

Minutes of the Town of Farmington
Regular Town Council Meeting
March 10, 2021
Held in Person for the Council and presenters Zoom Webinar
Meeting for the public 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 4:00 p.m.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

The Council and staff recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

C. Public Comment

The Clerk read the two public comments recorded with these minutes as Agenda Item C-1 from Jordan Bernier 19 South Ridge Rd and Allen Quigley 486 Main Street regarding the skate park and Agenda Item C-2 from Jay Tulin regarding the Human Relations Commission.

The Chair requested the email and his response to Justin Bernier recorded with these minutes as Agenda Item C-3 regarding the Friar Report be placed in the record.

Matt Hutvagner of 4 Deepwood Road spoke in favor of the Board of Education budget and suggested if it seemed high, to use the Town's Rainy-Day Fund to support it. He liked the meetings being supported by Zoom and felt it enabled the public to attend and stay informed.

Emily Kaliney of 30 High Street read remarks from Meghan Naujoks of 5 Trumbull Lane in support of the Board of Education budget. She acknowledged it was high but felt it was necessary to ensure the students wellbeing after the year of Covid-19 stresses. Ms. Kaliney spoke in favor of the Board of Education budget for herself. She told the Council we were in extraordinary times and needed extra funds to make up

for the lean budget last year and that would be in the long-term best interests of the Town to support the Board of Education budget.

Tim Kelly of 62 Westview Terrace acknowledged it had been a difficult year, but he was looking ahead to better times by the end of the summer. He believed the 4.3% budget increase requested by the Board of Education was too high. He was surprised the Board of Education had not found any areas in the Superintendent's recommended budget to decrease. He pointed out the Board of Education's budget had never been cut and had increased every year. He compared the Board of Education's budget request to similar towns, and it was higher than them all. He pointed out that budget called for 7.5 new positions, and the Board of Education was expecting \$1,000,000 in funds for Covid-19 from the federal government and would probably be receiving additional funds from the new 1.9 trillion-dollar Covid-19 package.

Don Dube of 94 Oakridge asked the Council to think strategically to keep our tax rate comparable to our neighbors. He felt a budget increase of 3% should be the maximum considered. He was concerned how the High School project would affect the tax rate. He asked the Council to keep in mind the Social Security cost of living increase was 1.3%. Thinking tactically, he asked if it might be better to hold the High School referendum not so close to the budget and market the project more.

D. To consider and take action on the proposed FY 2021-2022 Budget

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to consider and take action on the proposed FY 2021-2011 Budget.

Adopted unanimously

Ellen Siuta, Chair of the Board of Education made opening remarks regarding the Board of Education's Recommended budget and introduced the following people that were to review and answer questions about the Board of Education's Recommended Budget:

Kathy Greider, Superintendent of Schools

Kim Wynne, Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Alicia Bowman, Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations

Beth Haber, Business Manager

Matt Ross, Director of Technology

Sam Kilpatrick, Director of Facilities

Laurie Singer, Director of Special Services

Kara Bridgewater, Human Resources Co-Ordinator.

She told the Council she was very proud of the Board of Education members and their work on the budget. The Board of Education and School administration felt a strong need and responsibility to help the students and faculty recover from the past year due to Covid-19. The Council reviewed the Salaries, Benefits, Services, Supplies, Equipment and Dues & Fees sections of Board of Education Recommended Budget. After the review and questions, the Chair told the Chair of the Board of Education that the Town's financial planning for the Farmington High School project was

dependent on both the Town and Board of Education keeping their budget increases to a maximum of 3%, which was the 10-year average of budget increases. He asked the Board of Education to come back to the Council with a budget increase in the 3% range.

The education officials left the meeting.

The Manager; Erica Robertson, Assistant Town Manager; Kathryn Krajewski, Assistant Town Manager; Joseph Swetcky, Director of Finance and Administration joined the meeting.

The Council reviewed the General Administration Account.

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to tentatively approve the General Administration pages 1-25 of the Town Manager's Recommended Budget.

Adopted unanimously

The Council reviewed the Refuse Account.

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to tentatively approve the Refuse Account pages 69-71 of the Town Manager's Recommended Budget.

