



Board of Finance  
Budget Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, March 14, 2019  
7:00 PM

**\*Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting**

**Call to Order:** 7:04PM

**In attendance:** First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski; Business Manager Donna Latincsics; Treasurer Tish Ignatowicz; Superintendent Phil Stevens; representatives from the Willington Board of Education (BoE); Fire Chief Alex Moore; Fire Chief Tom Snyder; Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee Chair Stuart Cobb; various representatives from the Fire Departments; various members of town commissions, elected officials, and town workers; and members of the public. Absent from the Board of Finance: Alternate Bill Rankin.

**Seating of Alternates (if needed):** All BoF members present.

**Approval of Minutes:** Chairman Bulick noted that there were no minutes to approve at this time.

**Present To Speak:**

WHFD Chief Snyder noted it was OK to reduce his clothing budget to \$9,000, since some of his gear was included in the CIP budget. The Board thanked Chief Snyder for his update

Judy Threatt of Birch Meadow Lane, spoke in favor of the BoE budget. Quoting figures from the Superintendent's budget presentation she stated that we are in a unique situation, facing a 6.99% increase including a \$200,000 increase in medical and dental insurance costs. Accordingly it is almost impossible to keep the same services and same quality of education that we have now. The BoE has put forth a budget for an increase of 5.6% to essentially maintain the status quo. She added that 97% of our BoE budget is a fixed cost, leaving only 3% that we can adjust. This means we will have to start cutting staff, supplies, services and professional development. As a parent with a child in the school system, I really don't want those things cut. I support the BoE's budget. The chairman thanked Judy for expressing her views.

Judy's comments were echoed by Sandra Hughes of Willington Hill Rd, who spoke in favor of the BoE budget and the STEM program. She recently sent a letter to the chairman written by her daughter, writing in favor of the Maker Space. The chairman confirmed receipt of the letter saying that it had been forwarded to the board members. He then thanked Sandra for expressing her views.

Chief Alex Moore presented updated information on the purchase of six Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs) to be placed around town as follows: (1) Senior Center, (1) Town Hall, (2) Hall School, (1) Transfer Station and (1) Public Works. Both schools already have one AED on site. Further discussion ensued regarding the appropriate place to put this item in the budget. Donna Latincsics (Business Mgr.) will advise, probably somewhere in Emergency Services. The Board thanked Chief Moore for his update.



## New Business

### 1) Budget Discussions

- a) The Economic Development Commission's recently reduced budget request, now at \$19,280, to hire a part time consultant from the Connecticut Economic Resource Center to promote business development in Willington.
- b) A \$30,000 open space request from the Conservation Commission to partially fund two appraisals and a survey. These actions are required in order to apply for open space grant funding from the State. Barry Walleth recognized the town's 20% goal for open space as defined in the town's POCD, but felt that it was not a good time to put money aside for open space, particularly given the lack of property development. Laurie Semprebon commented "that once the space is gone you can't get it back". She indicated support for the request. Bob Shabot, representing the Conservation Commission, explained their rationale stating that \$50,000 is needed to initiate property acquisition and that the \$30,000 request together with existing open space money (approx. \$20,000) would let them act in a timely manner. Bob proposed that the Conservation Commission would be open to funding at \$10,000 per year until the \$50,000 "seed money" goal is achieved.
- c) Peter Tanaka inquired why the library grant request increased 4%. Tish Ignatowicz explained the increase was mostly due to increased medical insurance expense for the Director.
- d) The First Selectman's request for an additional \$30,000, raising the total request to \$40,000 to replace obsolete accounting software. A rough estimate, just received from the current provider, includes a new product offering on a one year subscription basis, data conversion, training and professional services. Peter Tanaka asked if current municipal users of the software have been contacted as references and this has been done with positive feedback.
- e) The State of Connecticut is indicating that Willington will be responsible for some portion of the Teacher Retirement Benefit (TRB). Exact details are not yet known (e.g., where this has to go in the town budget, how it will affect the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR), etc.) other than the amount will be \$32,990. Discussion ensued. **Motion made by Peter Tanaka and seconded by Mike Makuch to move the proposed TRB amount of \$32,990 into 0861 300 BoF Contingency. Motion passed unanimously.**
- f) Randy Belair inquired about the purpose of the \$10,000 budget request for traffic control submitted by the Selectmen. Selectwoman Wiecenski responded that no final decisions had been made how the funds would be used. Suggested uses include solar speed warning signs (two at \$5,600), speed bumps, using a borrowed radar trailer, etc. Erika stressed the need for the town to respond to numerous citizen complaints. Peter Tanaka indicated that while he appreciated the need, he would like



a more detailed recommendation. Erika indicated the new public works director will be charged with making a recommendation. Peter suggested consulting with local traffic experts, e.g. Mansfield.

