

# TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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## BOARD OF FINANCE

Meeting Minutes  
Via Public Online Video Conference

April 6, 2021  
8:00 PM

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

Members Present (a quorum of 4 members is required to conduct business):

Mike Makuch-Chair, Stephanie Summers, Christina Mailhos, Matt Clark, Pete Tanaka, Geoff Prusak

Also Present:

Superintendent Stevens, First Selectwoman Wiecenski (non-voting member), members of the public

Chairman Mike Makuch called the meeting to order at 8:00, immediately following the budget hearing

**SEATING OF ALTERNATES**-None required

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**-None to approve

### PRESENT TO SPEAK

-Erika Wiecenski relayed the updates on American Rescue Plan funds coming to Willington, reported as \$1,716,256 in 2 disbursements (this March year and again next March) to be spent by 12-31-2024. She also reported that there is a significant issue right now with waiting for guidance on use and process. An executive order (10-E) was released today to help start preparing towns to address the planning by allowing some adjustments to budget process such as absentee balloting, and date adjustments for approval of budgets. Basically, we need to wait for clearer guidance on how to use this money.

### NEW BUSINESS

#### **Budget Discussion**

-Chairman Makuch commented that he was thinking over the comments at the hearing earlier tonight and during the past months of budget process, that he still feels that we did the right things over the last 4 months in the process and in considering the town and larger scale conditions. If we knew we could apply some of these federal funds, that would be a win/win, but we don't have that information at this time.

-Matt Clark stated that a 4.3% increase this year is too large and we are spending down our reserves, wondering what it could mean for next year. Taking \$700,000 from reserve is likely to create a problem next year. He would have liked to see a 0% increase for the budget. He also would like to see a reduction in capital as well. He would like to see us closer to the level of inflation.



-Chairman Makuch said that we have been prudent, we have pushed already last year, which was right, but we now need to keep this large organization moving. People are hurting, but people pay taxes to get services. "If I can pay \$6000 per year for taxes, I can pay \$6500, even though I don't want to"

-Matt Clark said that some people cannot afford that.

-Chairman Makuch said he was making an example of himself and confirmed with Erika Wiczenski that tax collection was budgeted at 98% for this FY and is surpassing 99%, so Willington has been able to pay.

-Stephanie Summers asked if we can discuss the information from Erika now?

-Chairman Makuch said it pertains to this agenda item, so yes.

-Stephanie said we don't have much direction and it doesn't seem that we will get it in time for this budget process. We will have to adjust as allowed mid-year, if its applicable.

-Pete Tanaka said this information is so new, so we don't know if we can apply it to the budget and asked if Erika could confirm.

-Erika agreed.

-Pete said we have been in this position before with teachers retirement and MBR, where we were essentially misled by changing information after we acted on the earlier guidance. He doesn't feel comfortable passing a budget without knowing this information.

-Erika said that we just don't know enough other that its definitely coming, and its not supposed to take things out of budgeted items, but that meaning isn't even clear. Our only option is to delay some, creating the need for two referendums, and the associated costs.

-Mike Makuch said that our only options seem to be to delay slightly, and we can also ask Region 19 if they will delay so we can do this delayed process in one referendum.

-Erika agreed that those are the options.

-Similar discussion continued including Superintendent Stevens indicating that the Board of Education faces similar challenges in waiting for guidance, including with COVID relief funds.

-Stephanie asked if there is any real value to delay based on our current dates.

-Erika said, we can delay some, but it doesn't give us much more time, at the most maybe 2 weeks.

**-Mike Makuch moved and Pete Tanaka seconded that Item 3 of the agenda (Adoption of 2021-2022 Budget) be tabled to a future date, dependent upon forthcoming information.**

**-Discussion:** Mike will stay in close touch with Erika over the next few days, Erika said she will talk to region 19 BOE to see if they are going to delay. Stephanie said that we should note that any savings applied to ongoing cost will come back in next year, or after this funding is exhausted. Geoff Prusak commented that he feels the rules will be more flexible than we think.

**Vote: All yes, motion passes**

**Mike Makuch moved and Pete Tanaka seconded that Item 4 of the agenda (Set the mill rate) be tabled to a future date, dependent upon forthcoming information.**

**-Discussion:** Stephanie commented that this is essentially hand and glove with previous item.

**Vote: All yes, motion passes**

**CORRESPONDENCE** Chairman Makuch said that board members have all correspondence



## **PRESENT TO SPEAK**

-Pete Latincsics expressed his disappointment that the board was working with essentially pro-forma. He felt that the concerns of the people were completely ignored. He said he asked people to come, but they feel there is no point. The Board's responsibility is to focus on spending, which was not done. He is disappointed that there seems to be no concern for the public comment and no engagement by the board.

-Chairman Makuch stated that he typically doesn't engage in present to speak, but there were things said by Mr. Latincsics that needed to be addressed. First, probably everyone in town will be unhappy with some part of this budget. To imply that we do care about public engagement, or the concerns expressed is insulting and he is tired of two years of difficult budget seasons of his constant pretending that we don't care, and pretending that we don't listen to the public, and pretending the public is not engaged, when he is proof himself that the public is engaged. Whoever wants to come and speak can and does, and we ask and encourage it. We even added a second section of "present to speak" to each meeting. So, while he may think that the standard process is broken, it is not. He will come to every meeting, and he will comment, and the board will listen. Sometimes we will agree and sometimes not, but that's is how it goes, and has gone for years. The chairman is really irritated that he has to keep defending that the board members who donate their time for no pay, as he knows, because they care about it. The implication that the board doesn't care is insulting and asinine. He volunteers his time because he cares, while he has family members sitting in the same house waiting to spend time with him. But the chairman makes time for this because he cares about his community and will continue to do so, and he won't be told he doesn't care about it.

-Laurie Semprebson stated that she missed most of the meeting, but appreciates the work done by the board. She recognizes that we are a fiscally careful town, and she appreciates the thoughtfulness in coming up with a reasonable budget.

-Donna Cook said that it can be a little presumptuous to assume we can afford to spend more, and she thinks that anyone in town who has a passion for a particular thing should feel empowered to fundraise for it and donate to those programs.

## **GOOD & WELFARE**

-Chairman Makuch expected to thank the committee for finishing this stage of the budget, but we are not quite there yet. Stay healthy.

**Pete Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 pm**

**Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.**

**Vote: Unanimous in favor**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mike Makuch*

In lieu of Recording Secretary

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*Km*  
TOWN CLERK