Every time a budget cut happens it is chipping away at that reputation and everything else will fall with it. New families will not move to Town and house prices will fall.
5. Cindy Katske of 129 Meadowview Drive was present. Ms. Katske is a parent of college junior and a THS senior. Next year she will no longer have a child in the school system but still requested that the education funding cut by the BOF be restored. She specifically supports the additional staff that would be added under the BOE's request and particularly as they would add course offerings at the high school. Both of her children are artists and either are or will be majoring in art in college. Both children are career driven and are striving to use their art degrees in their careers. The art courses at THS are disappointing and are not up to par with other high schools in our DRG or geographical area. THS offers basic art classes, but no AP art classes and there are far fewer art courses offered as compared to other area schools. This lack of depth in art classes is disappointing for the students who go on to major in art in college. The current education budget proposal would add a .5 art teacher at THS as well as other classroom teachers which are desperately needed. The .5 art teacher could be used to add more sections of current offerings as opposed to offering more varied classes. It is a step in the right direction. The Superintendent's budget request is fair and reasonable and has been reduced by the BOE, the First Selectman and the BOF. The reality is that state mandated special education services and cost increases in energy and health insurance may take precedence at THS. Enrollment at THS is not going to decrease any time soon. The consultants' report has indicated that the drop in overall enrollment will not be as significant as was thought. At the current level of funding (2.04%) staffing will be affected. Ms. Katske asked that the effects be considered before voting. After the BOF vote there is no security officers in either the Police or the BOE budget and asked that this omission be fixed for the safety of the children.

6. Ted Johnston of 8 Frenchtown Road was present and indicated that he and his wife moved to Trumbull specifically for the educational system. The following information was found on a real estate blog:

Houses in districts that are in 90th percentile (Trumbull does) command \$130,000 more in home values than districts that score in the 80th percentile. Homes in districts rated excellent (Trumbull is) get on average get \$50 more per sf. than those in good districts.

A good educational system benefits not only those receiving the education but the neighbors and all people in town. Restoring the \$700,000 cut would cost the average household \$70 more per year, for a family of 4 that is less than 10 cents per day per child. This is about investing in our community.
7. Jennifer Mottolese of 36 Valley View Road was present and stated the Superintendent of Schools presented a fair budget that asked for the bare bones. The BOE reduced that budget slightly, the First Selectman sliced a little more, but the Superintendent thought he could make that work. The BoF then made drastic cuts that would decimate our schools. We will start sliding into the past. State of the art classrooms at THS would remain empty as students will be in study halls. The technology in the schools and all that potential would sit untapped. Students with mental health issues would fall through the cracks and asked the committee to consider Trumbull's children and future when they vote and requested to restore the funds to the budget.
8. Joanie Parente of 26 Old Hollow Road. Ms. Parente is the Daniels Farm School PTA president and has 4 children in the school system. They moved here from Westchester, NY and are very happy with the school system and have been impressed with the teachers and staff. They are concerned that there are not enough of them. If the funding is not provided there will not be enough advanced courses offered or the much needed technology support. Ms. Parente requested that the funds be restored to the First Selectman's level.
9. Laurie Weisensee of 15 Wendover Road was present and agreed with all of the comments made at this meeting. She and her husband moved here for the school system before they had children. We have a commitment to our children, schools and community. The superintendent and the BOE provided a good budget. It was not a budget of enhancements, or moving forward or to include anything extra. It was a budget to make sure we don't go backward or lose anything, which is a bit naive since costs will go up and cuts will have to be made. Those would be made at the expense of teachers, staff and programs. We have a commitment to our children's safety, emotional welfare and that has been cut. We have a commitment to provide enhancements for our students. Nothing is being invested in the elementary or middle schools and believes they are being squeezed out by the preschool and high-school's needs. We invested in giving the kindergarteners a full day curriculum and then we are pulling the rug out from under them when they are at the elementary level. The proposed budget was reasonable and respectfully asked that the funds be reinstated. These positions are important; they are not enhancements or extras. Cutting security, mental health, support systems, and cutting teachers is not the way to go to invest in our children, we have a commitment to our children and community to maintain that.
10. Bill Mottolese of 36 Valley View Road was present. He has 3 children in the school system. From his perspective as a parent he thinks one of the following reasons may have motivated this committee's decision to threaten the Town's education budget:

1. The mandate of your constituency.
2. A conservative fiscal ideology.
3. Inexplicable short term thinking.

Whatever the reason for the committee's decision making has struck a nerve with Trumbull's no longer silent majority, the hard working parents of this Town. They are middle class, homeowners, dual income with multiple children and work hard for the income they make, they save their pennies, volunteer their time and coach the kids' teams just as the council members do. They feel that a nerve has been touched; the committee's decisions potentially are threatening the health of the schools and in the bigger picture are threatening the real estate prices which are dependent on the success of the schools and are concerned they will compromise the education and well being of our children. The BOF and this committee has gotten the attention of the parents in Trumbull, they are usually too busy and too involved to vote and do not turn out in large numbers at the local level. They are asking that the budget be restored to the First Selectman's level. They are deeply disappointed that the budget isn't more than it is because they believe in the value of education and want the committee to know that if the education budget continues to slip they will start showing up at the polls to vote and will make their voices heard.

