

Minutes of the Town of Farmington
Regular Town Council Meeting
April 28 , 2020
Zoom Webinar Meeting due to the COVID19 Pandemic

Attending:

C. J. Thomas, Chair
Joe Capodiferro
Brian F. X. Connolly
Christopher Fagan
Edward Giannaros
Peter Mastrobattista
Gary Palumbo

Kathy Blonski, Town Manager
Paula B. Ray, Clerk

A. Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The Chair recited the Pledge of Allegiance. The Chair reviewed the ways the Town had been communicating with the public during the pandemic and asked the public to let him know if there were any other methods of communication that would be helpful.

C. Public Comments

The Clerk read the following public comments into the record:

1. Robert Leconche - 4 Hampton Court, Farmington

I don't agree with this new budget. I wouldn't pass it. I wouldn't vote for it. Every year we get another tax increase and all we do is spend more money on education administration. This is ridiculous. I came to this town because it was a nice, quiet rural town with low taxes. No more tax increase. Again, no more tax increase.

2. Erika Olsen -6 Longridge Ct. Unionville

To the Members of the Town Council:

As you consider this year's budget allocations during a difficult time, I urge you to avoid cuts or other changes that would impact the funding designated for our Board of Education and our school district. While I fully recognize the challenges, our community has faced and will continue to face for the duration of this crisis, I place a premium on the ability of our town to fulfill its obligations to our youngest residents. Distance learning has left some of our most vulnerable students behind despite the tremendous efforts of our educational professionals; please do not hobble them further. Thank you for your consideration.

3. Isabelle Endicott - 1 Extension Street, Unionville

My name is Isabelle Endicott and I am the mother of two boys currently attending Union School. We moved to Farmington specifically for the school system to ensure our boys would have access to an excellent education. We are so proud of our community and how our teachers have gone above and beyond during this difficult time. We need to know going forward that the town council will continue to ensure that the education for our children will be exceptional and that there is no place for budget cuts when it comes to our children's education and the future of this community.

4. Anya Beaupre, 3 Anglers Bend, Unionville

Dear City Council Members:

The Farmington education system is why we moved to this town when we came to Connecticut. I know cuts need to be made for next year, but please do not take away from our children and their future. Our education system matters for the rest of their lives AND our great education system will keep property values up and keep people moving into our town. Please preserve and protect the education budget!!

5. Matt Hutvagner, 4 Deepwood Rd.

I support the 2020-2021 Town Council Proposed Budget approved at the March 14, 2020 meeting. This budget maintains the level of town services expected by Farmington residents. As a parent who is managing the daily challenges of Connected Learning from home, I especially support our Farmington Public Schools and am more worried than ever about our children's educational opportunities. As you know, the responsibility of our children's education falls mostly to all of us in this community. Now is the time to make sure our local community, and our elected officials, provide their best efforts to support our children's education.

If the Town Council feels that budget cuts are necessary, I urge you to be open about the use of our Rainy Day Fund to offset those cuts. The fund can be used to reduce the need to make any additional cuts that would negatively impact the services our town residents expect, and our children need to support their education. I realize the world has changed a lot in the last month, but as I've heard from attending budget meetings, we have a healthy Rainy Day fund. This certainly seems like a "rainy day" to me and an appropriate usage of this fund to offset any negative impact to the residents and students of Farmington. Thank you

6. Emily Kaliney, 30 High St.

Dear Town Council,

Thank you for all the work you continue to do for our town during this difficult period in history. I know that no one expected to be living through conditions like these and having strong and trusted leaders in our community is all the more important. The current COVID-19 situation is grave. It is impacting every family in

Farmington to various degrees. I know that people in town are sick and have lost jobs. I am not surprised that Farmington is meeting these challenges by working together and uniting in countless ways. From restaurants helping to feed doctors and kids banging pots and pans on Friday nights, we are going to get through this together. I am proud to be a member of this community. It is from this place of pride that I urge you to pass the budget as it is currently written. I know you will face pressures to make further cuts and reductions, but I sat through some of your earlier meetings and I know that this is a lean and trim and well-considered budget. Our town needs to fund town services and the school district as fully as possible right now. You have already put in the time and energy and work to create a budget of which we can all be proud- now please pass it as is and let's continue to support each other through these next challenging weeks. Thank you.

