

For Immediate Release



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Mayor Leclerc's FY 2020 Budget Message

East Hartford, CT— Every year, I have worked hard together with my incredible finance director and my professional and dedicated team of directors to create a fiscally responsible budget. Together with the Town Council and over the course of several weeks we cull each line of the budget and support each line item. A process that despite having zero increases on the 250-page document, aside from nearly all of contractual negotiated salaries, maintains all town services and supports the broad and diverse responsibilities we have as a town service provider.

On Tuesday night, the Town Council adopted the 2020 budget of \$191.4 million and it represents a 0.7 percent spending increase over last year, in accordance with our commitment to keeping our costs low and in balance with our revenue. The adopted mill rate is 49.11 for real estate and personal property while remaining at 45 for motor vehicles.

This budget put forth to the Town Council was a fiscally responsible budget, and although we continually strive to keep spending in check, we are also reliant upon state funding, which has become sometimes unreliable in the fiscal environment on the state and federal level.

With respect to the Board of Education, I have allocated \$91.7 million which is an increase of \$971 thousand or 1.1%. This increase, when coupled with expected Alliance Grant increases from the State, will allow the BOE to maintain existing staffing in order to provide a solid education to all students while confronting \$2 million of rising medical costs and \$1.4 million of negotiated labor contract increases.

Like nearly all municipalities, the Town struggles to fund its unfunded pension obligation. Accordingly, nearly \$1 million of additional funding is directed toward our Defined Benefit pension plan as we fund normal costs and reduce the expected rate of return from 7.65% to 7.6%. It should be noted that the Defined Benefit plan is closed to all non-public safety employees hired after January 1, 2006.

With that being said, we have an ambitious year ahead. Among many goals, the town will begin the process of competitively bidding out waste collection with recycling, in an effort to reduce the overall cost to the taxpayers through permanent staffing reductions by attrition and market driven efficiency. In future years, through the use of market competition, the town will avoid the cost of replacing our fleet of automated waste trucks totaling \$2.5 million. In addition, we are rethinking our policy of full depth road reclamation and amending the approach so that more milling and repaving is completed on more roads, allowing the annual road miles paved to increase from about six to ten miles per year. This approach will allow for more road paving improvements to be completed with the same dollars, but with significantly less neighborhood disruption.

Additionally, the renovation of the former Blessed Sacrament Church into the town's new Senior Center is in the planning stages and being bid for 2019 construction. This \$6.8 million renovation will deliver a center for expanded programming and socialization. The expansion and renovation of the historic Wickham Library is also getting underway and in the process of being bid for construction in the summer of 2019. This \$1.7 million expansion and renovation will make the building handicapped accessible and will be used by the Raymond Library to expand programming and the geographic reach of its operation, while preserving this historic asset.

We have committed the town to a more robust and operationally sound Information Technology operation with the funding of a shared Chief Information Officer position with the BOE and an allocation of capital money in the amount of \$250 thousand to make harder the server infrastructure. Using surplus funding from an open engineering position, the town has temporarily employed a Geographical Information System trained specialist to begin to centralize the town's property mapping. Future uses of the GIS system include emergency response, bus, refuse, recycling, leaf collection, and plowing routing, as well as better information for the Assessor, Engineering, Fire, Police, Public Works, and Planning.

My main priority with this budget was to continue to deliver a host of municipal services provided by the Town, including Education, Public Safety such as Police, Fire, and Paramedic response, curbside refuse, bulky waste pickup, leaf collection pickup, elderly and disabled transportation subsidies and tax reductions for veterans, seniors and disabled citizens. My goal is to maintain the high level of service we have provided in the past, while controlling the costs.

I would like to close by thanking the Town Council, my directors and our town staff as well as the Superintendent, Board of Education and legislative delegation for working cooperatively and bringing to bear a responsible budget that supports town services and education and helps the tax increase below the rate of inflation.