

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING
FY 2009-2010 BUDGET
TOWN AUDITORIUM**

APRIL 2, 2009

President Scott Slifka called the meeting to order at 7:10 P.M.

President Slifka: Good evening everyone. We're going to start the hearing. We're attempting to run it like the one we did in January ...open-ended, and we're going to, you know, just put your hand up if you want to talk. If you just want to make a statement that's...that's up to you. If you want to ask a question we are here to respond but officially, legally this is a public hearing of the Town Council so we have a couple formalities we have to go through and the first of those is that we have to actually have a roll call so where is Ms. Labrot? Right here.

ROLL CALL

Present were Councilors Steven Adler, Tim Brennan, Shari Cantor, Chuck Coursey, Leon Davidoff, Scott Slifka, Carolyn Thornberry, Joseph Verrengia and Joseph Visconti.

President Slifka: Thank you, Ms. Labrot. Mr. Coursey is at a concert for his daughter and will be here any minute. First a couple introductions. To my left is Terry Schmitt, who you all know as the Chairman of the Board of Education and Terry is my for lack of a better term, co-host for the evening and we have with us all of our friends except for I think Mr. Coursey and Mr. Putterman who is away on a business trip, all of our colleagues from the Town Council and Board of Education. Starting from here we have Diane Mudge, Steve Adler from the Council, Joe Verrengia from the Council, Harry Captain, Board of Ed., Dr. Carolyn Thornberry, Town Council, Minority Leader of the Council, Leon Davidoff, Joe Visconti who wanted me to point out he would have worn jeans had he known he was sitting on the side and not up front at a table, Tim Brennan from the Town Council and also from the Town Council, Shari Cantor who you should know as the Chair of the Finance and Budget Committee along with myself and Mr. Davidoff. We're the three who meet at least on about a weekly basis to work on the budget. It is... Whatever you think of the results, Shari deserves incredible credit for the time commitment she puts into this in getting all these numbers together that the rest of us get to work off. Thank you, Shari. And we're not done yet. Now, to the other side. This got confusing. We have two more members of the Board of Education, Lib Brassil Spinella and Claire Kindall. To my right is the Town Manager, Ron VanWinkle and we have many members of our Board of Ed and town administrations who will be here to help us answer with questions, Chris Johnson, Chip Ward, Dr. Karen List, Glenn McGrath, Tim Dunn and Rick Ledwith and Principal Moore, are you...? No? Just sitting? Okay. Alright, well thank you all for being here tonight. We also want to thank... Before I turn this over to Terry we're just... He and I are just going to make a couple of quick remarks to give you some updates. We also want to thank WHC TV for

putting this on. We kind of take it for granted that all these now get televised, they get streamed through the web and that we're able to do this live on very short notice and that is because they are a volunteer operation that's putting this together and we owe them a debt of gratitude for putting this on.

We had a very productive meeting back in...back in January. We thought it was civil. We thought we got a lot of good information out and we're very proud of everyone's role in that because it is... Although budget times are always going to be by definition contentious I think it set a very good tone. This has been a very civil debate, though difficult, and we're hoping that it will continue throughout the rest of the process. Now, here's the obvious hard part. Back in January we hadn't made any decisions. There weren't really many things on the table. Well now we're to that point where it's getting close and that's where the emotions run a little bit higher and it's a little more difficult to keep those thoughts in check but we trust that everyone, if nothing else, will be extraordinarily civil and understanding of everyone's position as people get up and speak about the budget. A few specific things that have happened since January... We tried to give you then an overview of what was going to be going forward and it's all come true. Our biggest challenge has been the revenue picture. As we told you back then we had about a 6 million dollar deficit in terms of the revenue we received last year versus what we expected to get this year. That has come to fruition with one notable exception which is that today we learned that the State Legislature voted to cut municipal aid to West Hartford by another \$400,000, thus making our problem a little bit more difficult. Those who follow the details of that, you may have heard well, it didn't happen to ECS so education was safe. That is correct. It did not happen to ECS. As with the governor's budget they took it all out of a different pocket so the net loss to the town to you as the taxpayer is the same but we are happy that at least the ECS portion of it has been recognized as vitally important and maintained as flat but our job only got a little bit more difficult with that.

Here is some good news. First, as Mr. VanWinkle told you he was going to produce back in January and he did, on the town side of the budget we had a budget that is a decrease from last year. It's slightly under zero, and based on some other decisions that we anticipate making the council will be further reduction. I don't know what time in recent history that has happened and in part that has been able to happen because on the town side we have had some very good productive discussions with our unions as we indicated that we would. Since January we have been meeting with the municipal unions and I am proud to say this evening that we have reached tentative agreement with all of our bargaining units, all nine bargaining units on the town side, on keeping wages flat for this year. Now I say tentative because these still have to be voted on by the Council and the Board but those unions indicated that we could convey that to you this evening and that is a very recent development.

A couple other things just to clarify. I know some of you are here... We certainly got the hundreds of emails from folks over time and many of you have expressed anger directed at me over a statement of the Mayor's zero percent budget demand for the Board of Education. Well, did I say it? Yes, I did. And am I backing away from it? No I'm not, but understand something. Whatever I say is only as good as the votes that I have behind it and that was actually a decision of the democratic caucus, my colleagues sitting over here, and the reason that we did that was not because we are

anti-anything in education and certainly not because we are anti-teacher. This is merely a recognition of the continuing plummet of the revenues and this is going to be a multiyear problem for us. We've tried to illustrate that and Ron will have a brief presentation and try to illustrate a little bit further. And we can't control the revenues. We can't. The one thing that we have decided we can control and try to convey to you the taxpayer at home is that we can control spending. Is that an easy thing to do? It's not but the one thing we would want you to know out of this year is that since there is less money available to us this year that we will have to respond by spending less this year. Now, I don't want to hide the ball because why is that even more difficult? Because even if that takes place you still face a tax increase and that is something that we would need to explain to you because going further in that would create cuts that no one debates as being incredibly harmful to the community and that's the mission we have going forward so when we illustrate the numbers, as Ron will in a moment, the town is already at a zero and would be at a little bit less than zero. We have asked the Board to come in at a zero. If that were to happen, the tax increase based on the numbers we have today would still be about 3.3 percent and those are figures that in the recent referenda at least once have been voted down by our taxpayers so we're in this conundrum here. We historically have certainly valued education as a community. We still do but we're not getting help from the state like we would hope and it's less than it was before. As we'll maybe be sharing with you later the federal money... If anybody thinks the federal money is coming to save the day, it is not. It's a plus but it comes with a lot of strings attached and, in fact, Terry and the members of the Board can't really articulate what the effect is going to be yet because we're still learning the rules. It's been incredibly complicated so that's still to come. But folks, we're on our own. I told you that in January and it's even more true today and a lot of what we're faced... You know, we get emails from people and they're... Look, we appreciate them. We read all of them. I know I haven't gotten back to everybody but I'm trying to. I've got to do it on my own because we don't have staff that does it or anything and it takes a long time but we hear things like please don't balance the budget on the backs of the children. Please don't balance the budget on the backs of the seniors. Please don't balance the budget on the backs of the taxpayer. Please don't balance the budget on the backs of fill-in-the-blank. We've gotten them all. The problem is there's only one back and it's us and we're running out of other people to point out to so we return to the theme that we had in January which is shared sacrifice. We are trying to do this across the board. We are trying to ask everybody to be part of it and to understand that everyone's argument about what has value in this budget is true, particularly with the schools, but yet we also have many people in this community that are frightened about their ability to stay in their homes if they even see a modest increase and that's the role that we have to...we have to balance. And, you know, people don't generally get into politics to say no to people, to tell you you've got to have less of this or this program's going to be eliminated and certainly not to say you have to increase taxes. It does not make you popular but that is our job and in a tough time like this I think we might be the only people being straight with you and I think the President has too but I think we're trying to say to you it's this tough and I know you're not going to like hearing it but we really have an affordability problem here with the revenue and we're going to work through this and we're going to get through it and we're going to be great when we come

through this but for this period here it's a little bumpy and it's because we're telling you all the facts.

Two quick myths that we wanted to clear up and I want to thank my friend Terry for having addressed them at the Board meeting the other day. We did this in January. We're going to do it again. You know there's things that get out in the community that start to take root and people think they're true about the budget and we were able to clear a lot of them up in January but a few more have come up. One is there has been a statement circulating recently that the Town Council would prefer to throw money into streetlights and not into fill-in-the-blank, you know, to education or something else. Well, yes. There have been about 32 streetlights that have been redone in town and the town paid zero for them. They were completely funded by the federal government so if you want to say our priorities are out of whack, well we just took the money. I think that was a good thing. If you want to say the federal government's priorities are out of whack we might have a discussion about that but rest assured you as a West Hartford property tax payer did not pay for those things.

Second, this one's a little less specific on the numbers but I think bears to be true. Those that want to demonize the town employees... These are not people who are getting wealthy off your property tax dollars. Let's eliminate that thought right now. You may have discussions. We're having discussions about whether we can afford particular increases in a current year but do not leave here thinking that these are people that are getting fat off this system. They are not. They are dedicated employees who we do not pay what they're worth but we have to pay in conjunction with what the taxpayer can afford so, like we say, everybody please understand what our seniors are going through when they talk about whether they can afford it, also please don't demonize the people that work for us because they're the ones providing the services that have driven the values up in this community.

And last, fund balance or so-called "the rainy-day fund." Another rumor going around is that we have on the Town Council side a large fund that we haven't told you about and it's there to save the day and why don't we stop, you know, considering certain cuts and certain negotiations and just take all that. Ron is going to get into that in pure detail but let me say there is no "rainy-day fund," so to speak. There is a town savings account. There's a lot of detail that goes into it. There is money in it. It is not a good idea, as you know, to start spending your savings to cover your operating expenses and we'll get into why there are a lot of constraints with that. That said, you also may not know that the town has in recent years used small portions of the fund balance to try to offset program reductions and keep taxes lower so there is something there. There is something to talk about but as a general fiscal practice it's not a cure-all and it's a difficult thing to use but we will leave that detail to Ron.

Last, I just say we know right now there's a lot of anger, there's a lot of fear, but also I think there's a lot of energy there and that's a good thing. If that... You know, obviously we don't want you angry and we don't want you scared but if that got you to participate and got you to look at this with detail and got you to be considerate about your neighbors and about what all of us are going through in this time I think we might be able to channel that energy into a good thing and I'm hoping we will be able to continue that tonight and that we'll all be understanding of where everyone's coming from because this is phenomenal community. We're going to keep it that way. We're going to do it the right

way but it's tough. It's tough right now. And with that I want to turn it over to my co-host, the Chairman of the Board of Education, Terry Schmitt.

Chairman Schmitt: Thanks, Scott. I'm not going to go anywhere nearly as long as Scott did. I do have a few short remarks. What we've done is we've brought our experts here. I do expect to hear questions from you tonight. I'm reasonably sure that they and we are prepared to answer them to the best of our ability but we're not prepared yet to make our final decisions and it was made clear in both of the recent public hearings that the data that we're dealing with that will affect our schools, our town and many of your lives is especially difficult data this year and it changes daily, even hourly. I think that many of the pieces of data that we had at 5:00 today we did not have at 9:00 am this morning. Therefore, the one thing that I do want to tell you is that we've decided as a Board of Education to postpone our vote on our budget until the next Board of Education meeting. We're going to cancel the meeting next week on the 7th and we will do our voting on the 21st. We all agreed that that would be the prudent thing to do given the lack of information about our revenue sources at this point in time that are still very unclear so I wanted to make that clear. One of the things that I mentioned on Tuesday night and I will mention it again... I am not in the position unfortunately, Scott... I envy you that you are in the position to come and say that you've been speaking with several of the bargaining units here on the town side and that you're at the point where you have a tentative agreement with them. That's a sign of us working together and I appreciate that. I think that that takes courage. I think it takes a deep amount of soul-searching, particularly for some of those units that really were not under a great deal of pressure themselves to step forward, but they did. I'm not in the same position. I can't make those kinds of announcements tonight. We are not in that position. We would like to be in that position. I can say that almost all of our bargaining units that have relationships with the administration and the Board of Education, almost all of them are speaking to us and we're working with them. I can't say anything formally at this point because we don't have anything formally to say. We waited for awhile in deference to our largest bargaining unit and that hasn't worked out happily at this point, although it may, but other bargaining units now have decided to come forward and speak with us and I'll have Rick Ledwith, who works with both the town side and the board side, speak to any specific questions you have about that but meanwhile we're talking with them. We're going to try to get somewhere that will be hopefully mutually beneficial and beneficial for all of us and I guess I'll just leave it at that at this point in time.

I'm glad that you're out here. I think that this is a vital process. I've been very impressed with how many people have been at the Board of Education meetings and the passion that they've shared and some of the ideas that we shared. We had one person who saved us \$50,000 last Tuesday night. I was kind of impressed with that. Would that there would be more that could do that for us and identify things that would be helpful in that way, so I'm glad to be here and glad to have this opportunity and other of my colleagues will share their thoughts as we go along. So Ron, I think you have some words to say?