- g) Peter Tanaka inquired if the Public Works Director budget line had been adjusted now that the position has been filled. First Selectwoman Wiecenski indicated that the budget had been adjusted accordingly. Barry Wallett inquired about the new hire.

Erika identified the new hire as Troy Sposato who was formerly the Assistant Director of Highway Operations in Killingly. Mr. Sposato begins work on Mar-24.

**h) School budget discussions**

- Barry Wallett wants a conservative approach to school funding in view of the state's on-going budget crisis and its questionable ability to fund debt. He does not support the Board of Ed's 5.6% request and feels it is a mistake. He suggested that a strategic plan, conservative in nature, is needed to move forward on education costs, specifically facilities; administrative staff, certified staff, cost per pupil, etc.

- Mike Makuch asked for clarification if Hall School could be reconfigured to fit all 436 of Willington K-8 students. Superintendent Steven's indicated that due to state requirements, construction costs to modify Hall School would be prohibitive as you need to make extensive modifications to the building. Mr. Wallett disagreed saying we are lacking a study that articulates the potential costs which could be more affordable for the town.

- Laurie Semprebon advocated for the proposed BoE request. She remarked that last year the Finance Board forced the BoE into some really difficult choices and that she believes we should support the school board's budget. Further she referenced the importance of STEAM program, low class size, etc.

- Jim Bulick offered some financial perspective. The average CPI nationally is 2.1%. We have .6% increase in our grand list which suggests the town could probably afford around 2.6% - 2.7%. Therefore, its alarming when we see the increases in our budget numbers it's hard for Willington to stay an affordable community. I also understand that we can't have zero for a lot of reasons. But I am not happy with a 5.6% ask by the BoE, I think it should be something less than that. I did see some lower cost options outlined by Superintendent Stevens so there are a range of options to consider.

- Randy Belair invited Phil Stevens to discuss where we are with the current budget which was frozen last December following budget cuts to his predecessor's budget. Also, to explain if the BoE's 5.6% would maintain current services. Discussion revealed that the current budget has a slim margin of approximately \$10,000 to get through to the end of this school year. Further, a 5.6% budget would not entirely sustain current resource levels and that a 2.6% budget, as suggested by Chairman Bulick, would only cover the BoE's expected increase in insurance cost. Phil



indicated there are no significant savings to be had in supplies, fuel, contractual items, etc. Savings come from cutting programs, doing something specific with the buildings and or staff. Phil is exploring ways to save money for the town by looking at region 19 transportation costs.

- Peter Tanaka said his calculations indicate Willington's per student cost is almost \$21,000 per student per year. Given that a huge portion of school costs is fixed cost, Peter suggested that payroll is the key issue.

- Phil Stevens responded saying that if you want to address staffing, you have to find a way to go to one building, because that's where the annual \$700,000 savings comes from. If you can get things in check, you might be able to use a part time superintendent, and you could also look at your administrative positions. You could save by looking at redundant staff. Do you need the same number of: custodians, nurses, office staff, music teachers, unified arts staff, etc.? Until there's a big decision, and its going to cost money to get to that point, it's either you have to pay for two buildings or something drastic has to change.

### **School Budget Motions**

- i. Motion made by Peter Tanaka and Seconded by Jim Bulick for Option E, \$8,652,707 (+4.23% over last year). Discussion followed touching on MBR (minimum budget requirement), CT funding, the teacher's retirement fund obligation and sustaining current funding level and minimizing MBR impacts, i.e. a 0% increase as advocated by Barry Wallett. Result of discussion - motion withdrawn by P. Tanaka and seconded by J. Bulick.**
- ii. Motion made by Barry Wallett for a 0% budget increase over last year and seconded by Peter Tanaka - move to discussion (none) Vote For: Wallett, Against Belair; Bulick; Makuch; Semprebon; Tanaka. Motion failed.**
- iii. Motion made by Laurie Semprebon and Seconded by Mike Makuch for the recommend option C, \$8,767,117 (+5.6% over last year). Vote For: Belair, Makuch, Semprebon. Against: Bulick; Tanaka; Wallett. Motion failed.**
- iv. Motion made by Peter Tanaka and Seconded by Jim Bulick for Option E, \$8,652,707 (+4.23% over last year). For: Bulick; Tanaka; Against: Belair, Makuch, Semprebon; Wallett. Motion failed.**
- v. Motion made by Laurie Semprebon and Seconded by Mike Makuch for Option D, \$8,689,095 (+4.67% over last year). For: Bulick; Makuch Semprebon. Against Belair, Tanaka, Wallett. Motion Failed.**