7. Lauren McKeown, 35 Knollwood Road

I am writing to express my thoughts surrounding the town budget. I take pride in being a resident of this amazing town and I feel so fortunate for the excellent education that my children are receiving- even in the midst of a global pandemic. I do not think that the town budget should include any further cuts in the area of education. The education of our youth is so vital and if anything additional funds should be added as opposed to being removed. We cannot make cuts at the expense of our children. They are already losing so much right now. We can't and shouldn't take away educational opportunities, programs, or resources from them. As the advocate for my own children and as a representative for those that do not know to take advantage of this chance to voice concern, I beg of you not to reduce the education budget. Thank you

8. Sam and Mariah Reisner, 41 Main Street

Dear Town Council,

Thank you for all the work you do for our town, especially during this difficult time. We appreciate the efforts you have made to keep the community involved even while we practice social distancing.

We are writing to ask you to pass the budget as it is currently proposed without further reductions. The process to date has created a lean and well-considered budget. Farmington must continue to fund town services and the school district as fully as possible right now. Your work to date has already created a budget of which we can all be proud, after considerable time and effort. Please pass it as is and let's continue to support each other through the ongoing uncertainty and challenges.

9. Tracee Farkas, 11 Pequabuck Lane

Dear Town Council,

Thank you for all the work you continue to do for our town during these unprecedented times. Having strong and trusted leaders is invaluable as we navigate these unexpected conditions. Although the current COVID-19 situation is grave, I am not surprised that Farmington is meeting these challenges by working

together and uniting in countless ways. I see restaurants helping to feed hospital workers, hearts of all colors of the rainbow displayed in the windows of our neighbors, and kids banging pots and pans on Friday nights. We are going to get through this together. I am incredibly proud to be a member of this community. My family relocated to CT from AZ six years ago. We looked at several towns before settling on Farmington. Our decision was based in great part due to the town's strong reputation that we repeatedly heard about. We have never regretted our decision. It is from this place of pride that I urge you to pass the budget as it is currently written. We must fund town services and the school district as fully as possible right now. You have already put in the time and energy and work to create a budget of which we can all be proud- now please pass it as is and let's continue to support each other through these next challenging weeks.

10. Margaret Cristofaro, 11 Lake Garda Drive

I'm writing to object to tax raise in Farmington. This is a disgrace in this trying time seeing we just had these taxes raised. My vote as resident of 53 years is a definite No! No! No!

11. Catherine Noujaim, 22 Maple Ridge Drive

To the Town Council, I would like to encourage the town to keep the allocation of the budget as directed towards the library, \$2,681,134, a slight increase over last year. The Library is a valuable resource for the town, doing a lot with a relatively small amount of money. Including programs, events, the makerspace, outreach to elderly/homebound residents. With a wonderful teen space and summer reading programs aimed at all levels, the library brings people together. I really support giving the library as much money as possible so they can expand programs even more. Thank you!

12. Greg & Michelle King, 99 Oakridge

Good Morning,

We would like to offer my thoughts on the upcoming town budget. We would like to see the max increase in the mill rate and direct any funds above and beyond the proposed budget to the High School building project. We am very concerned that if Farmington does not get an updated High School building the school district will lose accreditation and our property values will drop. Furthermore, we feel that there needs to be a plan to update or rebuild all of the schools in town to secure Farmington as a great place for families in the future.