Mr. VanWinkle: Well, the good news is the mayor did my entire speech so I really don't have a lot to say so...

Chairman Schmitt: And most of mine.

Mr. VanWinkle: Yes, thank you. I'm just going to emphasize some of the things they said. We have a 6 million dollar decline in revenue and that's really what's driving our budget. We have 6 million dollars less next year than we do this year. It's because we have fewer building permits being sold, because the State of Connecticut has cut revenues that we get from the State of Connecticut, it's because we're selling fewer houses in West Hartford and we get a conveyance tax on it. If you add all those numbers up next year we have 6 million less dollars to spend than we do this year and that's a big driver of our taxes this year.

We're also going through a mandated reevaluation. We revalued all the properties which we are required by state law to do and we are going through a mandated reevaluation. Next year is the third year of that phase-in. It's a five year phase-in. Some of you in some homes in West Hartford will have their taxes reduced next year because of the reevaluation and some of them will have them increased. Some of them will have substantial increases and some of them will have significant reductions in taxes. It's the way reevaluation works. If someone wants to talk to me about it after I'll be glad to do it with a piece of paper with you but reevaluation is something we have to deal with because of the state law. We have sought with the legislature a number of times for changes to that law and we have not been successful to get what we have been looking for. The third component about revenue is the state's deficit. Although the state has already cut us in the governor's budget – that's what we are working with right now is the governor's budget – the State of Connecticut at this point is still a billion dollars in deficit in this year, in the year that we're in right now. They have to find a billion dollars in cuts or a billion dollars in new revenue and over the next few years they're looking at a 7 billion dollar deficit. Now we've been hearing numbers on the federal side of trillions of dollars so that seems like a small number but in truth that's a big number for the State of Connecticut and they give to the towns a lot of money and education cost-sharing is the primary one that we see but...and a lot of other grants that come to the towns. It's a big number in the budget so we're concerned that when they finally figure out they've got to make some significant cuts they will come and cut some of the revenues we get. We saw that in 1990 when we had the income tax introduced in the State of Connecticut. We also saw substantial cuts to what we get in West Hartford. We went from 13 million dollars in state revenue to 8 million dollars in the early 1990s. It's one that's lying out there today. As the mayor said we had some other news that they were cutting some other revenues. We'll see what that comes out to as they move forward.

The town budget increase, the expenditures, the money we spend was the same as we did last year. In fact, the mayor keeps telling me well don't forget, you're below last year. Yes, we're...right now we're about \$50,000 below what we spent in this year, in this fiscal year. We are spending about \$50,000 more than we will in the next fiscal year. There are options in the budget for the Council to look at to make some additional reductions on that and I just want to reiterate that includes 1.2 million dollars in union agreements, reductions in union costs or it includes 19 layoffs on the town side in order to get to that zero and I am happy to say that we are in agreement with the unions and crossing the T's and dotting the I's on each of the contracts and so we will be able to talk

about a union agreement where wages do not go up in this next year. The capital budget, that's our bonded money. We borrow money to build roads, to build schools and what-not. That is at a zero percent increase. That is absolutely flat and the school budget is in process right now. You heard from the Chair of the Board of Education where they are with that. The target is for a zero increase in spending but you need to understand that zero increase in spending still means a reduction in services because that money that we are cutting out of the budget has to come out of something. It doesn't come out of fewer pencils. It comes out of services that we provide. It comes out of reduction in the number of employees. The Board of Education is laying off employees in order to bring their budget down. The town is reducing its workforce also, both full and part-time.

Taxes. Despite the zero increase in spending taxes will increase and they increase because we've lost revenue and to make up the lost revenue we have to increase taxes. If we didn't want to make up that lost revenue we'd have to cut 6 million dollars out of our budget. That's a large number. That's the fire department. You know, closing a pool or doing a few things doesn't get you to 6 million dollars. That would be a significant change and individual taxpayers will have different tax experiences because of reevaluation. Although I can give you, you know, an average, a medium, what it is, but every home is different. My taxes are going up 7 percent on my home because of this budget. Our median we've looked at is less than that but the median doesn't really mean much to anybody and as I went through and looked at individual homes around the town and what the taxes are some clearly are going down, some are going up substantially. If you want to know what your taxes are going up in the manager's budget, this is prior to the Board's work and prior to some other reductions that we're seeing, if you want to know you go to our website, westhartford.org, and you go to the budget. There's a little budget item there. You click on that and then there's a thing called budget tax calculator. You click on that. You put your address in, street number and street and push the button. It'll tell you what your taxes are in the manager's budget. Now the manager's budget is higher than where the Council will end up at that point in time but it will tell you where your taxes are so you can individually understand. The new property tax levy is... There's a million ways to talk about taxes but how much does the levy, the amount of taxes we take out of this community go up, and in this budget it goes up 3.3 percent. That's the total taxes that we will need to replace that 6 million dollars in there.

Fund balances – I'll just reiterate what the mayor said. Fund balance is our savings account. It's set aside for emergency purposes. At present the fund balance is 15 million dollars so we've got 15 million dollars in a savings account set aside. It's meant to sit there in case something catastrophic happens or something unusual happens. We've used it in the past when the legislature can't make up their mind about what to do about the budget and they finally end up cutting our portion of the budget in August. Sometimes we've gone back to the fund balance to fill that hole. The fund balance also sits there as a backstop and you wouldn't take your savings account and use it for your daily expenditures because you're not going to be able to do that and every time we use the fund balance, we take a million dollars out of the fund balance and spend it for next year's budget, the following year I don't have that million dollars anymore. I took it out of my savings. I don't have it in new taxes. I don't have it so I have to go back to my fund balance again and take another million out so taking money out of our savings account to use for current spending is a bad process. At times we had to do that but it's a

bad process and it's something that is not something we would recommend. So, Mr. Mayor, you're up.

President Slifka: Well now we want to hear from you and what we're going to do is Rene will be going around with this mike. Just put your hand up. We'll call you. It is technically a public hearing so we need you to state your name and address at the beginning and we'll take that down. If you've got a statement, you know, we ask that you keep it within 3 minutes. We sense like last time they'll be a lot of people who'd like to speak and with that I'll give this to Rene and we had over here.

Mr. Sisk: My name is Robert Sisk. I live at 995 Prospect Avenue in West Hartford. What I'd like to do tonight is go back to the theme that I talked about in January and that was benefits. As I'm sure if you parse the budget in a little different way than the BOE part and the town part basically expenses are broken into four categories. There's capital expense which of course is cost associated with enhancements to the town's infrastructure. It includes the contributions to the Capital Improvement Fund and the debt service for the improvements that we do. Those are expenditures within the community and they maintain the town's infrastructure, as I said. The second group is operating expenses. Operating expenses are costs incurred for the normal operation and performance of the services from the town and the Board of Education. They include the supplies, training, paper, pencils that we always talk about, professional and contractual services, utilities, telecommunications, vehicles and maintenance. Again those are expenditures within the community and they provide services to the community. Wages and salaries are the next category and that's payroll costs for full and temporary employees. They include regular overtime, holiday, temporary and education payroll and again those are expenditures made within the community for the provision of services. Then we get to benefits. Benefits are costs related to the employee healthcare, Worker's Compensation, Social Security, pension, retiree healthcare, deferred compensation and to some extent the unused sick leave which is paid out at retirement. Except for the employee health care and Worker's Comp portions which, of course, are tied to employment, those expenses are not related to the provision of services and typically the expense is not within the community.

Now I raise this because the way the budget has shaken out, if you combine the Board of Education budget and the Town budget the reductions on the capital side, the reductions on the operating expense side and with the good news announced tonight of the reductions in wages on the town's side we have zero increase. They have cancelled themselves out and keep in mind those are the three parts of the budget that I just mentioned that provide the services to the town. The benefits, however, are going up and the benefits are basically on the adopted budget, we don't know how things will shake out in the end, but as it stands right now tonight the entire increase is going towards benefits basically and we have no choice in that. The benefits are part of the negotiations of the contracts so as we talk about reductions in services or reductions in head count in the various departments, we talk about full-day kindergarten and things like that, any cuts that are made are going to be made to pay for benefits and this can't continue. It's unsustainable. Benefits in the current budget with retiree health is going up 20 percent. Employee health is going up 11 percent. Pensions are going up 9.4 percent. Deferred

income is going up 9.1 percent and other fringe benefits are going up 8.7 percent. So until we get that problem under control, until we can address the benefit problem we're going to keep repeating this process every year so the recommendations are the same as I made in January. We need to take a position as a town that we're going to change the benefits going forward. You can't take away from people something that they've earned but we have to cap this and we have to change it for the future. Thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Thank you very much. How about from this side? Someone have a question or a comment? There. Let's get the microphone over to you. Here comes a microphone. It's a little dinky one but it works.

Ms. Davis-Pitre: Whoa! Thank you.

President Slifka: Hold it close.

Erika Davis-Pitre: My name is... My name is Erika Davis-Pitre. I live at 8 Beverly Road... Thanks. 8 Beverly Road, West Hartford and I was here in January and spoke very late about the libraries and I believe it's the only town service that everybody use, everyone can use. If you don't use it, you don't have to but every can use it pretty much equally, the youngsters, the old people and the people in the middle, and I was quite disturbed to hear that the libraries are a business and if cuts need to be made we can look at closing one of the branches or reducing hours and in these hard times, especially with the unemployment rate climbing even in our community, shutting the libraries down and closing one of the branches is taking our services in the wrong direction I feel and there isn't a contingency that stands up for the library as the Board of Education and the school board has their contingency and the rest of the town services have their contingency so speaking as someone who doesn't have a child in the public schools and who doesn't benefit from the senior services, I'd like to speak about the libraries...have them mentioned, talked about... If we can get some honest figures at what you're looking at doing if the budget comes to pass that's it's...we do need 6 million dollars to take somewhere. If we're talking about cutting services or a branch or hours I'd like that to be honestly addressed and I don't know who's addressing that but thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Fortunately somebody on the town is going to have to answer that one.

President Slifka: The short answer is the library came in with a zero percent increase from its department. There is no proposal from the Town Council right now to eliminate any branch and discussions about hours are ongoing but it's not anybody's intention at the moment to cut those hours further because a lot of that has already been done but we're still reviewing that in committee. We'd be kidding you if we told you would could guarantee 100 percent that it will all stay exactly the same but we're working towards that but I want to at least clear up that there is no one talking about closing a branch. That seems to be perpetuating right now and it's absolutely not true. What we do have, and this happens on both the Board and the Council's side, is our administration will produce options on things and tell us what it would cost and tell you, you know,

again, we're in difficult times. What would it take to reduce to certain numbers if you had to and those things are priced but that does not mean that they're endorsed or planned to take place and we realize that gets out there but that's not a proposal at this time.

Chairman Schmitt: Hi! Yes, you.

Mr. Lobato: Thank you. Mark Lobato, 158 Whiting Lane and my taxes are going up 6 percent so Mr. VanWinkle I feel your pain. Now I don't disagree with anything the mayor has said tonight but I do think I have a different perspective on the budget and looking at the budget I didn't see three words which I think are essential. One is accountability. The other one is planning and the third is education. I know schools are in there but schools are about structures and education is about people. The first thing, accountability, is my taxes are going up and we're getting less services so I want to make sure the money that I'm paying has some value, that it's being put to good use, and that starts here. It goes down to the line supervisors. It's... I think the employees do a great job but when we have a snowstorm and there's two guys cleaning up the schools at Martin Luther King on Sunday and it's predicated to give us six inches the next day and lo and behold they do a wonderful job and cleaned everything and the next day it's totally covered in 6 inches of snow, where is the accountability? Those guys should never had been called out because the crews would have to go back the next day and do it over again so that's smart use of money, okay? Fifteen years on Whiting Lane we've asked for speed bumps. One thousand dollars would save the town \$300,000 over that time because every time there's an accident - this is one of the most dangerous corners in West Hartford - we've got two patrol cars, we've got an ambulance and often a fire truck there. Okay? This... There's no accountability. They gave us a few weeks ago a camera that captures speeders going over 45 miles and hour in a 30 mile zone and sends them a letter. Well, send the camera back. I just saved you \$25,000. Okay? It could have saved you \$300,000 over this time. We make smart decisions. If you listen to the people living there we know the problems. We've got ideas about solutions. Accountability. Planning. We need long-term planning. This problem's not going away of short revenues. In 2010 we're going to have short revenues. In 2011 we're going to have short revenues. We need long-term planning on how to best use our resources and build the neighborhoods...build the neighborhood businesses. It makes no sense on Park Road to have a nice restaurant like Chengdu and put a car wash next door so when you're sitting out there in the open eating your dinner you're listening to machinery go on. What type of planning is there? There's no planning so this is the way to build a 5, 10, 20 year plan to develop businesses that are going to attract nice places. We don't need more Dunkin Donuts like on the corner of Boulevard and Prospect. You just... You brought some revenues into town. Great! Because they build a little strip mall there but right across the street there's a vacant building so we are turning into a Hartford. You drive around on New Britain, New Park Road, Park Road and you see all the vacancies. We're going the way of Hartford because there's no planning.

