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**May 8, 2025**

**Dear Residents of the Town of Westport,**

It has been, and continues to be, a great privilege to serve the Town of Westport in several roles, including as Chair of the School Committee, as a member of the Finance Committee, and as someone devoted to strengthening civic life and public trust.

While I hold these positions, I want to make clear that the thoughts I share here are my own. They reflect my personal experience and perspective, not the official position of the School Committee or any other body.

Of all the roles I've taken on in Westport, nothing has been more frustrating, or more revealing, than my time on the Finance Committee.

I've always said the tension between the "town side" and the "school side" is unnecessary. We should be working together. But it is difficult to build bridges when it seems that some are busy lighting matches.

Seeking straight answers on the Finance Committee has been at times difficult — and that goes well beyond the budget of any single department. What I've witnessed firsthand is a culture where, too often, asking tough questions is treated as an annoyance, and accountability is either brushed off as an inconvenience or wielded so aggressively it borders on micromanagement — depending entirely on which department happens to be in the hot seat.

To be clear, there are members of the committee who approach their role with genuine thoughtfulness and integrity, and I sincerely appreciate their efforts. But the broader dynamic remains inconsistent, and in some cases, seems to be driven more by personal agendas and selective priorities than by any clear or fair standard.

The article passed at Town Meeting to bar elected officials from serving on the Finance Committee has been framed as an ethics measure — but one could just as easily see it as a targeted response. Shortly after I began serving on FinCom, and long before I was ever elected to the School Committee, I was repeatedly asked to resign by the then Town Moderator who had just appointed me. It's difficult not to view this latest move as at least partly driven by discomfort with my asking tough questions, rather than any real concern about conflicts of interest.

There remains, in my view, a deep misunderstanding of what a conflict of interest actually is, and I believe it to be naïve to assume that only elected officials have the potential to carry their own interests, affiliations, and priorities to the work of the Finance Committee. Ironically, when I proposed an actual ethics safeguard — to prohibit anyone who draws a paycheck from the town from sitting on FinCom — it was shot down. And when another resident moved to block all members serving on other committees from serving on FinCom, that was immediately ruled out of order.

Most troubling to me was that prior to Town Meeting, FinCom members demanded the School Committee formally agree not to bring any motions on the Town Meeting floor in exchange for a modest \$80,000 increase from free cash to support the School Department. I felt that this was wildly inappropriate for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that the School Committee has never been the one driving floor amendments — that role has always belonged to the voters of Westport.

To put this in context, the demand came at the very same meeting where, in a matter of minutes, FinCom voted to increase the allocation for cemetery expansion from \$200,000 to \$300,000 using free cash—no questions asked. Yet, when a modest proposal was made to allocate \$75,000 from that same pool of "unallocated" free cash to the Special Education

Stabilization Fund, the Chair warned that “more transparency and checks and balances” were needed, and insisted the unelected Finance Committee—which exists only to recommend budgets—should be the final gatekeeper, rather than the elected School Committee and Select Board.

In any case, as School Committee Chair, I placed FinCom's demand on the School Committee agenda, said nothing, and abstained from the vote as it passed — all in the interest of diplomacy and good faith. On the floor of Town Meeting, I made no budget motions; I simply asked questions, many of which, frankly, never received straight or satisfactory answers.

I chose not to press the fight that night, recognizing that sometimes the best way forward is to allow the process to play out without adding further tension. I have great respect for the hard work of the School Committee, the School Department, and many members across committees who are genuinely trying to serve the town well.

Still, perhaps the quiet expectation that this “deal” would smooth things over or reduce conflict may very well have discouraged broader attendance at Town Meeting? Who’s to say?

Town Meeting is a funny thing - it belongs to those who show up. Sometimes it reflects the voice of the whole town; sometimes it’s just 183 people in a room with a median household income well-above that of all 16,000+ residents of the town.

Meanwhile, FinCom’s track record speaks for itself. Pet projects are approved in minutes, while essential departments — schools included — face heightened scrutiny and resistance. Year after year, the pattern is the same: some departments quietly get what they need, others are cut to the bone, and those who raise uncomfortable questions are dismissed.

This goes well beyond the School Department. Vital services across Westport are under-resourced, not because of any lack of commitment from our hardworking town employees, but in part because of how the town has chosen to prioritize spending; for example, the more than \$1 million that remains tied up from unused warrant articles dating back to Fiscal Year 2017.

It must also be recognized that the town is constantly navigating limited resources and difficult decisions — a challenge shaped not only by local choices but by the ongoing burden of unfunded state mandates and constraints imposed by Beacon Hill. Ultimately, we are all in this together, and the only path forward is through thoughtful, collaborative work and more transparent, deliberate prioritization to ensure that Westport’s fiscal decisions truly serve the best interests of all its residents.

Moving forward, my certificate of appointment to the Finance Committee states that my term runs through the end of June 2026, and I have no intention of doing anything but continuing to serve the thousands of Westport residents — working families, parents, seniors, neighbors — who deserve a government that operates with fairness, integrity, and common sense.

At the end of the day, this was never about one meeting, one committee member, or one budget line. It’s about whether Westport still has the courage to face the hard questions — and whether we have the will to start demanding better answers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher Thrasher, Esq.", with a small "Esq." written at the end of the signature.

**Christopher Thrasher, Esq.**