

Special Meeting
Town of North Stonington
Board of Selectmen Board of Education Board of Finance
North Stonington Elementary School Cafeteria
January 8, 2020
6:00 p.m.

A joint meeting of the Boards of Selectmen, Education, and Finance was held on Wednesday, January 8, 2020, at 6:00 p.m. in the North Stonington Elementary School Cafeteria. Present for the Board of Selectmen were Mr. Urgo, Ms. Kincaid, Mr. Carlson, and Ms. Dias; present for the Board of Education were Mrs. Wagner, Mr. Karpinski, Ms. Welborn, Mr. McCord, Dr. Robert, Mrs. Mastroianni and Mr. Nero; and present for the Board of Finance was Mr. Spring, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Smith, Mrs. Howell, Mr. Simonds, and Mrs. Akin. Also present were Senator Heather Somers and Representative Rotella.

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order at 6:10 p.m. by First Selectman Urgo. Board members introduced themselves. Mr. Urgo explained how the meeting will run. He thanked everyone for coming.

2. The Pledge of Allegiance – The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Future Strategies – a. Board of Selectmen – Mr. Urgo gave highlights of things happening in town including the boards and commissions being full and the number one priority being sewer and water in the industrial areas. He elaborated. He spoke of planning and zoning. He said activity on Wintechog Hill Rd. will be up-coming and he explained. He spoke of the town becoming a certified local government and he explained. A more detailed presentation will be forthcoming. He said what the town needs from Hartford is a more equal distribution of the Pequot Fund and he elaborated. It's not equitable – the town is not getting our fair share. LOCIP is pretty flat and continues to be reduced. Mr. Urgo said we haven't received our town aid road yet and he was hoping to see STEEP funds. He wanted to bring those to their attention.

b. Board of Education – Mrs. Wagner spoke of the PCBs discovered and that it cost the town close to a million dollars. She wondered if there was any place to get relief on that. She asked about and commented that you get penalized for doing well. She asked if anything was happening with regionalization. We are working with some area towns and she elaborated.

c. Board of Finance – Mr. Spring said they are in the budget season. He elaborated. The grand list is stagnant. He can't be more emphatic about bringing in more economic development. He spoke about the last reevaluation was in 2010; the best he has seen in recent evaluations is 2-3% higher. Mr. Spring commented it is because of the state of the state that we are not drawing people in. We are doing our best to draw in people to our town. The trend line demonstrates that we are managing our town fiscally in a responsible way and he said we can't continue to look at the expenditure side and continue to cut. Mr. Urgo said we try to do what we can here and he elaborated. He said they are referring to North Stonington as the Heart of Southeastern Connecticut. He hopes

our requests fall on ears that are listening. He said we want to make the impression that Connecticut is the place you want to be.

4. Legislative Priorities – a. Senator Heather Somers – Senator Somers said the STEEP grant system is going to change. If you had anything in the hopper you need to re-file. She gave background on the STEEP grants. The release of the money is totally up to the governor. There is additional money set aside totaling maybe 55 million dollars. The priority will be on regional projects according to what she has been told. Mr. Spring asked how STEEP grants work. Senator Somers said you have to have a project that has been planned and file an application. The maximum amount is \$500,000. It can be used towards a senior center, making some type of improvement to a municipal building, etc. The town has to front the money and then the town will be reimbursed. Questions were asked and answered. Once you get a STEEP grant you can't go back for another 3 years. Every town in Connecticut asks for money for infrastructure. There is not a large pool of money for infrastructure. She had further explanation. She said we continue to lose population. We need to market Connecticut as new. The ECS should be locked in. She said we have a deficit in Connecticut but it is small compared to what it has been. There is a huge fund balance and she explained it can be used for a variety of things. A large portion is being used for the hospital settlement.