And the third word there is education. When you look at the schools and, you know, my son's in the schools here at KP but the CMTs go down and down and we're not pulling out and we're throwing money in there and now we're losing teachers. You're going to tell us we're cutting teachers? There should be no teacher cut from that

classroom until we cut all the waste. Why are we having three administrators run a school costing \$500,000 when many businesses in this town can run successful businesses and have incomes of much less? You don't need all those administrators to run a school. You really don't.

Chairman Schmitt: Um, yeah, uh, go ahead.

Mr. Kantor: My name is Boris Kantor. I lived in West Hartford since 1978 and I don't know how long we can afford to continue to live in West Hartford. 81 Iroquois Road, West Hartford. First of all I want to express my gratitude to the Town Manager and you, Mayor, for your attempt to minimize our taxes. I feel good about that and if everybody would do the same probably we're not going to be in that scary situation. Can we still cut fat in the town services? I'm sure. Okay? But at least the Town Hall and you, the Town Manager, you recognize that all residents of West Hartford are your customers, not just teachers, not just schools, not just the Board of Education, and you have to weigh out to minimize our pain. Thank you.

But secondly I want to talk about our education. Okay? Our education is really in a dismal state, a really dismal state. My daughter graduated Hall High School in the 80s and at that time when she applied to... And she was not in the top of the class. She was in something... 15 percent. Every collage accepted her because Hall High School was our flagship. Hall High School was the number one school in Connecticut. Today Hall High School is 47. West Hartford education...the whole West Hartford education is number 88 just in Connecticut. To me that's embarrassing and that is despite for many years whatever the Board of Education or maybe not the Board of Education, maybe the Superintendent of Schools requested for West Hartford any funds they were granted but apparently there is no correlation between spending money and quality of education. I did some analysis and it's available, I can show you, Mr. Schmitt, I can show anybody but in four categories, okay... And I compared with suburban towns around West Hartford including Bloomfield, including Simsbury, including Avon and including East Windsor, affluent neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods, and I evaluated four parameters. One was the parameter of graduation rate. The second parameter – SAT score. The third parameter the rank by School Digger, that independent agency and the fourth parameter expenses per pupil, okay? And as embarrassing as this might sound, and I'm sure some of you know this information, out of 14 towns West Hartford in 13th place. Only Bloomfield had an aggregate score. Only Bloomfield behind West Hartford so I do believe that if you kind of...and the most steepest decline came over the last 10 years, okay? I don't want... I want to say that we all kind of brainwashed, even me and everybody else when we believed in the more money to spend is better quality we get. That's unfortunately not true. I work in industry and at a different position. There's no correlation between spending money. What is the root of success? The root of success is education. The root of success is diligence. That is the root of success, not necessarily money because for 10 years we've been getting more and more money infused into school and school did nothing to improve. And last... My time is up? I will finish. Okay. And this information available and the last time that may be a very provocative statement but very recently the AIG executives and some other executives in the United States, they gave back their bonuses. They gave back some of their compensation. Based

on what I said and our Superintendent of West Hartford Schools make 70 percent more without benefits than the Governor of Connecticut. Should we consider not only a salary freeze but give back and give increase based on merits, not based on seniority and contract. Thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Let me respond to a couple of those things you've said. I certainly would be interested in taking a look at the data that you provide...presented and you say that it will be available. It would be interesting to look at. You know, first of all, straightforwardly the...all of the senior executives for the West Hartford Board of Education, excuse me, the West Hartford Administration are taking a salary freeze for next year. All of them are and we've just gone through an extensive search for a new superintendent and I don't know how AIG picks its people or its executives. We looked all over the country and there's a market for these folks and the market is not something that we can control but it is something we live or die by in terms of who we get and what we have to pay for them. Our executives across the board are paid within...very much within the range of their market. If we don't pay them that we'll lose them and we're pretty happy with the people that we have...with many of the people that we have and I don't want to lose them. I think that our educators - many of them are here tonight - are some of the finest educators around. I will tell you something that has happened over that 10 year period that you have looked at in there. The demographics of our town have changed radically in that 10 year period. In that 10 year period the kinds of students that we have had to educate has changed from a relatively easy group of students, of upper-middle class students, to more and more on a relentless basis, more and more students that come from impoverished and lower socioeconomic classes where they do not have the educational benefits and advantages that kids from upper middle class environments have so we've had every year a more difficult group of students to educate and these educators here have done an excellent job of working with them. I also disagree with you. I don't see that our CMT scores have been going down. They've been going up or they've been flat. I will say that they've been...that in parts of the town they've been flat. I'll be happy to look at the data. I've been looking at it for years. The point is that we have maintained or improved our test results, and that's only one way to analyze how well the school is doing and our schools are doing, but we have maintained or... What is happening to this microphone?

Chairman Schmitt: Okay. I think I better, right? We have maintained or improved our results and our scores over the years when the raw materials that we're dealing with have been more difficult and, yeah, there is this mythology that we just throw money at our students. The reality is that we are spending less than half of the student...half of the schools in our state on a per capita basis and there's this also mythology - you got a little bit of round of applause for that - that we are top-heavy with administrators. Actually three-quarters of the school systems in the State of Connecticut pay more, have more administrators than we do. Three-quarters of them do. We are actually very, very careful on how we spend on administrators so that's part of the mythology out there that, you know, it doesn't matter. You only need to have teachers. It doesn't.... It's not a good thing to have principals supervising them. Your first words were accountability and principals are all about accountability. That's why they're there so that's some answers.

If anybody wants to answer more maybe we can do that a little bit later but let's ask a few more questions. You had a question here. Yeah. Go ahead. Let's... Is there a microphone for you?

Mr. Goshdigian: I apologize for not standing. It's not any disrespect but my name is Rich Goshdigian and I live at 887 Farmington Avenue. Those of you on the Council know that I have brought many issues before you. I do want to just make two quick statements. Number one, this happened. I was reading the budget and the book fell on my arm so you will be getting an additional piece of communication from me. And more importantly I stopped taking the Percocets so what I'm going to say is lucid.

My remarks tonight are going to be very direct and very candid and I'm going to ask for something that I have been unable to get in over 2 ½ years of dealing directly with Jim Francis, Barry Feldman before him, with you Mr. VanWinkle, with you, Scott, and with every member sitting on the Council. Okay? While I have seen a change in the attitude I am sitting before you as someone who has brought issues to this Council and has suffered slings and arrows. I've been blackballed by Barry Feldman. I've been attempted to not be able to speak before the Council and I've been basically dismissed as out-of-hand. Just so that you know, I am a product of the West Hartford school systems. While I am no longer in the corporate world I was a Senior Vice-President at a Fortune 500 company. I daresay I've done more budgets than all of you combined ranging from as little as \$3000 to \$750 million. Okay? I want to focus on a couple issues, Mr. VanWinkle. You should have these answers. If you don't, I'm going to ask that either you or Chris Johnson get the answers because they're examples of why... I hate to say it. Your budget book is a book. It is not a book that is useful in terms of analyzing what causes the numbers. It reports a lot of numbers but it doesn't delve with the sources as the issues and I'm going to give you a couple cases in point and I want to preface my remarks that in no way, shape or form are my remarks intended to say that you personally or any other town employee is doing something that they're not entitled to. I'm simply going to point out that we have some policies in place that need to be looked at. Case in point, if you look at the Town Manager's page of the budget book you will see in there the discussion of the line item called salaries and wages and you will see discussion of the fact that the proposed salaries are going to be down from the proposed salaries of 2008 and 2009. Nowhere in there will you see the fact that the salary line is going to be over \$90,000 over budget this fiscal year, which leads to the issue that I want to discuss. Many of you may not be aware but if you are a director in the town of West Hartford after 10 years of service you are entitled to seven weeks vacation. You are also entitled to accrue up to 150 sick days and 50 vacation days and you can sell your vacation days back to the town, 20 days a year. Now we've all heard a lot about pension liabilities and other types of things. I don't mean to get overly technical here but I believe, Mr. VanWinkle, you've been quoted in the West Hartford News something to the effect of West Hartford is paying for two town managers this year and that relates to the fact that we had to pay out Jim Francis' vacation and unused sick time I believe. Now the first question I'm asking and I've asked for is, number one, is there a complete listing of all director level and other non-union employees, what their accrued vacation and sick time is in terms of days and dollars? Okay? Can I be permitted to just...? Okay? So I'd like the answer to that question.

Number two, it's my contention that that liability is nowhere reflected on the town's books because had it been accrued for it wouldn't go against current operating expenses so I'd like you to confirm that fact. Okay? We're talking folks here in excess of at least a million dollars or more. Okay? Now again, these are all benefits that these folks are entitled to but they need to be reviewed. I'm sorry, but we don't need to have seven weeks vacation for people who have been employed by the town for 10 years at the director level. These are overly generous provisions and incidentally, everything that I'm saying to you comes directly from Jim Francis. Thank you very much.

Mr. VanWinkle: The only question I got in there is is that data available and that data is available without question. I would point out that like the executives of the school board, the executives of the Town of West Hartford are not taking a pay increase this year. I would also point out that they did not take a pay increase last year and I would point out again that they didn't take a pay increase the year before. My police chief is making the same salary he made three years ago. His benefits haven't gone up in three years so although there are benefits associated with it, those benefits haven't changed in that time so I understand what you're saying. Most of my directors I have a hard time getting them to take vacation. I haven't had a vacation day since I've been Town Manager only because there's a lot of work to do and they're dedicated. They're a good group of people. They work hard. We do an analysis of every executive salary and compare it to those salaries paid by other communities around the state. I've got that analysis for you if you want to see it and they're not at the top of that classification.

Mr. Goshdigian: Excuse me. May I respond? That's not what I talked about.

Mr. VanWinkle: What you...what you asked me...

Mr. VanWinkle: What you asked me is whether that data was available and that data is available but now I have the microphone and I get to say what I want to say as you did.

Mr. Goshdigian: You're not addressing the issue that I brought up. I did not question their salaries. What I asked was about the liabilities.

Mr. VanWinkle: And my answer to your question was yes, that data exists. It is available and I can get it for you but I want to point out as the Town Manager and the microphone in my hand that my executives have not had a pay increase in three years and many of them have taken pay cuts over the last three years. Those are the leadership of your town and so although you didn't ask that question I offer that information for your enlightenment.

Chairman Schmitt: Thank you, Ron. Yes?

Ms. Firestone: I am Hope Firestone from 37 Sunset Farm Road in West Hartford, Connecticut. I am a native of West Hartford. I went through the schools. I was very fortunate to and my children were educated in public schools in West Hartford also. I am now an empty nester, very empty on over an acre of land in a large house and hopefully

I'll be able to stay there. I do have a question about the Open Choice situation that the Board of Education is considering doing. I was previously in my other life a teacher and I'm interested in knowing as a town taxpayer all about this. Thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Alright. I'm going to turn that over to somebody over here cause I'm not exactly sure... Could you be maybe just a trifle more specific about what about it is...

Ms. Firestone: Well, I only heard about it through gossip. I don't know if I heard the right things or the wrong things. I understand we will be taking an additional 70 some-odd children in town?

Chairman Schmitt: Okay. We take... We have right now about 89... Is that right? 89 Open Choice students enrolled in our schools. We have participated in this program for many, many, many years and our policy has been that we look for spaces in kindergarten, first and second grade for students and if there are spaces that will not adversely affect class size and cause us to have to hire another teacher at several of our schools we will accept Open Choice students. That's why we have 89 students there right now. The state, because of its own needs due to the Sheff vs. O'Neill agreement and it's more than an agreement at this point, it's a mandate by the court of law, the state has decided that it needs to put many more students into suburban schools. The State Department of Education also decided that they didn't like the way that the Capitol Region Educational Council was managing the Open Choice operation and so they took it over this year and they wrote us a letter and they said you need to take 70 more students and oh, by the way, you need to take them in 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th grade. And oh, while we're at it, here's the schools where we want you to put them in. We had no idea that that letter was coming. Neither did any of the other districts in our whole area that got similar letters. We haven't made... Let me finish. We haven't made an official decision yet but I know that we've sent a letter off to the State Department of Education saying basically I'm sorry, I don't think we can do that this year. They may come back at us and say some other things as well but we don't feel it's educationally appropriate to do that. We don't feel prepared. We aren't ready. It doesn't fit in with our model and, to be perfectly honest with you, the state, at least the last that I heard because I was at the Capitol Region Educational Council a week-and-a-half ago discussing this issue, the state wanted to place 400 new students in area schools. So far they have yeses for 25 of those students. The state is just not doing a very good job with this program and this project. Does that answer your questions?

