Chairman Morrissey called a Special Meeting of the Board of Education as a Whole for Finance to Adopt a Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2017-18. The meeting began at 5:00 PM. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

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

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT: 
David O’Brien

Chairman Morrissey made a correction to the typo on the agenda which should read 2017 – 2018. He then turned the meeting over to Superintendent Neil Cavallaro and Finance Director Matt Cavallaro.

Superintendent Cavallaro said we have tried to keep you updated since we started this process back in December. This has been one of the most challenging budget years in the 15 years that he has been both Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent. There are still many unknown factors today regarding what will happen with the State Budget which directly affects us. Over 50% of our budget is through State ECS Funding and with the Governor’s proposal we stand to do very well but that proposal is very much up for debate and Special Ed funding is also subject to change as of today. We will make out very well if the proposal will go through as proposed but we are pretty sure that is not going to be the case and we are not sure when a final package will be adopted.

We did a really good job, Matt especially, of communicating with the finance office, members of the City Council, and we appreciate all the input we received from board of education members. Patrick has been very busy travelling but has managed to put aside two or three conference calls as the Chairman of Finance to listen to some possible cost
saving measures and we appreciate the time you put into this. Chairman Morrissey also attended some meetings and we appreciate that and the fact that board members came in to talk and sent emails. The challenge today is to try to get as close as we could to a flat funded budget because it is easier to prepare for the worst and try to do a little bit better should we do better with the state and city budget. We want to be able to work cooperatively with the city in this venture. We will go through this budget tonight and ask that you adopt it and then sit back because we have a long road ahead of us. Superintendent Cavallaro turned the meeting over to Matt to explain where we came up with the appropriated amount.

Matt Cavallaro said the overall increase over the current year budget to fiscal year 2017 – 2018 is a little over 1.1M which represents a 1.2% increase. We removed AFB which was our facilities management company which represents $180,000.00. We switched copy center vendors and were able to budget some savings which represents $55,000.00. We removed four or five line items that had no expenditures over the past few years which represent about $121,000.00. For staffing needs we have three open para positions that are not filled in next year’s budget and three AFSCME positions, two mid-year retirements and one known retirement at the end of the year. We had 1 mid-year administrative retirement position, 1 teaching position retirement, and the Communications Director position which is open in this year’s budget and is not being filled and at the end of the school year there is another Administrator position retirement.

The areas where the budget was increased are the contractual raises for the three unions that are receiving raises: Teachers, Admin, and CWA. The other unions are frozen for next year. We put a 2% increase for the transportation budget which is part of the Winkle Contract and we increased the Special Ed Tuition $200,000 based on the belief that the Governor’s proposal won’t be going into effect so excess cost will still be available and if you add this to the budgeted line item plus the excess cost it will cover the total spend for Special Ed. If the Governor’s proposal does go through excess cost will no longer be a factor but with the money we stand to gain we will be able to afford the cost and change the budget if it comes through. Utilities were also increased based on usage and rates to about $88,000. NEASC is coming in over the summer to review our high school for accreditation with a proposed budget for this of $30,000. We flat funded the medical insurance based on recommendations from the Lockton Benefit Group the third party group that assists the City and the Board.

Matt asked if there were any questions. The board members thanked Neil and Matt. Karen Pacelli asked what the teacher position is that is not being filled. Neil said a business teacher who retired in October and we left that position vacant. There is a sub in there now but we believe it can be eliminated at the conclusion of the school year. All of the positions across the board that are funded right now will be funded next year. We will take into account those who chose to retire and how we reallocate the staff would be subject to a board adopting a final budget. We are not looking to decrease any teachers. All of the positions that are currently filled are budgeted for in next year’s budget and that is not only for teachers; that is across the board. We feel that there may be more opportunities for savings as they come along. We have this number down as low as we
can get it and we feel that in working with members of the City Council who we communicated with understand where we are today and where we could be in June if everything is finalized at that point.

Rosemary Russo thanked Neil for all the work that was put into this. She knows it is a monumental amount of work and she appreciates all that you do. Rosemary has two questions. With the removal of the AFB purchased services that you took out for next year what happened to the money this year the $180,000. Neil said we were short with the educational cost share and that went towards reducing our overall budget this year. OK then this was from the shortage mid-year from Molloy. Yes, absolutely we had to account for that. If we didn’t have to reduce that number we would have been in good shape to turn back some of the excess cost share and not need to go to it this year as we anticipate we are going to have to and that is unfortunate but we were in a really good spot at one point. Rosemary thanked Neil and then asked with Special Ed with the excess cost you said if it is still available that is why you just put the $200,000 increase but if it ends up that he does take the excess cost away you said we will still be OK. Well how do you have that money in there; how do you know that. Matt said it is based on the two different strands of money that the Governor proposed; the ECS and the Special Ed Grant. There are also terms of the money where the city can only lessen their local share by so much so if we stand to gain around 6M as a city the BOE won’t get the full 6M but we will get enough based on how much the city can reduce their share to cover the spend. OK alright thank you.

Pat Libero had a question on the Health Insurance. It is flat funded; it is not changed right. It is not changed it just means the budget numbers will remain the same based on what the Lockton Benefit Group sees and what they told us our claims will be. Neil said they are also working on some aggressive plans and some other options done more through the city than with us. Remember it is all one big package that the city and Lockton has to go out and shop around. There are some opportunities for some savings there as well.

Pat said the two people that took over for AFB did not get an increase in salary is that correct. Neil said yes, they have not as of today but I did just get a letter from their bargaining unit and they want to impact the bargain of that but it will be more in lines of a stipend. He can’t imagine it being a quarter of what we have to budget for but that remains to be seen. Pat said it is a big responsibility to take on with no stipend. Neil said to his knowledge neither of those two individuals complained nor approached their union it was others who love letting things be known. Pat said no they have never said anything to her. Neil said they have done a terrific job and they haven’t asked for one dime.

