The Special Meeting of the Board of Education as a Whole for Finance was held on January 29, 2018 in the Board’s Meeting Room on the second floor of City Hall, 355 Main Street, West Haven, Connecticut. The meeting was called to order by Rosemary Russo, Chairwoman of the Board of Education at 6:00 p.m. The meeting opened with a pledge to the flag.

**BOARD MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**
Rosemary Russo, Chairwoman
Robert Guthrie, Vice Chair
Susan Walker, Secretary/Treasurer
Lauren Aceto
Patrick Leigh
James Morrissey
Karen Pacelli

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**
Patricia Libero
Rosa Richardson

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

**CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:**
Mayor Nancy R. Rossi
Kevin McNabola

Chairwoman Russo turned the meeting over to the Finance Committee Chairman Patrick Leigh who turned the meeting over to Matt Cavallaro, Director of Finance. Matt reviewed the 2018-2019 proposed budget with a 1.92% or a little over 1.7 million dollar increase from last year’s budget. Matt discussed the reason for the increase. Salaries will increase due to contractual obligations. Karen Pacelli asked if there were new positions. Matt stated, the Special Ed Position is new and the Math and itinerant are replacements. Special Education Tuition is increased at about $100,000.00 over the current year’s budget and makes up just under 9% of the budget. We need to keep up with rising special education tuition costs. As enrollment drops in some places in the district, the Special Education student population is rising. Special Ed as a whole currently represents 27% of our total operating budget when you take in consideration of tuition, transportation and salaries. Patrick Leigh asked if the tuition range of $45,000 to $150,000 is the average bottom and top range or do we service children that cost a lot more? Matt stated those are the base prices; depending on the needs of the student it could be higher. Excess Cost Grant is a State reimbursement for Special Ed costs for students who live in
this district whose outplacement tuition exceeds 4.5 times the cost of a regular student or we are reimbursed 100% if the state places the student in our district because they don't have a home district. This doesn't cover transportation just tuition. Transportation there will be no increase due to possible contract extension. The chart in the handout shows that the other towns are not close to Winkle's low pricing. We are getting a very good deal with Winkle.

Matt then discussed the Health Benefits and Fixed Charges. There is an increase of $163,000 over the current year's budget. The new plan is stabilizing costs. For the Health Insurance Plans we are projecting a 2.5% increase to offset the unions still in the old plan. Patrick Leigh asked with the previous benefits, if we didn't change, what would we have paid this year? Matt will get that information to him. The Workman's Comp line item has been decreased $200,000 for fiscal year 2018/19 based on historical data. James Morrissey asked why it has gone down so dramatically over the last several years. Matt said less injuries and a new company overseeing the workman’s comp. We went to PMA which now oversees it. Neil asked Jolene Barnes, Personnel Director who was in the audience to comment. Jolene stated we did have some catastrophic injuries in previous years and we haven't seen that in the past couple of years so it has kind of stabilized and a little luck was involved. Jim Morrissey said let's hope luck continues. Patrick Leigh asked if we had oversite to minimize fraud. Neil said that is what PMA does.

Matt continued with the Operation of Plant. There is a very small increase over the current year budget. There are just a few increases to utilities to keep in line with rates and usage. There is a second round of the Alliance Construction Grant and what we do with that money will create our boilers and our mechanics to become even more efficient which will result in even greater savings. Rosemary Russo asked Neil if he had a plan as to where that money was going to go. Neil Cavallaro said the board voted and approved the plan. We are now in the process of putting out RFP's for all of the projects. The priorities are boilers at Savin Rock, Bailey and three intercom systems at Washington, Carrigan and Savin Rock. It also includes replacement controls for Carrigan.

Matt continued with stating that Purchased Services and Instruction had no increases. James Morrissey asked if he didn’t think we would need more school supplies or anything of that nature. Neil Cavallaro stated that purchase services also include attorney fees and there are no up-coming negotiations this year. James Morrissey wants to make sure teachers get their supplies; this concerns him. Matt stated we use these line items and the grants to offset and supplement that. Anne said the Alliance Grant allows us to maintain our professional learning and also provide those materials to support those whether they are papers, books, kits etc. Title One also helps support the most needy schools and those happen to be some of our largest buildings and we are allowed to use that money to buy materials and supplies. We are able to use it for Staff Development and the materials with the bulk of it having to go to the Title 1 Schools. Neil added it is used also for licenses for software. Anne stated that we have evaluation software, NWEA is the other software to do spot checks 3 times a year used for student performance it is standardized data and for instructional thesis the Library Folet
System. We will purchase more media technology, instructional software for the classroom and support staff. The state has no more funds for technology.