Ms. Firestone: Yeah.

Chairman Schmitt: You can... Yeah, you can have a quick followup. Sure.

Ms. Firestone: The quick followup was the following. I understand West Hartford was not treated the same as the suburban towns of West Hartford regarding the valley with the number of students that they would take and we would have to take a much larger proportion.

Chairman Schmitt: I honestly... Does anybody have a clue at all what the rationale was behind the numbers? I don't know that there was any rationale that was apparent to us or explained to us for what the numbers were and why they were what they were. I don't know. It kind of doesn't matter because we've pretty much said no. Okay? Let's see. Let's have one... David. Here.

Mr. Dippolino: Dave Dippolino, 88 Meadowbrook Road. I'm the President of the West Hartford Education Association. I'm a town resident and a proud parent of a Conard graduate. I apologize if this response is long but I think it is important enough to be heard in its entirety.

I would like to address several topics tonight, the first being the comments made by the Board of Education Chairman, Terry Schmitt. At the Board Budget Workshop this past Tuesday evening, like Mr. Schmitt, I feel it is important for me to take this time and express my extreme disappointment in the remarks he made as he made his extreme disappointment in WHEA perfectly clear to the West Hartford residents. Chairman Schmitt's remarks mischaracterized the events of the past several months and the relationship that WHEA has with central administration as well as the relationship between the CEA and WHEA. I would like to take this time to clarify these relationships and share what has occurred in the last month. I think I have a good working relationship with central office. We repeatedly deal with various issues that occur throughout the school system and work together to come to an agreement on these issues. I have had several successful conversations with them regarding concessions prior to my going out for surgery four weeks ago. As a matter of fact, I was able to meet with them at least once while I was recovering. Let me clarify for the public, the WHEA is a partner with CEA and the National Education Association. In our quest to support the profession of teaching and all that it encompasses CEA does provide legal assistance on various matters much like outside counsel from Shipman & Goodwin does for the Board of Education. However, I am the President of the WHEA. I make the decision on whether meetings will be held or not. In fact, on February 26, 2009 our CEA representative, Sara Pomponi, and myself met with Rick Ledwith and Tim Dunn to discuss potential cost-saving measures. I had surveyed my members for suggestions and approached administration so that we could work together in this budget cycle. In that meeting we floated various small cost-saving measures, a proposal to offer an early retirement incentive and a proposal over a health insurance incentive to reduce the number of lives insured by the Board of Education. After the meeting, at their request CEA assisted me in surveying the membership of the WHEA to assess what kind of cost-savings could be reached through a health insurance incentive. Sara Pomponi compiled these results and communicated them to me, Rick Ledwith and Tim Dunn on March 13. The potential net cost saving to the Board of Ed is over \$600,000. Originally the response from central office was that they were interested and would get back to us. To this date we have not heard any information but I hope they are still working and looking at these two things. I did receive a formal request to enter into concession bargaining from the Board of Education on Monday, March 23, 2009. At that time an off-the-record meeting was set with members of the Board of Ed and our executive committee. Simultaneously the WHEA bylaws were being looked at for how we should proceed with the request to enter

into concession bargaining. I, unfortunately, due to a setback in my recovery from surgery, was unable to attend that meeting and had to cancel it. As we looked into the bylaws it became clear that the appropriate protocol for such discussions begins with a vote of our Council of the WHEA to determine if it is in the best interest of the teachers collectively to have us enter into concession talks. This vote is scheduled for Monday, April 6, 2009 which is our next rep. council meeting. The reason for cancelling the meeting and this plan were conveyed openly and honestly to both Rick Ledwith and Chairman Schmitt. If our rep. council feels we should enter into concession talks I will be the first one to show up at those meetings. Despite Chairman Schmitt's portrayal of honorable behavior on his part, I assure you that I do not see behavior he displayed at the Board of Ed Budget Workshop as honorable. Clearly he does not understand the key element of trust in the labor relationship field of off-the-record when he took this information and made it public on-the-record. I am proud to serve the 868 teachers of West Hartford but I am saddened by the recent political attacks on our solidarity. The WHEA is in support of the superintendent's proposed budget and will continue to voice that support regardless of the outcome of our rep. council vote on April 6. Thank you for the opportunity to clarify the events that occurred in the past several months.

Chairman Schmitt: Thank you, David.

Chairman Schmitt: Well let's see. Since most of that was about me I suppose I ought to respond to that. I think that almost everything that you said was true and I would agree with it and I would agree that you've been working to be as honorable and as cooperative as you could possibly be. I certainly experienced what happened on Friday differently than you did and I have information that was different than what you've expressed there and I think I'm going to leave it at that. I welcome, as I've said publically and I will say again and again and again, I will go and meet with you and your people anytime, anywhere, any place to work together towards a mutually beneficial solution. I have a deep respect for the teachers in this town. I have a deep respect for what you people do and, you know, the fact that we made a decision to wait to have our meeting until April 21 may mean that your April 6 meeting will have some benefit. As of Friday, as we in the executive team and board members were sitting, planning, waiting for the meeting to happen that we had all heard was going to happen and had that cancelled on us at that point...

Mr. Dippolino: [Inaudible.] I mean I was supposed to go back to work this Monday but I had to call my doctor. I had problems with my back. I was not going to be able to make that meeting.

Chairman Schmitt: Right. And at that point we didn't know that we were going to be pushing our meeting off or our decision off and that was the end of...looked like the end of our chance. My hope is what I've said from the beginning and what the Mayor said from the beginning, that we can work together and David, I've appreciated every step you've tried to take. No question about it. Okay? Alright. Any other... Let's see. We were over here before so let's... Yeah. Back here.

Ms. Baker: My name is Wendy Baker. I live at 12 Garland Road. I have resided in West Hartford for 35 years. I've also been teaching elementary school children in West Hartford for the past 16 years. It's a tough time to be teaching although I must say that I love my job and I enjoy working with each and every child that comes through my classroom but it saddens me that I, as a teacher, am being singled out as a scapegoat for the town's fiscal problems. According to news accounts of various town meetings it has been suggested by more than a few that teachers should reopen finalized contract negotiations in order to make more salary concessions than we did when we agreed to our contract last fall. In the fall, town leaders publicized their gratitude for the wonderful result achieved in negotiating a contract that had required teachers to make many concessions and that had held their first year salary increase to an unheard level of only one percent. Town leaders stated that West Hartford had achieved a much better negotiated contract with its teachers than those recently concluded in neighboring towns. Now less than six months later someone asks West Hartford teachers to give up the poor bargain imposed on them and what is now a binding contract. Some would ask us to consent to have more money taken out of our pockets in order to subsidize the taxpayer burden. Is that fair play? Is that a good civics lesson that we should want taught to our children? Is that what it means to enter into a binding contract? I am also a taxpayer in West Hartford. My annual salary increases as a West Hartford teacher over the last several years have hardly been enough to offset the increase in the taxes that I have to pay to West Hartford on my home and my car. The one percent increase in my salary and the reduction in my medical benefits under our last negotiated contract virtually offset each other. Why should teachers face the town's fiscal problems? As taxpayers, the burden should not lie with the teachers. We residents must find solutions that are fair and equitable. We can't ask one group or another of our town employees to make concessions in contracts that the town is legally and morally obligated to honor. We must stop making scapegoats out of our teachers. Thank you for your consideration on my views.

President Slifka: Thank you. I just want to point a couple things out. First, you know, a lot of what you say about the numbers is true but two quick things. One is that we have asked everybody to take part. I don't think that... We don't like the use of the word scapegoat. I understand it's very sensitive right now and particularly with the teachers because that was the last contract that was entered into but we have asked every single employee, both union and nonunion to take part in this process. No one has been singled out. The second this is I hate to tell you, the world changed. From December to today it's very different and that's what we're dealing with. That's the only reason we would come back and we had to come back to all. As we indicated in January, every single one of these contracts is legally binding. None of these unions has to speak to us at all. This has been based on an appeal of a world that has changed. It has changed under our feet and we have to catch up with it and that's the only way we can do it. The town is made up of services. Services are provided by employees. Those employees are paid salaries and at that point we start running out of any options. We've tried to go through all of them and I don't... Certainly if I'm the one who has to give something back and you feel that the salary has not kept up with other increases you're exactly right. That is the burden we

face here but the world changed and that's why we had to come back and ask everybody to be part of the process.

Chairman Schmitt: And I want to say something else. I was speaking to one of my parishoners today who is a teacher in another town. I won't mention the town but that town, like this town, went to the teachers and every other union as well, every other bargaining unit, and they went to the town and they said we want you to reopen the bargaining. We want you to take a pay freeze right now and the teachers rightly said okay, well let's talk jobs. What jobs are you going to protect. What jobs are you going to put on the table? And that town said oh, we're not going to put any jobs on... We're not going to guarantee anything about jobs. We just want you to take a pay freeze. Now what do you think that teacher's union said? They said take a hike which is exactly what they should have said but I want you to understand, and I've said this publically and I'll say it publically again and I'm about to brand it on the Mayor here that he's said it privately as well. If we got concessions from our unions, all of our unions, we would save every single job this year that is on the chopping block, every single job. I promise you that. Every single one. Every FTE. All of those jobs in various places, we would save them. So that's a promise we will make you so for us this is a fairly simple issue. It's a painful one. I don't disagree with that. It's a painful one and a difficult one but the fact is that I want to see people working, more people working, and we have to all make some sacrifices. My sacrifice, as is yours as you said, will be higher taxes. That's going to happen but I would like to see more people working and we promise you that if our labor leaders and people cooperate this year all the jobs will be saved.

President Slifka: Minority Leader, like to comment?

Councilor Davidoff: Good evening. I just can't sit idly by and just listen to the dialogue as it gets to this most crucial issue. These are unprecedented economic times in our global economy. It's just not here in West Hartford and what we're trying to do as community leaders is to provide the services that the people of West Hartford have come to expect. That's why they choose to live here. Over the last two weeks, no joke, I must have received over a hundred emails asking me to save this program or that program. Don't raise my taxes. Save that program. What we're asking in a bipartisan way is to have a wage freeze from all people who receive a paycheck from the Town of West Hartford. I've got emails from people who say their spouse has lost a job. They don't know how they're going to make ends meet. I talked with somebody who is a teacher. They have three students in their classroom where the father has lost his job. They don't even know how they're going to pay their property taxes. That's just one classroom. These are scary times. I think if the times weren't like this I don't think you would see this request, this sincerity, from the people who serve this community. We have gone line item by line item through the budget. We are now talking about people's jobs. That's what we're talking about because when we cut a program we're going to eliminate people's jobs. Layoffs, as I said in the last year's budget, were the thing that would bother me the most and tonight they really bother me the most because the person that you're going to layoff is the person that lives next door to you, down the street from you or could be a relative.

These are scary times. I ask and I plead that when the teacher's union meets and discusses this think, please. One year wage freeze. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you Mr. Davidoff. Okay. We were...this side. Yes, right in front.

Mr. Israel: Yeah, my name is Art Israel. I live on Portage Road, 45 Portage Road. I took a look at the recovery.gov site the other day, the economic stimulus, and there were millions of dollars for West Hartford projects out there. How will those projects impact the budget?

President Slifka: Very good question. Mr. VanWinkle, I'm going to turn that over to you.

Mr. VanWinkle: I haven't seen millions of dollars yet but we have been told we are going to receive funding. HUD, Housing and Urban Development, we receive what's called Community Zone Block Grants. We are going to receive \$194,000?

Mr. VanWinkle: \$294,000 in additional funding through HUD. Our CDBG funds are used to assist people who can't take care of their homes. We help people replace roofs that meet income standards and there are a number of other programs that the Community Development Block Grant money... That is meant to be spent only in certain areas and on certain programs so we're going to see those additional dollars. They can't be spent in the general fund. They have to be spent on programs so it won't help us much in the general fund. We've also been told that we will receive funding, \$250,000 for energy. \$258 as of my...? \$574,000?

Mr. VanWinkle: Good. I know all my numbers. \$574,000 for energy from the Department of Energy. That energy fund we will...cannot offset general fund expenditures but we're going to expend those dollars to reduce our energy costs in West Hartford so they'll have some benefits. We are receiving funds for the Department of Education. Come here. Come here. This is Chip Ward for the Department of Education for Special Education. Can you just talk about that?

Mr. Ward: We're going to get a total of around 2.4 million dollars of IDA funds to be spent over the next two years for our funds and another \$400,000 for Title I funds that can be spent over the next...the next couple of years.

Mr. VanWinkle: And the impression of how we can spend those funds?