Adopted unanimously

The Council reviewed the Debt Service Account.

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to tentatively approve the Debt Service Account page 68 of the Town Manager's Recommended Budget.

Adopted unanimously

E. Adjourn to Executive Session

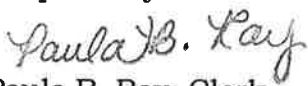
There was no Executive Session held.

F. Adjournment

Motion was made and seconded (Mastrobattista/Capodiferro) to adjourn the meeting at 6:17 p.m.

Adopted unanimously

Respectfully Submitted,


Paula B. Ray, Clerk

Anna Savastano

From: Jordan Bernier <bernierjordan@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 5, 2021 8:05 AM
To: Town Council Account for e-Mail
Subject: Tunxis Mead Skatepark

March 5, 2021

Dear Farmington Town Council,

We would like to express our support for the inclusion of the Tunxis Mead skateboard park remodel in the 2021/2022 year budget.

We are lifelong residents of Farmington, and our involvement in the Farmington Skatepark dates back to a meeting at the Main Library in the autumn of 1998. Our friends and families joined us inside the crowded community space to show support for a public skatepark. The town worked quickly to achieve this goal, and the following year we saw the first skatepark constructed at its initial location on New Britain Ave. About one year later, the ramps were relocated to the Tunxis Mead Park. For over twenty years, we have been skating these cherished ramps.

Today, we visit the park several times a week. We can attest that the space has long been overdue for repairs and updates. Since its relocation to Tunxis Mead in early 2000, the skatepark has not seen many improvements. Outdoor weather conditions have caused the asphalt ground to deteriorate and the seams between ramps to separate. With each rainstorm, rocks from the parking lot flood the space. What's more, some of the ledges have been rendered unusable due to neglect and vandalism. Despite the damage, skaters still use the space on a daily basis, and the skatepark remains a popular feature of the Tunxis Mead complex.

In the past two decades, Central Connecticut has seen a number of new public skatepark constructions, as well as skatepark remodels in New Britain, Newington, and Canton. New and improved parks bring new participants and fresh enthusiasm to the sport of skateboarding. Similarly, when the Farmington skatepark was in good condition, it would see hundreds of visitors weekly. We are confident that repairs and updates to the skatepark will boost participation and generate enthusiasm among beginners and experts alike. The need for safe outdoor recreational space is of great importance in 2021, and the Tunxis Mead remodel would be an excellent opportunity to renew and improve a well-worn public space.

While it may be long overdue, the town's renewed support and interest in the skatepark is great news. We will follow the future town council updates, and we hope the park remodel can remain in the upcoming 2021/2022 budget.

Thank you for your support,

Jordan Bernier and Allen Quigley

Jordan Bernier
19 South Ridge Rd., Farmington
bernierjordan@gmail.com

Allen Quigley
486 Main St., Farmington
allenquigley@gmail.com

My comments this evening are in regards to a cooperative initiative I brought to your attention recently entitled Mayors United against Antisemitism. It is sponsored by the American Jewish Committee (an advocacy group) and the US Conference of Mayors.

There has been a dramatic upsurge in antisemitic incidents and in particular would remind you that we had an incident this summer in Farmington, a webinar for holocaust survivors sponsored by Voices of Hope. There also have been incidents in Newington and West Hartford and numerous others in Connecticut. I can provide a document with over 40 incidents that have occurred throughout the world since last summer. Incidents on social media, physical threats to individuals and actual destruction of property.

For all these reasons, it is my belief that this is a definite call to action that should be considered.

I have spoken to the Director of the AJC and some of the local mayors that have signed on and it is my understanding that the portal that allows mayors and community leaders to sign on to this initiative will expire this week so I ask for your careful consideration in this critical matter.

Agenda Item C-2

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Jay Tulin
Chair Human Relations
Commission

From: Justin Bernier <justinbernier@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 5, 2021 12:35 PM
To: CJ Thomas
Cc: Joe Capodiferro; Peter Mastrobattista; Christopher J. Fagan; Gary A. Palumbo; Edward Giannaros; Brian FX. Connolly; Kathy Blonski; Town Council Account for e-Mail
Subject: Re: PK-8 School Improvements

CJ, thank you for your response, which I trust will be entered into the public record. It is clear to me that the town does not have a detailed plan showing the Friar Report recommendations that will, and will not, be addressed by 2027. It's also clear to me that we will simply disagree on the best path forward.