- 2) Fund Balance Discussion
- 3) CT Budget News and any Impact to Willington: Treasurer Tish Ignatowicz reported that no new information was available from the State.

## **Old Business**

- 1) CIP Plan: Two major expense items in the CIP Plan were discussed at length. Barry Wallett wanted an explanation why the CIP Committee elected to pay for replacing Center and Hall School roofs out of the General Fund (or Fund Balance) instead of issuing a bond. Mr. Wallett suggested that we have an opportunity to bond funds needed to repair the roofs as well as the long needed drainage projects for Liska, Schofield and Village Hill roads.

Chair Jim Bulick explained that the CIP committee unanimously agreed that 1) the school roofs needed immediate attention; 2) there is a "bubble" of leases currently consuming capital funds and finishing soon; and 3) there was significant savings by financing with cash. Laurie Semprebon added that like everything else, we have a limited amount of money. Stuart Cobb indicated that funding via a bond now, would overlap the library bond which would effectively limit the towns ability to make purchases for several years. First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that unless we significantly alter the numbers we are using in the plan, and if we keep trying to spend at the level we are spending, projects like these roads keep getting put off. We all agree that the roads need to be done.

**A motion was made by Barry Wallett and seconded by Mike Makuch for the CIP committee to meet again and do a projection of showing what a bond cost would be for all three road projects and the two school roofs. Mike asked should there be other things included in the bond, e.g. fire stations addition (in out year at \$2.6 million). This motion second was subsequently withdrawn in favor of a revised motion.**

**Mr. Wallett then advanced a revised motion, and again seconded by Mike Makuch, for the CIP committee to meet again and do a projection showing what the individual project elements of a comprehensive bond would cost including; a) three road projects, and b) the two school roofs, also (a and b) plus the fire stations addition in CIP out year 5 (a \$2.6 million expense). It was resolved that the CIP Chairman (S. Cobb) would decide if a meeting was necessary or if he and the Business Manager (Donna Latincsics) could analyze the project and bond payment schedule to be reported at the next finance meeting Mar-21.**

**VOTE - For: Belair, Bulick, Makuch, Wallett. Against: Semprebon. Abstain: Tanaka.  
Motion Carried.**

- 2) Revenue – No update
- 3) Treasurer: Since Tish has been handling both income and expenses, additional surveillance and procedures have been initiated. No new vendors have been added by Tish, and First Contract negotiations for the Willington School classified staff: A "kickoff meeting" was



held 7 Mar. Negotiations start in April.

- 4) Annual Report – No update

### **Correspondence**

- 1) Sarah Reis on Mar-14 wrote in favor of the BoE and the Parks/Rec. proposed budgets.
- 2) Dr. Sandra Hughes, Willington Hill Rd, spoke in favor of the BoE proposed budget and the STEM program. She included a letter her daughter wrote to the BoE, supporting the Maker Space class.
- 3) Richard Mindek, Economic Development Commission (EDC) Chair, sent a reduced budget request for EDC services to be provided by the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. (CERC) along with additional client references.
- 4) Kathy Demers wrote in favor of the presentation made by Rich Mindek and CERC on Feb-22, stating it was very important to stave off further business loss in Willington.
- 5) Alternate Bill Rankin informed the board of his absence.

### **Good & Welfare**

- 1) Selectwoman Erika Wiecewski informed that Board that the town road sweeper died. The current plan is to buy another used sweeper. The plan is to transfer funds from the current 2019 budget to buy the sweeper.
- 2) Tish Ignatowicz will be stepping down as Treasurer, taking a new accounting position in the Financial Office. The Board thanked Tish for her service and wished her well.

Adjournment: **Motion to adjourn at 9:45PM by Peter Tanaka and seconded by Mike Makuch**  
**Motion passed unanimously.**

*Respectfully Submitted 3.20.2019*

*R. Belair – Board of Finance. Secretary*