Mr. Ward: That's the... That's still an open question. The federal government published on April Fools' Day 200 pages of regulations on exactly how we can use that. The State Department of Education is actively going through those regulations and determining what our options are in terms of the use of that money. Can we use it for some of our programs and services that are currently being spent for by general fund money or does it have to be for new projects? We'll have to see what the final regulations are on that but

there's probably a good chance that we can use some of that for some of our current money with our general fund and that can help reduce the general fund budget at the cost, of course, of when that money goes away in two years we'll need to bring those positions and funds back into the general fund so it's sort of a...sort of a two year fix on the education funds. Title I funds we're... Again we'll be at a meeting on Monday to try to find out more information about that. Again, more guidance came down from that so that's still a work in progress but it certainly should have some ability to help with the Board of Education's general fund expenditures for 2009-2010. What the final numbers are going to be we won't know for a few more weeks I don't think.

Mr. VanWinkle: There was some funding...just again some funding that's going to the state that was supposed to keep the state from cutting grants to the communities, education grants. From the State of Connecticut we receive educational cost-sharing grants. They're going to reduce the educational cross-sharing grants, take the federal money and replace the money back to the same level so no money came to us. No new money came to us. There is funds and there are some things we're going to be able to do with it but it's...there's not a substantial impact on our general fund with those dollars.

Chairman Schmitt: I do want to say one thing about that because it is... One should be very suspicious when the federal money that comes comes through the state when the state is facing a 6 billion dollar budget deficit over the same period of time. The state has a way of commandeering some of that money before it gets all the way through their hands so we're being very prudent I guess at this point in terms of whether we're actually going to see those monies or not. That's unfortunately just the reality. Judy?

Ms. Aaron: Hi. Good evening. My name is Judy Aaron. I live at 40 North Quaker Lane and I first of all want to thank all the members and leadership of the town for coming out tonight and having this forum. I have a couple of comments and some suggestions. I prepared a longer speech but I'm just going to go through, you know, basically outline some things. You know, since the town proposed this budget there's been a lot of noise and discussion and blame and a lot of things floating around but I think really the time has come for solutions and I am so very encouraged and heartened to find out that we do have people, union leadership coming out and talking and coming to the table and making some suggestions and concessions on how we can all proceed forward. We all know that on the revenue side of the equation the fact is that we shouldn't be asking families at this time to be paying more taxes in this stressed economy and we do, as the town manager pointed out, have some very serious deficit issues, less money coming into us from the state and the reality of shrinking non-tax revenues so the only thing that we can do at this point has to do with spending and everybody has spoken a lot about higher union salaries and benefits as a result of the negotiated contracts. Yes, we made a deal with the workers of our town and it's very plain that some bargaining units thus far have not had any kind of wish to make any concessions on those contracts and as a result what we're faced with yet again this year is reductions in the budget manifesting itself in loss or downsizing of town programs and services in deference to those salaries and benefits that the bargaining units have negotiated. Now the teacher's union, West Hartford Education Association, already has started a campaign and sent out

a flier to every household requesting that they support this budget and claims that \$12.50 more a month in taxes is not much to ask to pay towards education even though they neglect to say that each of us already pay well over half of our property tax to education. How can they claim that we're not investing enough in education already to me, quite frankly, is laughable. Now if we want to keep our spending levels level in the wake of higher salaries and benefits we can certainly send out a sea of pink slips to the West Hartford employees, both union and nonunion employees, to compensate for this budget gap and I have heard, unfortunately... I don't know, Dave Dippolino can dispute this, that the teacher's union has apparently been instructed by the state union not to give an inch and I hope that that's not true but it's very clear that if they don't given an inch that these union leaders are willing to throw the newest members of their own organization under the bus to preserve the jobs and salaries of the most seasoned members of the union and that to me is really very sad and should be a signal to these newer union members how little they are valued by their own union representatives and how their mandatory union dues are not really working for them. I'll be... I'm finishing up here. And I think their union dues should provide them with some measure of job security. I do care about the rank and file families. I'd like them to keep their jobs in this troubled economy. I'm offering a different solution. I know that our town deducts and withholds union dues from every union employee's paycheck and then the town pays the union directly. Union members don't even have a choice in paying these dues. They must pay into the union. It's also an administrative cost to the town for sure. You all may be very surprised to learn that our town withholds \$878,463 in union dues on the Board of Education side alone for the year with \$677,000 a year from the teacher's union alone, and my suggestion is that instead of requesting that union contracts be open for concessions or give-backs in order to help the town, that the union heads instead open up their union checkbook and cut a check to the Town of West Hartford for the amount that is paid to them in union dues. That is a give-back that could give us over a million dollars without opening contracts at all. It can save union jobs and prevent us from cutting town services and programs. How many teaching jobs and educational and sports programs can be saved with a check from the teacher's union for \$677,000? They pay \$39 for 20 pay periods. That's \$80 a month and they're asking me to spend \$12.50 more a month when they're collecting \$80 a month from their union members who they, by the way, are not even going it seems to protect them from being laid off. So that's my suggestion and I hope that the Town Council and Board of Education can do what they can to convince the bargaining units that their participation is entirely necessary to preserve West Hartford. Now I think that certain leaders can take a very simple step to give back to our town and save union jobs without opening union contracts by giving back some of these exorbitant union due that they charge their members. Thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Well, I've got to admit. Of all of the things that I thought I was going to do tonight, this was not the one that I thought I would be doing which was defending the WHEA. You know a little bit... A while ago... A little bit...A little bit ago David got up and he said that it doesn't really matter what the state union or the national union says. He's the President of the union and he makes the decisions for this place and you know what? I believe him. I believe him. And I respect him for that too. And their union dues are their money. I mean, they can do with that money what they

want and what they need. The union has protected the interests of these people for a long time and you could go and suggest that to them I suppose but.... Yeah, you wish you hadn't. I know. David, do you want to... I mean, did you want to say anything about that?

Mr. Dippolino: I'm speechless.

Chairman Schmitt: You're speechless. Right. That's a...

Mr. Dippolino: You know, the one thing that I don't quite understand is I believe that through the years, I mean even when my dad was alive and we were living in Hamden he was paying taxes to make sure children went to school and I believe that every year that school budget went up a little bit. It had to have because salaries have increased every year and so that budget has increased every year so I'm not sure I quite understand why there's such a fuss when you talk about teachers. I mean, I wish I made some of the money that the West Hartford Taxpayer's Association people make. I mean I really do. I wish I had the money that they make. Not all of them. I'm not saying all of them. I know you're retired and your budget... Yours isn't... But there are some who live in million dollar homes and had five children go through this school and had other people pay for those children to go through the school so...

Chairman Schmitt: Thanks. Alright. That's... That's not.... That's not... That's not going to get us anywhere right now so...so... No, you've had your chance. Alright. Gentleman, you're in the back. You have a chance to speak.

Mr. Kleszczynski: My name is Joseph Kleszczynski. I live at 7 Hyde Road for the last 35 years. I have a very brief comment...not a comment but a question to the mayor who is my friend and who started with a very brief, energetic opening statement. In that statement he said that there were new 36 traffic lights paid by the federal government. Is this right? Okay. This came not from this pocket but from this pocket. I mean it's still... It's still the taxpayer's money but not the town money. Okay, but my question comes to this, what I call Big Brother is watching you which is the cameras next to the traffic light. My question specifically to you is who paid for these cameras, how much cost the maintenance of these cameras right now and who made the decision? Who is against all the principles that I escaped from the totalitarian system to the free system? Thank you.

President Slifka: First while I've got this I want, if we can, I want everybody to see Joe here. This is off-topic but this gentleman is a hero of World War II. He is very modest and when some people say... You know, he used the word totalitarianism and I'll get into that in a second but he means it. He did escape it so that is not an exaggeration here and I hope at some other time you will hear about Joe's story. It is incredibly moving so I'm glad to see you here my friend this evening. Now, to the camera question I'm going to go to Mr. VanWinkle since Joe's...on the pricing cause Joe's question got very detailed there at the end but as to the principle behind it the camera first of all... For those who are concerned about Big Brother the cameras do not ticket anybody. That is

illegal in the State of Connecticut. They are there as a traffic measurement that enables us to see traffic flow and change the traffic patterns as we see fit. That is the purpose. Now they could be... If it were legal in the State of Connecticut, they could be turned on at some intersections to ticket. They would be empowered to do that but if you are concerned about that, that is currently something that is illegal in the State of Connecticut. We could not do it even if we wanted to but they are there. Joe, they are there and they're hopefully for a good use to enable you to get around town a little bit more quickly, but as to the financial piece let me give it to Mr. VanWinkle.

Mr. VanWinkle: A 6 million dollar grant. We applied for it in 2004. Department of Transportation grants take years to put into place. We apply for grants all the time. Everyday we're applying for grants from the federal government because they're available. They're available for us to use so if we didn't take that 6 million dollars Newington would have or some other community would have. They save us substantial money on our traffic lights. The cost of turning on those bulbs in those traffic lights was \$76,000 two years ago. The cost of turning on those LED lights on those traffic lights is below \$40,000 so it saves us there. The cost of maintaining them... Before when you pulled up to a light there was a magnetic plate under the ground that sensed the iron that was over it and it said there's a car there and then it made the adjustment to the light. This one actually sees you. We were always repairing those pieces in the ground because the wires are down there and they broke a lot and there was a lot of maintenance. These we don't really touch. They sit there. They don't move. There's no maintenance really on them of any substantial amount and even though they are cameras they cannot record right now. They have no ability to record. All they do is they use a video technology to see you, to see that there's a car there and then they tell the light there's a car there. That's all it does. It doesn't record. It doesn't see you. It doesn't know your car. It doesn't take a picture at all.

Chairman Schmitt: Thank you. Okay. Way in the back.

Ms. Vaughn: I'm sorry.

Chairman Schmitt: Oh, I'm sorry. The... Go with the mike.

Ms. Vaughn: Okay. Good evening. My name is Sandrine Vaughn. I live at 82 Lyman Road. I have been a resident of West Hartford for six years and I love this town and I have chosen to raise my children here because of its great school system. First I would like to thank both the Town Council and the Board of Education for the amazing work that you're doing in this very difficult time. I am here tonight because my older child will be entering kindergarten this fall at Aiken and I remain deeply concerned about class sizes and the reduction in the number of paras for all kindergarten classes. The kindergarten year is a huge transition for any child. A successful start to a child's scholastic career is of primary importance to confidence building, instilling a love of learning and the foundation for success in the later years. I believe that if the cuts as proposed go forward more children would have a very difficult experience in their first year in the public school system, setting them off on the wrong foot. I urge that we do not

take this course of action. To me it is simple. We have to go back to basics and reduce our class sizes or, in this case, at a minimum not effectively increase them through a reduction in paras. The proposal to cut the number of paras by half is not different than wanting to increase class sizes by 50 percent. It will be impossible for even the best teacher to teach as she or he will have to worry constantly about discipline and safety. These 5-year-olds are only little people, barely dependent, just starting to verbalize. How can we expect them to blossom in this kind of environment? I recognize that the funding for keeping paras must come from somewhere else. I see two avenues, both of which are priority issues for us as a community. Option one is to cut other educational programs. The better option is to look harder for more cuts, and that budget on the town side. Ultimately all the other programs like Quest languages won't matter to a child if their first year as a student in West Hartford ends up being a terrible experience due to classroom overcrowding and lack of attention so tonight I am begging you, the Council, and we, the community, to rethink our priorities. Remember that this community's children are the doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, council members of tomorrow so let's put our education first and that's what I wanted to say tonight. Thank you.

Chairman Schmitt: Thank you very much. Back on this side. Okay, go ahead. We have to get a mike to you.

Mr. Rousseau: My name is Kenneth Rousseau. I live at 85 Fenbrook Road. I'm a 16 year resident of West Hartford. My wife, sister-in-law and cousin are all graduates of West Hartford high schools. My two daughters are students at Smith. I'd like to thank everyone who came out here to speak and to listen. I'd like to point out that the current proposed budget which is before the recent cuts...that you can all go onto the website to calculate your tax increase. To me, although it shows a \$400 increase in my taxes is a \$400 net decrease in my taxes. My taxes are going up because of reevaluation. Reevaluation is not something the town has under its control. What it represents is that commercial and industrial property in town or other residential property in town has fallen in value with respect to my home. That means that over the years prior to reevaluation I was living off the back of other people. This is just that funds coming back to roost and I'm now paying what I borrowed from other people in prior years. I appreciate that and I am willing to pay that increase in taxes so I've seen already an increase...sorry, a decrease of about \$800 in my taxes. I'd say that's plenty. That's more than enough. I understand that other people feel that that's not enough and for that reason we're looking for additional savings. I'd like to ask you not to give up the principles of West Hartford by doing things like cutting library hours on Saturday mornings. I noticed that that was one of the things that have been costed out. I'd like to propose that as you suggested there are some things that are just not worth it. The \$40,000 that it might save is not going to help balance our budgets. Not when it costs us so much in valuable services. Somebody else talked about how over the last 10 years we've seen our quality of student graduates from our high schools drop precipitously. In those same 10 years our cost per pupil, our spending per pupil, has dropped precipitously. We've gone from top...