All the best,
Justin

On Fri, Mar 5, 2021 at 10:39 AM CJ Thomas <thomascj@farmington-ct.org> wrote:
Dear Justin,

I appreciate your continued interest and involvement in the FHS building project. The letter you attached from September was responded to, by me, with the numbers for spending on the Friar Report items so I am unclear as to why you feel you were "offered no details." I have attached that report again, with the details of the almost six million dollars in spending.

As far as my offer to "discuss the issue...following the online meeting," you left out the part where I said it was in consideration of the time of those present. That same group has heard these same questions asked and answered numerous times. I understand you do not like the response I have given you , but it has not changed.

Friar Architecture is the group who wrote the report. You consider the items on their report as "required" spending. I will refer you again to the response I forwarded to you at the time from Alicia Bowman Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations:

"regarding the K-8 Code Analysis and Buildings & Grounds Survey completed by Friar Architects. When analyzing this report, it is essential to note that this is a facilities assessment, not a master plan, therefore the recommendations made by Friar are not requirements.

At the time, Friar estimated the cost based on proposed *renovate as new* projects. Our district has taken a strategic project-based approach, rather than a *renovate as new* approach at this time.

The Friar Report recommendations have been an instrumental guide for determining school-based and system renovations, as well as, prioritizing our capital improvement projects. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our funds as well as necessary safety and security priorities for all of our facilities, so we have adjusted and responded accordingly. I can assure you that we will continue to use the Friar Report as we prepare our recommended budget for 2021-2022."

Stay well,
C.J.

P.S. I appreciate your opening with the honorific "mayor."

From: Justin Bernier <justinbernier@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 6:35 AM

To: CJ Thomas <thomascj@farmington-ct.org>; Joe Capodiferro <capodiferroj@farmington-ct.org>; Peter Mastrobattista <mastrobattistap@farmington-ct.org>; Christopher J. Fagan <faganc@farmington-ct.org>; Gary A. Palumbo <palumbog@farmington-ct.org>; Edward Giannaros <giannarose@farmington-ct.org>; Brian FX. Connolly <connollyb@farmington-ct.org>; Kathy Blonski <blonskik@farmington-ct.org>

Cc: Town Council Account for e-Mail <TownCouncil@farmington-ct.org>; Joseph Swetcky <swetckyj@farmington-ct.org>

Subject: PK-8 School Improvements

March 4, 2021

Dear Mayor Thomas,

Yesterday, March 3rd, you said you would prefer to discuss the issue of PK-8 school improvements with me following an online meeting. In response to a comment I made about the town council's proposed budget, you claimed that "the people who wrote the Friar Report" say \$2.2 million per year is enough to meet the needs of the six PK-8 schools in Farmington. Your assertion surprised me because it would seem to contradict the Friar Report itself.

In a September 9th, 2020, letter to you (attached), I wrote: "The facilities report by Friar Architecture, Inc., identified approximately \$60 million to \$180 million (non-escalated) in improvements needed to address deficiencies in Farmington's six PK-8 schools between 2018 and 2027." At the close of the letter, I asked you, "What required improvements remain? What is the estimated cost of those required improvements?" Your response to my letter offered no details.

Please explain your assertion from yesterday, providing a citation, if one exists. Specifically, how will approximately \$15 million [\$2.2 million per year for seven years] meet the required improvements for the six PK-8 schools outlined in the Friar Report? Who are "the people who wrote the report" whom you cited in your assertion yesterday?

I believe the public needs to know if the Friar Report's estimate of some \$60 million to \$180 million in required improvements was incorrect. **Please consider this a formal request for information.**

Sincerely,
Justin Bernier
11 Carrington Lane

Cc: Joseph Capodiferro, Christopher Fagan, Gary Palumbo, Peter Mastrobattista, Brian Connolly, Edward Giannaros

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Justin Bernier
860.866.8706

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