

## Better Budget Process Suggestions

The Goal: To build community consensus around programs and spending priorities through improved communication and increased citizen participation.

### **1. Better Budget Information**

- Place all municipal and CIP budget-related information in a separate, unique area within the Town website, similar to the budget page on the Schools website.
- Update all budget information, including the valuable "Budget in Brief," frequently and in a timely manner.
- The budget areas of both the Town and Schools website should contain a frequently updated "Budget Facts" page that answers common questions and corrects misinformation.
- Provide meaningful data measuring West Hartford's expenditures and efficiency against other towns'.
- Take prompt, proactive steps to correct inaccurate information published or circulated about the budget.
- Online budget documents should be bookmarked and searchable.
- Advertise the availability of budget information (ListServ, newspapers, etc.).

### **2. A More Participatory Process**

- Make the Council's budget deliberation process more accessible to the public. Possible options for achieving this objective include...
  - Holding subcommittee meetings where "workshop" work on the Town budget is done in the evening.
  - Recording subcommittee meetings for broadcast on public access TV.
  - Conducting a series of evening workshops (similar to those held by the Board of Education) during the time period after the Manager's proposed budget presentation and before the start of public hearings.
- The Board of Education should hold one public question and answer meeting in the period after its budget workshops and before its public hearing.
- The Council should hold a similar meeting in the period after the Manager's proposed budget presentation and before the start of its public hearings.
- At least two joint Council/Board public meetings regarding spending and programming should be held each fall and winter before the budget is presented.
- All meetings, including those of subcommittees, should be better-advertised (ListServ, newspapers, etc.).

### **3. More Accessible Town Documents**

- Proposed resolutions and ordinances, as well as reports and materials, should be posted online in advance of Council meetings. Paper copies should be available to the public at Council meetings. For the benefit of TV viewers, the text of resolutions and ordinances, or at least a faithful summary of them, should be read aloud at meetings before the Council votes.
- Post subcommittee agendas in advance of meetings on a more consistent basis.
- Subcommittee meeting minutes should be more complete. Post handouts and other reference materials from these meetings.
- Enhance ListServ so that residents can subscribe to agendas and documents for specific governmental bodies.

### **4. Improved Town Department and Program Budget Pages**

- Create a cover sheet which highlights key points, changes from the previous year and an explanation of what factors are driving these changes.
- Sections by department and program (page numbers commencing with "1") should be revised to provide more detail and transparency. Specifically, the "SUMMARY OF REVENUES" at the end

of each department description needs to be moved forward to appear just prior to the heading "BUDGET & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS," and not provided as an afterthought.

- The "SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES" also appearing at the end of each department section needs to be moved forward and integrated into the separate "SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES BY PROGRAM."
- Each program listed ought to be accompanied by the level of detailed costing data for personnel, supply and benefits that are now provided only in aggregate at the end of the section.
- The accompanying explanatory passages found under "BUDGET & PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS" should provide more complete and sufficient explanation of programmatic expenses. The underlying detailed accounting entries for each expenditure category (actual for past FY, estimated for current FY, proposed for future FY) for each and every program need to be made public and revised as the budget process unfolds. They could be included in the budget book, or available via "hyperlink" from the main budget document.

#### **5. A More Detailed CIP Budget**

- CIP budget pages should be more specific as to project descriptions and expenditure schedules.
- Engage the public earlier and more extensively in discussing proposed capital expenditures and setting priorities.

#### **6. Improved Education Budget Pages**

- Eliminate inconsistencies in enrollment information. Include all Pre-K students.
- Eliminate inconsistencies in employee counts. Include all personnel in position counts, both on summary and program pages—paras, TAs, cafeteria workers, etc.
- Allocate personnel, to the greatest extent possible, to the specific programs they serve.
- Include the Position Summary in the online budget.
- In the "C" section, better define the various expenditure and revenue totals found on the "Fiscal Summary" pages and reconcile them with those found on the "Budget Summary" pages.
- Present all Pre-K programs in the body of the budget and in a manner consistent with other programs.
- Streamline the Appendices (Budget Supplement and Financial Worksheets), incorporating information into the body of the budget wherever practicable. Include them in the paper budget books provided to the public.

#### **7. Better Disclosure of Personnel Costs**

- Report at Council and Board meetings, and post online, the results of collective bargaining agreements. Include a review of the process and course of negotiations, a benchmarking of the results to similar public bargaining units (both in West Hartford and beyond), and an objective discussion of the employees' roles and responsibilities defining the compensation - including comparisons to relevant private sector positions. Union leadership should participate.
- Post employee compensation packages, both collectively-bargained and executive non-union.

#### **8. More Attention to Sustainability**

- Make public Town analyses regarding the long-term sustainability of public spending in West Hartford.
- Include this topic in community discussions of spending and programming.

#### **9. More Information about Cost Control**

- Provide specific information to the public regarding both ongoing and planned efforts to control costs and increase efficiency.
- Where they do not exist, institute regular procedures for evaluating the efficiency and efficacy of all Town and School programs and services. Regularly disclose the results of such evaluations.
- Improve employee suggestion programs.