13. Holly Golden, 33 Pine Drive

I hear you want to raise taxes in the midst of a pandemic. Way to go...nothing like kicking people when they are down! Don't you have anything else to do? Signed - Concerned Resident and taxpayer

The following public comments were made during the meeting:

Tim Kelly 62 Westview Terrace told the Council the cardinal rule of economics was to never raise taxes in a downturn. He asked the Council to make adjustments to the budget to lower the tax increase, and at the very least there should be no new hires. He felt the tax increase should be close to zero and possibly using savings from this year to offset next years budget. He questioned if the schools could experience savings in an on-line model of educating students.

Jay Tulin of 39 Timberline Drive spoke in favor passing the budget forward as passed at the March 14, 2020 meeting with no further reductions. As the Chair of the Human Relations Commission, he informed the Council that he had given the Farmington High School Building Committee the names of two accessibility consultants to consider for the project.

Leahanne Fenton of 3 Longridge Court thanked the Council for all the work they do for the Town. She told the Council she appreciated that they were listening to the public. She asked the Council to keep the budget as it was passed in March in order to support Town services. She didn't want class sizes to go up or for people to lose their jobs.

D. Consideration of Special Topics

1. Covid-19 Update

a. Operations

The Town Manger gave an update on Town operations and answered Council questions. She reported the Police Department was returning to regular shifts on May 1, 2020, and she was reviewing bringing other Town employees that didn't have the ability to work from home affectively back to regular hours as well.

b. Financial Update

Joseph Swetcky, Finance Director gave a financial update for the Town and answered Council questions. He reported the current year's budget was projected to have a \$300,000 shortfall on the revenue side, but he hoped to make that up on the expenditure side. He was seeing savings on expenditures on the Town side due to savings and freezes. He was concerned that if the revenues decreased more than expected the Town could be looking at a deficit for the end of the 2019/2020 Fiscal Year.

c. Communications Update

Erica Robertson, Assistant Town Manager reviewed the communications the Town had been doing with the residents such as warnings about scams related to Covid-19, updates from the Farmington Valley Health District and business information. She discussed and answered Council questions regarding the ways the Town was communicating with the residents regarding the Town's Tax Deferment Program. She showed the Council the postcard all residents would be receiving and told the Council there would be information on the tax bills about the program.

E. New Business

There was no new business added to the agenda.

The Chair expressed his desire for a zero percent tax increase due to the economic conditions because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. He told the Council, after discussion with the Town Manager and Superintendent of Schools, it would take a reduction of \$2,800,000 to the Town Council's Recommended Budget for Fiscal Year 2020/2021 to achieve a zero percent tax increase. He proposed that if the Town's unions and non-union employees took a hard freeze on raises there would be a savings of \$331,000 and if the Board of Education unions and non-union employees took a hard freeze there would be a savings of \$1,230,000. He suggested the remaining dollars could be obtained by both the Town and Board of Education making reductions of \$615,000 to their Capital Plan Budgets. He believed this would avoid layoffs. He told the Town Manager to have suggested reductions to her operating budget of \$331,000, if the Town unions weren't agreeable to the wage increase freeze, for the May 12, 2020 Town Council Meeting. He told the Council the Town Manger had told him that type of reduction to her operating budget would result in layoffs. He asked the Town Manager and Finance Director to look for any other savings they could find in the 2020/2021 Fiscal Year Budget. He asked for Council consensus on the plan. It was the consensus of the Council to move forward with the plan for both the Town and Board of Education.

F. Executive Session

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to move to Executive Session at 7:57 p.m. with the Town Council; Town Manager; Joseph Swetcky, Finance Director and Erica Robertson, Assistant Town Manager present for the purpose of discussion records, reports and statements of strategy or negotiations with respect to collective bargaining.

Adopted unanimously

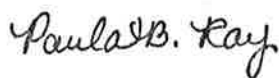
The Council returned to Open Session at 8:23 p.m.

G. Adjournment

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Adopted unanimously

Respectfully submitted,



Paula B. Ray, Clerk