Pat said with the three para positions that aren’t being filled we lost Pauline who was a tech para; did we lose classroom para positions with the other two. She is asking because she doesn’t know. No, I know that you are right. Pauline Lucibello is a tech para and our IT people are absorbing that work and the other two who retired we did some maneuvering around and we absorbed the positions.
Rosa commented that her understanding is currently we are down 5 paras and there is one kindergarten class at Pagels where there is a great need for additional assistance and if we continue to reduce the numbers in the paras and move them around at what point are we going to be short changing our kids. Rosa would request that you look into the kindergarten class at Pagels. Neil said he has never been approached by the administrator in the building nor has he heard from the Special Ed Department that there has been an issue but we will certainly look into it. We have made it pretty clear that we do have priorities with regard to learning labs, obviously individual students who require para assistance throughout the day and the kindergarten paras are a priority in the younger grades but we have not heard that. Rosa said her understanding is that this is a Special Education Kindergarten class. Joseph Lucibello, Director of Pupil Services said this is the first he has heard about it and he was there last week. Rosa just wants us to be conscious; you need to be conscious. Joe said we are very conscious especially if it is a self-contained class and we are very conscious of the support that is going on in the building. Neil asked Joe to look at the numbers. Joe looked at the numbers and said Pauline was one and there were three Special Ed paras that were not filled.

Stefania Izzo-Larry, a coordinator in charge of Early Childhood programs and Pre-School said in that particular classroom there are five paras in that classroom in addition to the teacher. Rosa said there are five and we still have….. It is a challenging class…OK… but it is well staffed. Rosa said so are there children in that class that need 1 on 1. There are. Do they get that? Yes. So out of the five paras how many of them are 1 on 1 and what is the ratio when you take away the 1 on 1 what is the ratio of para to student in that classroom. We have students that join her pre-school in the afternoon and we do have students that get pulled out for OT, PT and speech so depending on the time of day we have worked out a schedule that for students who require 1 on 1 assistance to have that. OK. Rosa thanked her for the clarification.

Bob Guthrie said Neil you brought it up but just to talk about the money that was reduced in the current budget the $850,000 the board was only legally responsible for the $250,000 lost with the Alliance Grant. Matt still thinks that based because we are an Alliance Grant it is a case by case situation of whether the board is responsible for it or not and he hasn’t received that clarification yet but he will get that. Bob stated what they put out they said the $250,000; the money issued to the Alliance Grant money if they came out had to be backed out of the Board of Education money not from any funds that were passed along by the city. Matt said the $250,000 was cut out of the Alliance Grant portion but the Alliance Grant portion is combined with the ECS Fund so basically it is all one it is just that small subset of the money that we have to monitor differently than the rest of the ECS Funds so they are not sure whether or not the Alliance Grant towns that receive it are responsible for that because every town was cut not just the Alliance Grant. It just so happened if you have the Alliance Grant it came from that portion of the money. It is a town by town decision whether the board is responsible for it or not but is not sure of the criteria what goes in whether we will or will not be responsible but Matt will get that information for you. Neil said he thinks we could make an argument but the bottom line is if the city doesn’t have the money we are trying to work with them. Bob understands this but the bottom line is the board is in a hole from the $850,000. Yes and
you can make an argument that we would not be responsible and we are planning on giving that back based on the money that the city didn’t receive.

Bob said along the lines of the grant money then this budget also accepts local responsibility for All Day Kindergarten minus the $600,000 grant. Right. So in addition to your contractual obligations the $600,000 to keep All Day Kindergarten that is in your 1.2%. Yes. Bob thanked Neil and Matt. Neil said this is a very good point.

Chairman Morrissey asked if there were further comments from board members. Patrick Leigh stated he thinks you guys (Neil and Matt) did a stellar job especially working with the administration, the board, and myself personally and I thank you.

Chairman Morrissey wanted to thank the Superintendent also and Matt Cavallaro and Patrick Leigh for the hard work of the last several months on this budget. As he said nothing is etched in stone but the Superintendent feels that with this budget right now that we can run in the proper manner next year for our students which is the most important thing. Also, with the governor’s proposed budget right now he thinks we are in pretty good shape and we are in good standing right now as we speak. That we can possibly get an additional 6M is a good think for West Haven for the city as a whole. There might also be some other cost savings that could be made throughout this year for next year’s budget also. Concerning the paras nothing is etched in stone. If the principals come to us and say there is a need for additional staffing I’m sure this board would be more than willing to look into that and come to an some sort of agreement and work together to obviously protect our children and make sure they have the proper education. Neil said he thinks this is an excellent point and he would hope that any administrator who believes that a classroom that is under staffed or not supported or is not safe or a child’s needs are not being met would come forward. Neil would be disappointed if they didn’t. We will certainly do what we can and he knows you as a board would advocate for those kids or those needs. We are not going to let any child or any classroom go unprotected. Thank you. Jim thanked Neil and thanked the whole board for all their hard work and fine input during the last several months and he looks forward to next year with no layoffs and we can have a great educational process for the coming year 2017 – 2018.

Chairman Morrissey asked is there a motion
Mark Palmieri made a motion to adopt the recommended budget to present to Mayor O’Brien
Rosa Richardson seconded the motion
All board members were in favor
Motion carries

Superintendent Cavallaro said he will draft a cover letter, and highlight any changes and get it to the Mayor’s office ASAP. Chairman Morrissey thanked Superintendent Cavallaro.

Chairman Morrissey asked for a motion to adjourn
Rosa Richardson made the motion
Karen Pacelli seconded the motion
There was no further discussion
The meeting adjourned at 5:28 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Secretary