President Slifka: Please, let the gentleman finish.

Mr. Rousseau: We've gone from tops in the state...top 10 percent in the state of revenue... I'm sorry, of expenditures per pupil down to median. I don't think that we can blame expenditures, you know, throwing money at the problem as a reason for where we are today so I would like to say that the budget that we've come up with is a sound budget. It's fiscally responsible and I appreciate that the town is doing such a good job of trying to manage it and I just caution us not to try to squeeze blood from a stone.

President Slifka: Thank you. Okay. I'm going to go in the back. There's... I'm... There's a number of people who've been raising their hands. They're behind you.

Mr. Galm: Good evening.

President Slifka: We'll get to everybody.

Mr. Galm: Hopefully.

President Slifka: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. Galm: That's okay. Good evening. I'd like to thank you Mr. Mayor and members of the Board of Ed for participating in community forums for other residents who can't or are intimidated with coming to the Town Hall so I'd like to thank you for getting out to the community to hear the voices of the people. I'm speaking tonight... Oh, my name is Eric Galm. I live at 112 White Ave. I'm speaking tonight in support of education in West Hartford. As a college professor I am deeply concerned about the future of education. My family was fortunate to move to West Hartford for the strong school system which the town promotes in its profile as one of the best in the state. A survey posted on the town website reports that 9 in 10 residents said that it's very or somewhat important to develop or maintain West Hartford's reputation for quality public schools. Over the past few years I have seen education and town services erode and evaporate. While education in the town has been crippled by unfunded and underfunded mandates of educational cost-sharing and No Child Left Behind we often overlook some of the biggest unfunded mandates that continue to cost our country 4 billion dollars every month. As a result of this we have seen a corresponding decline in town library hours, education and town services. Clearly we need to maintain a strong educational base that will support the development of future leaders so they can learn history and do not repeat mistakes from the past, learn mathematics and economics so they can understand the complex global system that's now in operation, and the arts and humanities so they can speak eloquently and think critically about what others are saying. I and many other families support the superintendent's proposed budget. We need to keep our educational system as strong as possible so that we ensure that our children become successful and thoughtful adults that are poised to confidently lead us into the future and I'd like to say that my children have had fantastic teachers and we are really appreciative.

President Slifka: Thank you. Okay. Now we'll go up front here.

Mr. Barishpolsky: My name is Boris Barishpolsky.

President Slifka: Put the mike up a little bit please.

Mr. Barishpolsky: Okay. 131 Hyde Road. I live in West Hartford about 30 years and my comment is very simple. It seems to me this meeting is just... to me it looks like the theater of the absurd. On the one hand we have money which we have to spend. On the other hand we have to get the results. Here's the results. Doesn't compare to money we spend then something is wrong ..and every state rank of the town's schools now is number 88. It's about two times worse than it was five years ago and the education budget rose 43 percent. Why? Who is responsible for that? The Board of Education, teachers or who else? Or union? That's not true. That's not correct because this town was considered as the best town for education. Now it's not despite some people says it's very good it's not good because the Bugbee School, elementary school, was number one five years ago. It's now number 15. This is just from your site. You can see these numbers if you need to so something is wrong and we have to change that. It's not money. It's not check a worse education... We want to spend less money for education. We won't cut this portion of budget which doesn't help our education in this town. Thank you.

President Slifka: We're going to go to Mr. Kennedy next.

Mr. Kennedy: My name is George Kennedy. I live at 19 Waterside Lane. I've been a resident since 1951. I've gone through the school systems. My kids have gone through the school systems and before I start saying I'd just like to say this. We had a visitor at one of our West Hartford Taxpayer Association meetings and he sat and got involved in the dialogue. This was last spring. He got involved with the dialogue and assured us that there was waste in the Board of Education. That was you, David. And that's what we're after. Anyway, at the outset I want to unequivocally state having come from a family of teachers, that neither the West Hartford Taxpayer Association nor I hate or want to diminish the education in town. Having said that we do hate what the general education national industry is doing to our children, our young parents, our taxpayers and to our country. Test scores in national journals including educational commentators all agree that our education industry is failing our country to the extent the education debacle is now critical enough to be considered a national security issue. We want to help fix, not destroy our education system. As the professor back here said, we need it. It's the basis of our future. Study after study shows that simply adding money and raising taxes are not the solution to a better educational system. The U.S. spends more than any developed country from what I have been able to gather on education, yet we are now ranked 21st among 25 developed countries and we're sliding further down. Look at our hospitals, our factories, utilities and software development centers - all technical jobs. Now most are heavily staffed by Europeans and Asians. Fortunately for us those countries are able to provide what we need with hard science technically educated people who will lead us into the 21st century. Our educational system, however, seemed to be very good at producing a lot of lawyers and investment bankers – and we know where that led us. Last Thursday I received a West Hartford Education Association pamphlet. I was appalled

with the distortion and spin – at best it’s disingenuous. A yearly propaganda of fear. Every year, last year and this year, parents have indicated that their kids would suffer if they spoke out against the budget, and we have heard teachers actually telling their students to tell their parents to support the budget. This is inappropriate. It does not belong in the classroom. Dr. Sklarz has said it’s all about the kiddies. The U.S. education industry hasn’t been about the kiddies for years. It’s all about jobs, benefits and power. The pamphlet’s title, “Education is the Smartest Investment You Can Make.” We agree. However, in my terminology investment needs a positive return and I do not mean this as a joke. The only positive return I see is to the teachers, their yearly increases. It further implies that seven towns have already adopted the same relative percentage increases in their education budget. In fact, these towns have not finalized their budget. They are at the same point we are. Finally, we are told that a \$12.50 monthly tax investment will ensure skilled, employed and intelligent residents. I want the \$12.50 in my pocket, not everybody else’s. You want an educated workforce? The answer is simple. This November when we vote get rid of as many of the Board of Education as you can and replace them with business people who hire their workforce. Also at the same time let’s start working to eliminate tenure and binding arbitration. Now you will have a free market teacher pool. And also, are you aware that most of the...50 percent of the town employees don’t live in town? Why? The common response is West Hartford is too expensive. Nonresident employees do not recycle part of their salaries back into our town as they don’t pay the very property taxes they are forcing upon us. Incidentally, we now have the honor of having the highest property tax in the country. We understand that the education union at the state level told the town union to stand fast and not give in. It sounds a bit like Jim Calhoun, doesn’t it? Not one dime. When asked about him giving back since he earns 1.6 million, which I think is ridiculous, at least he does give us a world class basketball. What do we get in West Hartford education that is world class? What we get? As a couple of people said before test scores are dropping each year and we are now at the bottom of our DRG or District Reference Group. Hall and Conard are now rated 47 and 53. When I was here they were almost prep schools. College readiness rapidly decreasing. Remedial English and math are now the common courses for freshmen college students. U.S. News listed 25 Connecticut schools that received various awards. Not one West Hartford school was listed. The schools in Avon, Farmington, Simsbury and Hartford were listed. U.S. News rankings in December of last year and this year, no West Hartford school in the top 100 in the U.S. Great! And yet West Hartford educational spending has increased 61 percent between 2000 and 2007 from \$8,500 to \$11,500. Connecticut Magazine’s top 10 schools rank Avon number 3. They spend \$9,123 a student. I have 5 minutes. Okay. Well I’d just like to finish, Mr. Mayor.

President Slifka: Go ahead and finish, Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Kennedy: The solutions – basically clean house. Let’s get some new people running the Board of Education. The Town Council – not one more dime than 2008 for the Board of Education budget. The Town Council, embrace the citizen’s due diligent audit of the Board of Education and demand a line item budget format change like the town side and our Town Manager has put together. Collectively we should start working together to eliminate both tenure and binding arbitration. Tenure keeps a core of burned-out teachers

and binding arbitration is not the least bit democratic. Finally, we need to change the way education is funded. It should be funded by an income tax which places the costs squarely on the users and as a country we ought to look at the European and Asian models. They do a better job than we do with a heck of a lot less resources. Thank you.

President Slifka: I just want to address a couple things, Mr. Kennedy. I don't think you intended this so I want to clear it up. It sounded like you said West Hartford had the highest property taxes in the country?

Mr. Kennedy: No.

President Slifka: That is not the case? You're agreeing with me, right?

Mr. Kennedy: Yeah. Absolutely. Connecticut does. Connecticut.

President Slifka: Oh, Connecticut. Okay. Thank you. Well, at least clear up West Hartford here. And just because we've been trying to make sure everybody understands what roles the Council and Board has with respect to taxation that whether someone agrees or disagrees with your idea about the income tax it is not something that the Council or the Board is empowered to do legally. I just want to make sure people understand that. Okay. And I will just say one more thing which is... And I know Chairman Schmitt has addressed this earlier but I do want to point out that the Town Council also recognizes this fact that when we throw out comparisons to places like Avon and Simsbury, though they may seem attractive when you want to make an argument about the money I don't... We are comparing apples and oranges in terms of our student population and I think that you have to recognize if we're going to be in this together and recognize the demands that all taxpayers expect of the school system you have to understand the challenges that our teachers are working under is a very different student population as Dr. Schmitt had said... Reverend Schmitt, sorry. Is it both? Reverend Doctor Schmitt. You know, you get those...you get all those degrees. Somebody's got to recognize it. We're a much more challenging population than it was 25, 30 and more years ago and our teachers have a much more difficult job to do right now. We can discuss the rest of the system but I think we need to acknowledge uniformly that it is a very difficult job and different than the one that they may have been hired for when they came here several decades ago. Okay. Mr. Devine. I'm used to you calling on me but not the other way around. I'll bring the mike.

Mr. Devine: Thank you. Tom Devine. I live at 9 Ravenwood Road. I'm a West Hartford resident for 29 years, a teacher at Hall and Conard for 29 years. Three children through the West Hartford School System. My wife and I both teach at Hall. I'm on the WHEA rep council so I think I have a lot of bonafide-eeze to speak to issues that have come up tonight. I do want to thank the Board and the Town Council people. You do work hard. I've always thought you run an efficient and an uncorrupt town and I do give you credit for that. It seems that most of the things we ever argue about are things at the margins but this is a more serious case. I appreciate Reverend Schmitt saying that if the teachers make a concession of having a salary freeze for a year that that could, in your

words, you could promise that there would be no layoffs. You could promise that there would be no cuts in programs, but our friends in the West Hartford Taxpayer's Association are probably ready to promise that there would be a referendum and I'm not sure how you could square your promises to us, which I take on good faith, with the political reality that that's not a guarantee and we could be as good to you as we could possibly be and put our increase and our next year's salary on the line and still have ill result from the Taxpayer's Association.

Chairman Schmitt: Boy, am I glad you raised that point Tom because it would be pretty foolish to put your hard-earned bargained pay increase on the line if it could get yanked away because some people who had nothing to do with that process and weren't making the promises came along and caused us to have a referendum that took all of the money away. That can be managed, not in a particularly happy way but it can be managed in a way that puts pressure on everybody. Am I right, Rick, that we put a poison pill into the agreement... This is why I wanted to talk to you guys. This is the whole point. We can put a poison pill in that that says if this goes to a referendum it's all gone. It's all gone. The agreement goes back to the original contract and if this is referendumed... We're going to try to do the absolute best we can which is to say we're not going to spend a dime to use the Jim Calhoun phrase. We're not going to spend a dime more this year than we did last year but if that isn't good enough for you then folks, then all bets are off and we give these people the money that they bargained before because that seems fair. We don't want to put... We don't want to jeopardize your salaries for nothing. That wouldn't be fair. That wouldn't be appropriate. That's not our intention. You've already spoken. Let's find somebody who... John.