b. Representative Kate Rotella – Representative Rotella said what Senator Somers said is spot on. She is hoping that funding gets released soon. ECS looks pretty solid at this point. For any project you put in for STEEP, regional and economic impact will be a priority. You put the grant in yourself and some go through COG. The Pequot Fund has been her pet peeve since she got there. She said the Senator feels the same way. The towns impacted the most don't get their fair share. Questions were asked and answered. She spoke of PCBs. She said you can speak to the department of education about reimbursement on that. Senator Somers said they did pass legislation regarding that. Questions were asked and answered. The Pequot fund is supposed to have a formula and she elaborated. They are both on the appropriations committee. She had further explanation. She has a bill in to stabilize the nine towns so they would get a certain percentage of the bump-up and she elaborated. She explained about towns having nothing to do with a new casino getting funding. Mr. Carlson asked what their position is on tolls. Senator Somers said she has always been against tolls. There is no lockbox money – that was taken out. She is against tolling trucks when there is a lawsuit in another state. Questions were asked and answered. There supposedly is going to be a toll bill that is going to come out. The governor is supposed to be having a meeting in Westport on Sunday. She is ready to have a vote and she elaborated. The last bill they heard was it would go to a third party that can raise the tolls. Representative Rotella hasn't seen the plan yet so she can't make a definitive statement on it. The plan she saw was for tractor-trailers and she explained. She said regardless of the lawsuit, the bill has to be paid and tractor trailers do the most damage. She elaborated. If we do this, she would like to have some authority and see it come back to the legislature. She hasn't seen the plan but one way or another we have to pay. She elaborated. Questions were asked and answered. Senator Somers had further comment. She said there are other alternatives to tolling. There are low interest loans through the federal government. Mr. Nero spoke of the comprehensive reform on teacher evaluation. We developed a hybrid of the SEED document. He said his

teachers and principals spend a lot of time scripting and writing plans, etc. He would like to see some wiggle room on that and he had further comment. He spoke of Rhode Island backing off on it. He would ask for consideration on that. Mr. Mullane, citizen, said there should be no more unfunded mandates. He said people move to this state to this area. He spoke of the state troopers charge rate. He said the state of Connecticut doesn't support education. They come to Connecticut to the small towns for the education. The STEEP grant has no education consideration – it is a political consideration and he elaborated. Pequot Fund needs to be preserved to at least what we have. He has been involved for 40 years – the state always cuts funding. The performance factor for quality-of-life are the boards sitting here. He had further comment. The legislation has never helped us. It's a political decision for whoever is in the majority. Mr. Brian Rathbun, citizen, said he has lived here since 1958. He said his father said the state was a farming state. He said we are being taxed and taxed and he elaborated. We have to stop the taxes. We have to promote our farms especially in our town. He elaborated. He spoke of all the raises in Hartford. He wondered why he doesn't get a vote on that. Senior citizens and the rich are moving out leaving the poor here. Now we have taxation with representation. He said his farmer neighbors are struggling. He had further comment. He was hoping they would take a little more time to promote farming. Mrs. Kincaid asked both of them about Electric Boat. Senator Somers said she meets regularly with Electric Boat. They need housing for the people they are trying to bring in and they want certain things that we can't provide and she elaborated. They also need to feel engaged in their community. She works with them on focus groups and she elaborated. Mrs. Wagner said we just got done with negotiations and was wondering if there was discussion about getting rid of binding arbitration. Both the Senator and Representative said it is brought up every year. Board members wondered what the resistance was and Senator Somers said the teachers' union is strong and they just don't have the votes. Representative Rotella said the Senator was right. She elaborated. Dr. Robert asked about EDTPA and what they thought of it. Senator Somers said she is not familiar with that enough to answer. Dr. Robert asked how much the state makes from that and they will get that information to them. There was discussion. Ms. Welborn asked why there wasn't more discussion and forward thinking to rectify these situations. There was further discussion. Mr. Urgo had comment. The Board of Education left for their meeting at 7:05 p.m. Mrs. Howell had comment and mentioned that people she knows that have moved out of state pay so much less for health care. She mentioned the huge increases in their fees. There was discussion. They explained the state mandates and that every company assumes every person is going to be having those procedures. Senator Somers said they cannot put a cap on rate increases – the commission approves those. The governor is going to do two benchmark orders – they will put a number on what procedures should cost and she explained. Senator Somers said she has a bill in regarding prescription drugs and rebates and she explained. She said they would have to base the cost including any rebates they get. There was further comment. The Family Medical Leave Act was discussed. Senator Somers spoke of New York's workers compensation rider about paid family leave. She elaborated and explained.

On a motion by Mr. Spring, seconded by Mr. Carlson, the Boards voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Roberta T. McCarthy, Secretary to the Board of Education