11. Kathleen Hoefler of 29 and has 2 children in the Trumbull public schools. Ms. Hoefler is a parent and teacher in New Canaan. Nine years ago the Trumbull public schools looked very different than they do today and that is unacceptable. We should not be going backwards we should be moving forward. We do live in a Town where resources should be available, the budget should provided for every student to move forward, that includes students with emotional needs, special education needs and gifted abilities. No student should not have those resources in a town like Trumbull. Ms. Hoefler urged the committee to give Trumbull a step in the right direction. We have the teachers and the instruction that will provide what her children need, but they need to be supported and asked that be restored to the budget.
12. Tracy Lear of 25 Lynnbrook Road is the 1st VP of the Daniels Farm School PTA. Her family moved to Trumbull 2.5 years ago for the primary reason of the school system. They have been impressed with what they have seen to date. Ms. Lear respectfully requested that the \$697,000 be restored. At the March 10th meeting she heard concerns of potential declining enrollment, and does not believe that is a credible enough reason for underfunding gaps that exist in the schools today. Dr. Cialfi's FTE needs were not enrollment driven but are curriculum driven. There are gaps in AP and elective course selections, therefore students are sitting in study halls and we are not meeting the state mandate for the ratio of social workers at the high school. We do not have the technology specialists to work with the teachers at the elementary levels to help them best integrate the technology into their classroom. The Superintendent does not believe that the declining enrollment will result in a reduction to the number of classroom teachers given the distribution. The consultants have indicated that the anticipated decline may not be as high. A projection is only a projection. 90% of homes of empty nesters sell to families. Many concerned parents at the March 10th meeting had moved to Trumbull in the last 5 years and continues to see this trend as long as Trumbull keeps its priorities with education. The best way to make sure teachers are not going to be laid off down the road is to continue to fund the education budget today and keeping Trumbull an attractive place to live for families. This would drive enrollment not reduce it. Underfunding the budget today will not protect the teachers from being laid off in the future, in fact it is the fastest

way to reduce enrollment as families move away to Towns with lower taxes, putting their children into private schools or move to towns where more of their tax dollars go to the funding of education. Please head what the Superintendent and the BOE are advising us during this process. If they do not get the full amount they requested they will be forced to make choices that will have a direct negative impact on schools and children today. As a voter she wants to see the BoF and the Town Council advocate for the wise spending of our tax dollars but does not believe in making this year's education budget an example of this. Trumbull is not keeping up with towns in our DRG whose taxes are not as high as ours and has one of the lowest per pupil spending and one of the highest participation fees. They want our children to compete at the same level as the towns in our DRG as well as throughout the country. Our taxes should not be going towards town expansion of administration and lawsuits at the expense of her children and housing value. She hopes to see the same scrutiny on the Town's side of the ledger as she has seen on the education side. We have excellent teachers and staff; more than 85% of the budget goes to the teachers and staff salaries and benefits. This leaves very little for the other needs and is concerned how reductions of today will impact the future as her children matriculate into the upper grades. Please restore the \$697,000.

13. Darren Frances of 11 Rangely Drive was present and indicated he is a sta- at-home dad. They had just moved to Trumbull in November. They moved from northwest Arkansas. One of the main reasons they moved to Trumbull was because of the school system and has been nothing but impressed with the school system and its teachers. When he heard about budget cuts, specifically to the technology he was appalled. His son was in school in Arkansas for preschool and kindergarten there were Smartboards in the schools in Arkansas 5 to 6 years ago. His son is just now getting the Smartboard in his classroom this year. To hear that you are cutting that out is unacceptable. He is asking to look to the future. Technology is expanding in our world so rapidly to pull that back away from kids when this is the best time for them to learn the stuff is unacceptable. He asked that the Council reinstate what has been cut.

Stacey Tellis of 40 Valley View Road spoke for the second time. Ms. Tellis stated she loves the town and knows that this committee is working very hard. She is an educator in Bridgeport, she is disheartened again to see that the schools in Trumbull do not have the technology that they have in Bridgeport. As a teacher who has been using the Smartboard for six years encouraged the committee go into a classroom where there is a Smartboard with an experienced teacher in teaching with the Smartboard. It takes education to a different level. She has had students who don't speak or communicate come up to a Smartboard and communicate. Her second-grader has never touched a Smartboard. She noted that it is a beautiful town but if we don't put money into the education and especially the technology there will be no way our teachers will be able to catch up. We have to do this now and requested that the committee pass the budget

14. Joseph Veccition of Booth Hill Road was present. They've been living in Trumbull for 20 years and have had children in the school system all of that time. They have fought with the school system the whole time over complaints that their budgets were always stressed. He is noticed over the years the amount of funding that went to other departments besides his education such as a lot of lawsuits and law spending. Why don't we take the million dollars that were going to spend to sue Monroe over a Walmart and take \$600,000 of that money and put it into our education system. The one thing technology will do will let people look around and see what is going on around them

in towns. The citizens need to pay closer attention to what is going on with all of the departments not only just education and see how the money is being shifted from one department to another department whether it's administrative, education or maintenance.

The Chair asked if anyone else wanted to speak or if anyone else wanted to speak for the second time for a one minute rejoinder. Hearing none the Finance Committee of the Town Council adjourned by unanimous consent at 10:53 a.m.

The Chair thanked all present for coming and for their thoughtful comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margaret D. Mastroni
Town Council Clerk