Mr. Hardy: John Hardy. 133 Pioneer Drive. I fancy myself an education supporter. Two kids in the schools. I made a spectacle of myself over the last several referenda wearing the yellow shirt and waving the yellow sign. I think that we have some very, very good teachers in the West Hartford Public School System. The members of the school administration will tell you that I'm not so easy to please with the education that my kids get on an individual basis and I see the superintendent sitting over there and he will attest that I sent him an email earlier this year in regards to one of my daughter's teachers asking him to find a way to clone that gentleman. That's how, and you know facetiously, but that was how pleased I was with this guy. Having said that we need to get to zero this year on the Board of Education budget very clearly. All of the elected officials in this room and some other folks in the administration or what not are painfully aware that I sent them a 12 page document where I did a thorough analysis of the Board of Ed budget and a lot of what I had in there were questions. A lot of what I had in there were suggestions to seek efficiencies and no question, we need to seek efficiencies and we need to pursue that. I think the way that we might do that going forward, I may have some disagreements with the methodology of the Taxpayer's Association but I certainly, you know, am on the same page in terms of let's see how much better we can deliver the services. But, you know, what else was in that document which was very painful to me was some pretty significant cuts in services to get to my zero and I didn't like doing them. The Board of Ed said just don't say don't cut this, don't cut that. Come to us with ideas so I came to them with ideas. There are many people in town, myself included,

who are not getting any raise in our compensation. I'm chairman of the Town Risk Management Advisory Board so I'm well aware of the employee benefit programs that are in our town. I do that in a living. Some of us don't have as generous benefits in the private sector and that's the way that those things go but I guess what I'm trying to say with respect to the WHEA and to its membership, I love most of you. I'm begging you...I'm begging you give it back to us this year. Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, John. I just want to point out, a few of my colleagues, particularly Mr. Brennan, suggested not entirely in jest that if the board and Dr. Schmitt and the WHEA felt like meeting now we'd be happy to adjourn the meeting since there seemed to be some good dialogue but we're only kidding. We know there's rules to this. To a slightly lighter note we wanted to mention this in the beginning. We forgot. You know, there was a gentleman who spoke at the very beginning of the last hearing and you may remember him. He's a minister in town and he had started a relatively new church and he got up and he said, you know, you're asking for ideas. I've got an idea. I need a place to house my congregation on Sundays and I've, you know, I've been trying to negotiate and get into one of the schools or something and I'm happy to help you and we'll pay and I just wanted to point out that right after that meeting we actually reached an agreement with him and he now has his services in the Town Hall auditorium, correct? On Sunday so some good things have come out of this and that was not one I would have proposed, you know, I think bringing together church and state like that but it sure worked out. Okay. Where were we? We had... Yes, back corner here.

Mr. Arbuglio: Hi. My name is Francis Arbuglio. I live at 31 Grassmere Avenue. I have a question to ask the Town Council people here. In the West Hartford News of March 19, 2009 you specified in it that you were going to cut the salaries of this town or freeze them. Well why are you saying there that you're going to take the money you cut in salaries and you're going to hire an energy engineer fulltime so that means you're going to put more expense on the salaries? That's contradicting yourself there.

President Slifka: Well, I'm going to see if Mr. Brennan would like to help out but we... That could be very easily explained. Mr. Brennan has been our representative to the Clean Energy Task Force and they recently produced a series of recommendations, which I'm sure he's going to clarify, that are saving us a lot of money so Tim...

Counselor Brennan: Alright. Thank you, Scott. The Clean Energy Task Force and a group of us put together a comprehensive energy plan. The value of that plan is roughly \$200,000 dollars if it were done in the private sector. There are a series of recommendations in it, all of which are meant to save money on a return on investment basis on a priority basis. Nothing in there is required. An energy manager is suggested as a way to save money. It's not something I even suggest to do right now. There are a number of ways to save money. Last night the Clean Energy Task Force, and I was with them, were in Duffy School. We performed an audit. Went through to see where, you know, where we could save money. I can assure you we will be saving money year after year after year if we implement the energy plan. We already talked about an energy block grant coming. It's \$574,000. We're going to be using that money and turning it into

more money by saving money over time so just understand that the manager issue is not something that's going to be implemented right away. Perhaps sometime, but only done if it's fiscally prudent.

President Slifka: Thank you, Tim. Okay. Mr. Chleblowski?

Mr. Chlebowski: Excuse me. You going to hold that for me? Okay. My name is Don Chlebowski I been in town too long. In fact somebody said to me what, you here? I says, yeah. What are you doing here? So one works against the other. When I came into this wonderful town back in the 60s it was pretty well-balanced. I mean, the whole thing. You know, the... Don't wave this. I had the option cause my son was in schools here and I did well with the town administration and everything but since then we've gone crazy. The reason I said that is because I don't think I am cause if I am I shouldn't be here. I should be in a home someplace. But anyway, the fact remains is that I don't think many of you here know and understand what a budget really is. I bet I could ask anyone here and I would get different answers cause... Don't tell me to get a dictionary because you don't know what that means but anyway, the way I understand the budget is you have so much money accumulated in the town. What is it Ron? Something like 213 million? Now I don't know what the ratio is between the town side and the education side. I don't know what it is but I bet it's more than 50 percent on one side than it is the other. I just bet that because it just seems like I came in this town and I said it's pretty well-balanced and I think everybody's going to be equally benefitting by it even over the long years. Wrong, because when I'm up where I am now I try to get some help and they say yeah, there is but they've added restrictions to my side but the other side, no restriction. Boy, that's fair I guess, by those that are getting it but the ones that aren't getting it that's not fair. But the fact remains is that we have to get a restructure over the system. The structure isn't too good because it's off-key. It's off-balance because I'd like to know through Ron what of the 213 million... How much is allocated for the education side and how much for the town side? Do you know that offhand? I'm putting him on the spot again. I'm going to know everybody quite well after today.

Mr. VanWinkle: It's not quite 60 school and 40 town but....

Mr. Chlebowski: I didn't say for the percentage but I said it's over 50.

Mr. VanWinkle: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chlebowski: Thank you. See, I was... But I didn't know how much but the fact remains is if we've got a true balance on the town side and we don't have that on the education side something's amiss there. That's why I think a restructuring of this whole thing would be in line here because... Now I'm going to favor my side because I'm on the retired end of it. I think it's retired, not retarded. Retired... That we don't need any kind of cutbacks. I came to this town because everybody was treated fairly but today fairness doesn't seem to be quite as I thought it was. Thank you very much.

President Slifka: Thank you Don. Good to see you again. You might be surprised to learn, though, that there's a document in my office which is a town guide produced by the League of Women Voters in 1975 and it has all the relevant town data about the budget and everything else and I by chance happened to look at it today before I came in here and in 1975 the percentage of spending from the town that went to municipal services, the town side, was 43 percent and to the education side was 57 percent and that was roughly 34 years ago so the percentages actually have not changed that much historically. Just food for thought. Okay. George, we're going to get back to you George, but let me call on the other folks. Okay. We'll do that.

Mr. Kennedy: In terms of the energy ...

President Slifka: Wait. Let's get the mike to you, George.

Mr. Kennedy: My name is George Kennedy. I retired from Northeast Utilities and the only thing I'd share with you if you haven't already checked it out is that Northeast Utilities had a rather extensive and impressive consulting service as opposed to hiring somebody that ends up with fringe benefits. Another solution that we found to augment our forces was that we had consultants who were very, very qualified engineers who would come in and what they did was they worked for free. They took a percentage of your savings at a given point in time and so these are two solutions you might want to look at and you could save that salary possibly. And plus you have a rotating person so you don't have the guy trying to make up downstream for what he did wrong. You've got a new guy looking at it constantly. Thank you.

Mr. Slifka: Just so we're clear though, the group that Tim has helped head up is exactly that. It is a series of volunteers from our community, our residents, who are professionals in this field and the report that we produced, the series of recommendations, what was the value of this? \$200,000 and it was produced for free so we're doing exactly what you suggested and let me let Tim address the rest.

Councilor Brennan: Right, so... And that's actually covered in the plan. You should take a look. That's called performance contracting and it's a good idea except the problem is if we use performance contracting we don't actually save money in our operating budget so for me, this is just my personal preference, I don't want to implement an energy savings, an energy measure that won't actually save us money in our budget. A couple of points of reference – the town has saved through efforts of very good contracting by members of the town staff over a million dollars in energy savings this year and that is reflected in the budget. It totals in gas and electric very smart contracting. Secondly, as mentioned, the value of that plan produced was \$200,000. The members of the committee include a very seasoned engineer who actually has a background in energy and professionally does this. He's doing this for free for the town. The value of the audit – I asked this question point blank. What did it cost last night to produce the audit in Duffy? They had done work in advance. We were there for hours last night and they'll be more time after that. It's \$0.25 a square foot. 80,000 square foot in Duffy, that's a \$20,000 voluntary service that we got last night so I can't give enough

kudos to these guys because they're giving back to the town as we've seen time and time again from volunteers and the volunteers are reflected in the budget. We need to talk about that too because if we squeeze and pressure away services, so go the volunteers, so go that value so...

President Slifka: Thank you, Tim. Okay. Yes, in the back.

Ms. Connor: My name is Keeley Connor. I live at 19 Woodpond Road and I'm one of George's neighbors and George, I just wanted to make just one point. You talked about that you were at Northeast Utilities and the talented consultants. You talked a lot about business and how they could run the schools better. Well, I guess that I was a talented consultant at Northeast Utilities. I used to be an engineer and now I'm a physics teacher at Conard and I have to tell you, as far as my knowledge, my... Yeah, I made a lot more money as an engineer and it was great but my knowledge compared to the teachers - I wish they were all here - is nothing. These people are brilliant. You have a lot of negative things to say about teachers and I don't think you really get it because I was an engineer for years and I was one of the first women engineers that worked for my company and then consulted for Northeast Utilities for 10 years and I don't see anybody like the teachers that we work with. They're brilliant. You can't compare them and you've got to be careful where you go with your argument. I mean, discuss taxes. Yeah, you had a lot of negative things to say about teachers. Okay. You said business should so that's all I'm saying is that just...

President Slifka: Okay. Okay.

Ms. Connor: I don't... I used to think the same thing until I got involved in education.

President Slifka: Okay. Thank you. Anyone else? Yes, right here. And we've got you next.

Mr. Joyce: John Joyce, 170 South Main Street. You know, I come to... I go to a lot of the Board of Education meetings and I make comments. I usually don't come to the Town Council just because of time constraints. You're probably thankful for that. One of the things I believe in very strongly about this town is in its resilience. I don't believe in the concept of excellence without exception. I don't think that would even make sense, but I do believe with resilience without exception and whatever we have to go through because of this crisis we will get through, even if it means we have to increase the class size or keep the class size as it is this year or reduce paras because we have great citizens that will come forth and volunteer and participate more fully in the education of their children. As a matter of fact, when you get our children they are already very sophisticated and the change in demographics has made this a much better place. You know, I grew up here. I went to these schools and I am just enthralled with the demographics that exist right now and the value that brings to me and to my family and to my children. It's a much better place to be. If Robert Sisk is right that what drives our expenses are the benefits, my question to you all is what are we going to do with that

because even if we get these concessions for this year, next year we'll be back at the same place and we're already talking about cutting a lot of services so those services will be gone and we'll have these expenses coming back at us. What are we going to do with that? I think that we all have to get together and I know the Board of Education has a website where suggestions have gone in and I think there's 130 suggestions as of March 1. It hasn't been updated but I know there have been more suggestions. I think we all have to come together and put our minds together and work together because there are still a lot of great ideas out there that aren't on the table right now and even if we have to change temporarily...

President Slifka: Do you have any you'd like to suggest? We're here. We've got a couple weeks left till we vote.

Mr. Joyce: Well, I actually sent...

President Slifka: I'd like to know what they are.

Mr. Joyce: I actually sent a list to the West Hartford website but I do have a couple more. One is that I heard at the last Board of Ed meeting that we spend \$600,000 on athletics, our sports. I wouldn't mind personally for a year or two or several to have one team out of both high schools compete, you know, amongst the region's larger schools which would save us \$300,000. You know? One team for each gender. You know I also think that... I mentioned at a Board of Ed meeting if we worked to graduate some of our students earlier we could save, you know, expenses for teachers and for, you know, operating expenses. You know, when I graduated, if I compare myself to the graduates of today I'm really inadequate. You know, many of our 11th graders are very, very sophisticated and we hold them back by the way the system is structured and we have them remain for another year. I made these comments at the Board of Ed meeting before last so they're available. My time is up. And I also think that we should look at estate and gift planning. You know, there are many people who donate their inheritance to universities. I mean, why not back to the town and I know nothing about the conveyance tax except that I had paid it a couple times but if the school system maintains and enhances the property taxes, well maybe we should increase the conveyance tax so we get some of that back to us or... I don't know if that's possible. Or, you know, we could voluntarily ask for a program where the seller and the realtor are kicking back a half a percent each to the town for expenses. Thank you.

President Slifka: The conveyance tax, Mr. Joyce, is a state tax so it is completely under the control of the state. We don't have any power over it's amount, how to use it, etc... I'll just address the benefits for a second. As Mr. Sisk indicated, the issue right now is there are benefits that cost us a lot of money that we can't change. Those are all in the past. They go, you know, for people who worked here 20, 30, 40 years ago. What we can do is attempt to control them in the future and I think you have seen if you look at the more recent labor agreements and add the teachers to that as well – they're included in that – that you have seen more and more of that be limited so that we can control the growth of those expenses in the future years. The problem is there's going to be this gap

where until we catch up to where we, you know, frankly the folks that worked her a long time ago and had more generous benefits have passed on we are on the hook for that but at a certain point going forward it is a much better picture. The hard part is how do we get to that point? How do we keep this town together until we can get to that point? In the future it gets much better but that is some time off but one of the good news...pieces of good news – we talked about this a little bit last time in reference to some questions about the pension plan and our long-term healthcare reserve – was that these are things that West Hartford has actually gotten under control to the extent that any community can get them under control. I see Mr. Hardy nodding cause he's the chair of our Risk Management Advisory Board. He knows that and we are considered a model for how these things have been controlled. Again, however, we are still essentially living in the past with debt. When folks who are working here today retire it will be different but they're not there yet and we're still paying for other folks. Terry, I didn't know if you wanted to address anything else.