Matt stated the ECS Grant and local funding is getting back to a 50/50 split which is what it should be. Matt asked if there were any questions. Patrick said one of the things we need to evaluate is what this means for the tax payers of West Haven. We are asking for an increase of 1.7M and he believes a mill in West Haven runs about 3 million; so that is a little over half. He doesn’t know if anyone looked to see maybe Mayor Rossi if you evaluated if that means a substantial mill rise. Mayor Rossi said the board is the first to bring forth their budget right now so I haven’t looked at the other departments. She did meet with the Superintendent and Matt this afternoon along with Kevin McNabola, who is here as well, and she is going to do her absolute best and of course I always believe in supporting education. She doesn’t have all the pieces yet of all the other city side department budgets along with the projection on the state revenues. Kevin said hopefully by the 2nd week of February. Mayor Rossi has not sent anything to the MARB yet because she wanted to make sure this body approves it and we will be forwarding this packet to the MARB along with the additional Winkle information to see if they will be on board with the bid waiver. Hopefully we will get it back and to the City Council Agenda because it needs to be voted on by the City Council as well. Our next MARB meeting, she doesn’t know what will be on the agenda, will be at 10:00 AM on February 8th which is a week from this Thursday. I don’t know where it will be held yet. Anyone that wants to attend, it is open to the public. They will not address you or speak to you but you can sit there and listen. If there are questions you want me to ask I would be more than happy to because we are all in this together. Neil said in May we will look at retirements and we will look for some savings. When we showed Patrick the seniority list the other day one of the dilemmas you saw we were in was trying to offer some kind of incentive but it looks like that is going to be difficult; but we haven’t ruled it out there are always things we can do. With the MARB in place, it will be a little bit more difficult to go to the unions and say are you willing to look at opening your contract or giving back for an extension. There will be a little bit of anxiety on their part to open the contracts and have somebody saying no; we won’t accept that. Those are some of the challenges we will face this year. We will get creative but Neil doesn’t see an early retirement yet. He sees some reluctance with the unions to open a contract at this point. If you look at the raises we have given out and the sacrifices our employees have made over the years including wage freezes, give backs of benefits Neil doesn’t feel he will have a difficult time justifying our spending needs when you look at what our employees have given back over the years. Neil’s expectation of MARB is to not just throw a number at them it is his hope that you have a pretty diverse group of people there and experts in the finance area. There is a former mayor, Mayor Jackson the Mayor of Hamden, there are some labor people on there and some finance people on there and It is his hope they won’t just throw numbers at us; they will say here is where we think you can do better or have you looked at these kind of options in order to save money. We will certainly be receptive to that and work with the city.

Robert Guthrie addressed his question to Dr. Druzolowski and said in reading that the state is changing the mentoring program is that going to have a cost that has to be borne by the local district. Dr. Druzolowski stated if we choose to but the way we have designed our plan we
should be in pretty good shape. What it really will do is perhaps put the burden if we do have those mentors in place it may change the configuration of them and what we pay them to be perfectly honest with you but nothing has been finalized. Until it is finalized we are holding back because it is another unfunded mandate. Bob said this is not going to affect just West Haven. Neil said Bob I’m sure you know that CABE and CAPSS have been talking about that as another unfunded mandate and to Neil it is a prime example of the unfunded mandate. Bob said mentoring is not one of those things you can let go the question is who is funding it. Dr. Druzolowski said the difference is the way we have had our evaluation design it is almost a double zap to the beginning teacher because they not only have to have the evaluation required by statute and they get that support within the school they also then have to go through the hoops for a team. The decision has to be made it is an unfunded mandate and she can’t meld it into what we are doing and why we are doing it. It is pretty tough for a beginning year teacher; for the first three years in particular. Robert Guthrie said our technology is outdated, when did we last update our technology plan Anne said we did last year with the high school and we recently did the wiring and infrastructure. Now she is looking into Chrome Books again because the importance of computers right now is not just for teaching and learning but unfortunately state testing and they just added another state test in Science which is not all on computer. Bob said the only way we as a board can move our students forward is to put a line item back in there. We had one with $200,000 in there but that is really a place holder which will be gone through rather quickly but this is the only way we will get the intent of replacing items on a yearly basis. Neil asked what the overall budget on technology is $320,000 and the Business Network uses that money to refresh old equipment with new equipment and do everything they need for the IT stuff behind the scenes and the servers and wiring. Anne is looking into other ways of acquiring technology in the hands of the students and this is a priority right now. We also need teachers to help kids use the equipment. She would rather say goodbye to the state tests and save us a little money there and just use it completely for instruction. Neil said the issue is the initial investment but it is making the initial purchase of Chrome Books or I Pads or whatever and then keeping the license. We have a lofty goal of putting a computer in everybody’s hands but economically we just don’t know how to do it. Bob Guthrie said to bump up the line item Matt was talking about would probably be well served. Neil said we can always use more money.

Chairwoman Russo stated she does support this budget since last year we had a zero increase so if you look at this as a two year increase it is really not that large an increase at all but she has two main concerns.

There are paras that have left or retired that have not been replaced and she thinks the number is over 15 in the last two years and that number is a lot of bodies and manpower that has gone. This concerns her because at every meeting we talk about our need for special ed for our kids. Special Ed keeps increasing and we are decreasing the amount of paras. This doesn’t make sense because services are going down because you need that extra pair of hands you need that other person to make sure the IEP’s are carried out or to just assist with children physically who need more help than others.
Chairman Russo said to piggy back on what Jim said instruction never goes up it seems and for $30,000; what is that. Our teachers are very creative and we saw this on Good Morning America on Friday but she is also concerned that teachers are still taking money out of their own pocket to buy things for their classroom. She doesn’t think there is any other profession where they have to buy their own supplies to complete their jobs. It is good we should get some increase but more money would be better but these are two serious issues with the paras and the needs of our children and this has to be considered.

Jim Morrissey agrees with what Rose said and thinks it is common knowledge the average teacher in the school system takes money out of their own pocket on a regular basis, to supply their student’s needs. He also agrees with the budget and is glad to see the increase. He agrees with Rosemary and hears stories all the time that the teachers don’t have the services for their students and they do go in their own pockets; thank God for the PTA’s they do a good job assisting the teachers and going out of their way and raising money to help our students. He is glad there was an increase but is worried about not having enough money for the average teacher to get the proper supplies to our students. He thanked the teachers for going into their pockets and he is very proud as a board member to have the dedicated staff that we have in West Haven.

Patrick Leigh asked if there was any further discussion. There was none. Patrick asked for a motion to accept the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2018/19 Rosemary Russo made the motion Karen Pacelli seconded the motion All board members present were in favor Motion passes.

Patrick asked for a motion to adjourn Chairwoman Russo made the motion Karen Pacelli seconded the motion The meeting adjourned at 6:40 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Secretary