Chairman Schmitt: Only one thing. It's tangential and you and I should talk about this later but your idea that you had a couple of weeks ago about the high schools resonated with me for a couple of reasons about high school students, seniors in high school, and it reminds me that there was one thing that I forgot to mention at the beginning of today. I did mention it Tuesday night again and that was that there had been a proposal on the table to cut kindergarten from full-day to half-day in six schools in the town and that idea is off the table. My colleagues have made it abundantly clear that they do not want to consider that issue and part of that made me think that thinking about saving money by making kindergarten half-day is exactly the opposite of what all the educational information tells us. Would it be investing more the earlier the kids are? If we were going to do something half-day it ought to be senior year in high school and that's what fits in with your idea in some way. I mean, we ought to... We might want to look at... If cost savings are that desperate than that's the place to do it because it will do the least educational damage because the amount of money that we put in for kindergarten and prekindergarten has massive educational benefits. That's where you want to work with the kids and make the most impact so I just say that that's one of several ideas you had, John, that have resonated and that we're at least thinking about, rattling around in there so...Okay. Boy, I don't know about you guys but I am really ready to go home. But no, you've got a hand up. We don't want to... You had it up so go ahead. Yes. You've been waiting a long time. Absolutely.

Ms. Goodman: My name is Merle Goodman. I live at 120 Fuller Drive. I am committed to West Hartford succeeding in good and hard times. I thought there was a hiring freeze in these hard times. Why are we hiring 10 new teachers that present administrators should cover? Why are we hiring a new security person at 11 Wampanoag Road in the education budget and even though it was discussed somewhat about the energy manager why are we hiring a new energy manager from the proposed energy savings the council voted on? The hiring of an energy manager is in the document which was voted on by the Council so if it's voted on it means that everything in there is accepted. Spending is not saving.

President Slifka: Thank you. Let me give you the school stuff but let me just address the energy one. As we've attempted to explain, the town unanimously, all my colleagues have supported this, voted for a series of recommendations. It is not an action plan. The recommendation means we'll explore hiring. It doesn't mean we're actually hiring anybody so as Tim Brennan tried to explain before we are not hiring an energy manager. Again I want to make that very clear. This is on the record. We are not hiring an energy manager and the Town Council has a hiring freeze in place. It remains in place so we now... We have to study things in the future and say some day we may consider hiring people in other ways. We do that with our police force. We do that with lots of areas but we're not doing it. The hiring freeze is in place. The energy manager is not being hired right now. Terry, for the rest...

Chairman Schmitt: Yeah, in terms of the teacher hiring it would be intriguing if we could simply say well, okay, the teacher in fourth grade retired or left or went someplace else so we won't hire someone there. Unfortunately the 24 kids still show up and they need somebody in the room and we have a contracted agreement that says that we will keep class sizes at a certain level in every place so when people leave we have to hire based on where the kids are in the classes so to a degree, unless we change the class sizes again, we have to hire those teachers. It's that simple for us. Alright. Anyone else?

President Slifka: Oh, the security guard.

Chairman Schmitt: I don't have the vaguest notion about the security guard. Who has any idea about the security guard? I don't know diddly squat about this.

Tim Dunn: Yeah, there was a security officer added for Wampanoag Drive for this year based upon need. Next year's budget reduces the number of security officers in the district.

Chairman Schmitt: Okay, so we hired him this year and he's gone next year, or she. Okay.

President Slifka: Are there any other hands? Oh, yes. I'm sorry. Right here.

Mr. Muldoon: My name is Gary Muldoon. I live on 94 Ledge Wood Road and I have a list of towns that don't have all-day kindergarten – Bristol, Simsbury, Avon, Farmington, Wethersfield, Glastonbury, Berlin, Rocky Hill, South Windsor... I mean if all these towns don't feel that it is necessary to have all-day kindergarten I don't see how we can be possibly, you know, digging our heels in so deep over this issue because these are basically towns that we're...in our economic group I would think. You know? Only some of the, like East Windsor and Manchester... Manchester only has some where they have all-day kindergarten. And like I said, I'm for education but some of these things that we're going to cut my kids didn't have and so like I said I would never say hey, my kids are out. The heck with you guys. But my kids didn't have all-day kindergarten. They didn't have the Quest program which is another thing they're digging their heels in and I don't think is that important, these language programs, things like that. These

things have all been added over the years, you know? So that's one thing and another thing is the... This always seemed to bother me and that's why I always thought that the Prospect Street Firehouse was closed. I thought they closed it 20 years ago. Then it came up that, you know, they were talking about closing it again and our Town Council said that, you know, that it's public safety and we can't do anything with public safety but the thing is is that we have a fulltime fire department, 90 fulltime fire people where most of these suburbs have, you know, a volunteer. Newington, half our size, has not one fulltime fireman. We have 90 fulltime fire people and it's very expensive because of these salaries and, you know, benefits and things like that, retirees and...a big expense so we have to deal with that. We just can't say...take it off the board and say well, this is public safety. We can't do anything. We're pounding education over here but we're going to say we can't do anything with public safety? I believe the Prospect Street firehouse should have been closed or we should reduce the number of firehouses. This is something we have to do. We have to... And the reason I'm bringing that up too is because the fire departments used to run over their budget by almost a half a million dollars every year. Why? Why can't we do something about that?

President Slifka: Why don't you take the kindergarten first? Then we'll do the firehouse.

Chairman Schmitt: Okay. You know, one of the things...and I'm actually going to go back to something you said, George. One of the things... It's a problem. Those are good questions in terms of why do we have all-day K and all of these other places around don't and why are some towns this way and other towns don't have gifted and talented the way that we have gifted and talented and again I want to go back to George's thing saying that our expenditures per capita are, I forget where it was but he said 68 percent or 63 percent it went up in those numbers of years and you know what? All of that's true. All that's true but the fact is that during that same period the expenditures in all the rest of the towns in the state of Connecticut went up more because during that same period our per capita spending went down in relationship to every other town. We are now at 89. We are 89th out of 169 towns in per capita spending on our children. When your children were in school, when, you know, you were around for awhile but 25 years ago...25 years ago we were in the top 10 of per capita spending so our... Even though the spending's going up, and I don't deny that. It's a fact. You can't deny it but in comparison to what the rest of the towns in Connecticut are paying it's been going down. We've been paying less and less and the point in that that I'm making is that it's tough to make those comparisons on an individual basis, on an individual program basis. Yes, we have all-day K but it means we don't have something else if these other towns do. We've allocated our money in the way that we think that it does the most good, that our expert leaders think that it does the most good and in our town... First of all, it is very obvious, oh boy, is it obvious that parents really want kindergarten all-day for their kids. It is also educationally significant that kindergarten...that the dramatic effect that you have on a child's education... The earlier you get to them the better and that is particularly important for children that are coming from disadvantaged households so we've allocated some of our funds that way but overall, overall our spending is... which may be high but it's not out of line in relationship to what's going on in the rest of the state. The fact of the matter is that's what education costs all over the state right now. The difference here

is we think we have a very, very good product with that and that's where I might disagree with some other things I've heard tonight. I think we do a very good job with the money we spend here and we're committed to it and I trust and respect what our leaders have given us in terms of their planning so the all-day K is an issue so...

President Slifka: Regarding the firehouse... George, we'll get you. If you're not familiar with all the firehouses in town let me be clear. There is a firehouse that is on Prospect Avenue right on the Hartford/West Hartford border. It is the oldest of our firehouses. I believe it is in excess of 100 years old. It's very difficult for the trucks that we have these days to even get through the doors. Your statement seemed to be that we refused to close it in order to protect public safety and Deputy Mayor Coursey, the Chairman of our Public Safety Committee, is here. The reason you even heard about that is actually because this Council, all nine of us last year proposed closing it. We're the ones that decided to do that. We actually voted for it and authorized the town manager at the time to close it. What we discovered was that for the time being, because we don't get any savings in personnel, that it wasn't worth it at the time. Now, cause right now in our fire contract we have a provision called minimum staffing. It means that we're required to keep X number of firefighters on duty at all times, a topic that will come up when we renegotiate the contract in a short time. The savings right now were only really the heating and cooling costs of the building which were fairly minimal. I mean, every dollar counts obviously but they were only...only those costs would be saved right now. Maybe we'd get something if we were to sell the building too but really, as you point out, the savings is in the personnel and so it's being studied at the moment. It's being discussed with our fire department right now, something that you will see come up again in future years, and the fire chief had started this discussion by saying he thought that it was something worth exploring because you could, with modern apparatus and such, handle a town of this size with only the four firehouses out of the five. It's still something that we're trying to get a conclusion for but the reason it didn't get closed last year was essentially there was not enough savings to really justify the potential public safety risk, not that we had an aversion to the concept as a whole. George?

Mr. Kennedy: We are 88, just as you suggested but I have a rather interesting item here in which I will make a point of getting to you and it's from School Diggers. It's off the internet. I didn't make up the numbers. West Hartford is 88. We spend, according to this, \$11,939 a pupil. Simsbury is number 10. They spend \$11,739 per pupil. Greenwich is 82nd. I was absolutely shocked by that. They spend \$16,924. Now as far as I know, Greenwich doesn't have a demographic shift of any magnitude. They're just spending money but they're only 82nd. I'll make a copy of this for you. I mean I was shocked by the numbers.

Chairman Schmitt: You could give them by Chip, who's probably done a better job of looking at that kind of thing. That is a little bit strange. I don't know about those numbers. Greenwich does have a demographic problem similar to ours as a matter of fact. They just have a much higher high end than we do. Way much higher high end than we do so thankfully... You should be thankful we're not trying to spend at those levels so... Alright.

President Slifka: One second. My colleague, Mr. Visconti, would like to do a duet with me.

Councilman Visconti: Oh, sure. A quick fact or I'd like to mention. I did some research with Tim Dunn in the back of the room, on absentees in our school system. Approximately 375 children are absent every day in this town which is the equivalent of an elementary school absent every day. Think about the ramifications of education, make-up tests, classrooms, empty busses... We're going to need to do a lot more with that - I have one child left in the school system - with bringing our kids in on time because it is affecting much, much more than we realize. It's a large absentee number and I think it's growing. Thank you.

President Slifka: Okay. We were done. Mr. Chlebowski.

Mr. Chlebowski: I can't believe that... Oh, thank you. Now I can save my voice. I can't believe that this town with 213 million dollars can't resolve a current budget. I can't believe it. Either I'm sick or I should be someplace else but 213 million dollars. I don't need that to fool around but I'm just saying we should...we should easily make that and have a little reserve but one gentleman or somebody over there said being a retiree that I have plenty of time. Yeah, but I don't have the money. Maybe he's got less time and more money. How about that?

President Slifka: Okay.

Mr. Chlebowski: How do you balance that? Thank you.

President Slifka: Thank you, Don. I think Mr. Arbuglio behind you had a question?

Mr. Arbuglio: Fran Arbuglio, 31 Grassmere Avenue, West Hartford. I have two simple questions that I haven't seen in the news or anybody's brought up. Are we in this town resurfacing roads this year? Do you know what I mean by resurfacing roads? Dig up roads that really need repair instead of patching them up? That's costly and I know that goes out for bids. Also, how many police cruisers in this town are we replacing this year which I haven't seen in the budget also and that's very expensive also too so, I mean, I know we're looking at budgets here but if this affects... How much is this going to affect taxes in this town if we do do the roads and how many police vehicles are we going to purchase? Could you give me an idea there please? I appreciate it.

President Slifka: Mr. VanWinkle.

Mr. VanWinkle: There are no cruisers in the budget this year. We are not purchasing any. None are allocated in the budget so that's the answer to your second question. We do seven miles of road... We try to do seven miles of road a year in the town of West Hartford. There are 215 miles of roads in West Hartford, all the way from here to Philadelphia. A road lasts about 30 years. Some do, some don't but at a 30 year cycle 7

miles gets you 210 so we try to resurface or replace our streets at that rate. That comes out of a bonded account, not from the general fund so we borrow money to do that. This year we have allocated approximately 4 million dollars for resurfacing and reconstruction.

President Slifka: Okay. Anyone else? Well, seeing no hands we want to thank you again for partaking in this. Again this is an unprecedented year and I think you've set some great traditions here for budget time. A couple of things on the calendar just so you walk away with the information. There may be more for you at home. The Board of Education is...Terry announced earlier tonight will not be voting on its budget next Tuesday the 7th. It will be voting on April 21 and additionally the Town Council for reasons related to the charter is likely to be voting on the budget on April 23, which is a Thursday two days after the Board rather than the following Tuesday. We'll be explaining that a little bit more at our next meeting. Thank you again and have a great night.

The Public Hearing was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Essie S. Labrot
Town Clerk/Council Clerk

/sab