

**BOARD OF FINANCE  
TOWN OFFICE BUILDING  
40 OLD FARMS ROAD  
WILLINGTON, CT 06279**

**MEETING MINUTES**

Thursday, April 15, 2021  
7:00 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 – Chairman  
Geoff Prusak – Vice Chairman  
Peter Tanaka – Secretary  
Stephanie Summers  
Matt Clark  
Christina Mailhos  
Brenda Abrams – Alternate  
Lisa Woolf – Alternate

Members Absent:

Also Present:

Erika Wiecewski – First Selectwoman  
John Blessington – Selectman  
Donna Latincsics – Business Manager  
Christine Psathas – Registrar of Voters  
Maureen Parsell – Former Director of Parks and Recreation  
Members of the Public

Chairman Mike Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

**SEATING OF ALTERNATES:**

**Matt Clark moved to seat Brenda Abrams as a regular member in place of Vice Chairman Geoff Prusak.**

**Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.**

**Vote: 5 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, S. Summers, M. Clark, C. Mailhos) 0 No.**

Vice Chairman Geoff Prusak joined the meeting at 7:09 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

There were no minutes to approve as Secretary Marysa Semprebon was out of state and the minutes were not available. Chairman Makuch stated that Eileen Smith will be the Recording Secretary.

### **PRESENT TO SPEAK:**

Peter Latincsics of 97 Trask Road stated: I just wanted to share with the Board my concern about the 4.3% increase that was adopted at the last Board of Finance (BOF) meeting following the Public Hearing. I think that many townspeople, that kind of increase at a time of a large or grave economic recession in our community and our State is concerning, not just to me but to many townspeople. I am very interested to see how some of the funds might be applied from what was discussed your last meeting when you paused action on the budget (State), particularly the portion of that funding that applies to assisting businesses and other economic entities that may have suffered in our community, so I look forward to that discussion. Most importantly, I strongly encourage the BOF to follow the Board of Selectman (BOS), who at their last meeting indicated that a public hearing is in order prior to our Town meeting following whatever action occurs tonight. Thank you for your time.

Jim Bulick of 12 Laurel Drive stated: I do want to echo Mr. Latincsics' comments that I believe a public hearing is in order. This is very unusual. You guys conducted a public hearing and a week after that Public Hearing we had new information forthcoming from our leaders in Hartford and from the US, so I think we need to determine how this impacts our budget, what's going on. There was talk that the Library was looking for some internet upgrades. These funds are probably a wonderful use of that. There is a lot we don't know, but I encourage you to conduct a public meeting, again with the public, explain what is going on. This is rapidly changing information and it is best to communicate that out and get that out to the public. I think it will serve everybody well. Thank you.

### **OLD BUSINESS:**

#### **1. Public Health Crisis Update-**

- a) Potential effect on municipal budgets-including updated revenue report.

Chairman Makuch stated that Board members have the updated revenue report, although there has been a problem with the email being off and on all day, so anyone trying to access it today may not have received the updated revenue report. Chairman Makuch stated that the one key item that he points out from memory is that the Town has passed the 98% collection, which is a good marker for the Town because that is how the current fiscal year is budgeted, so with all the uncertainty there was a year ago going into this, he is glad that budgeting was done a little more carefully on collection. Instead of going with the typical 99 % collection they pulled back to 98% and the taxpayers have surpassed that mark. He stated that is one checkmark in their favor.

Stef Summers stated that with the gap in revenue between now and the end of the year, once the ECS money comes in, it looks like all of the assigned fund balance would not be used. There would be a pretty good chance the Town would be retaining a lot of the \$673,000.00 that was assigned to this fiscal year in the fund balance, and she asked if that was correct. Donna Latincsics, Business Manager, stated that yes she thinks on the revenue side of the budget that the revenues will do better than budgeted, and she thinks on the expenditure side, less will be spent than what was budgeted.

Chairman Makuch stated that regarding the fund balance this board will have to adjust somewhere between expenses, revenues and fund balance to accommodate that. He stated it is a good adjustment to be making.



- b) Latest directives from the Governor and how the remainder of the budget process might proceed.

Chairman Makuch stated that the part he can tell everyone is that Region 19 did elect to continue on with their budget process, so the Town is constrained by a certain calendar to have the townspeople approve that budget. However, because of the other information this board has been working with since the last meeting, our discussion will continue on for other items this evening as to whether this board should try to bring the whole budget through in that timeframe. As discussed last week, there will probably be two budget approval events because Region 19 has to be approved within a certain amount of days, but the information on how to use the American Rescue Plan money may not be received within that same timeframe.

Matt Clark asked when the information on particulars regarding the American Rescue Plan would be available. First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated May 11 is the anticipated deadline, so there is no word from Treasury on any guidance sooner than that. She stated that the BOS made a motion on Monday night to adjust the dates of the Town meeting and the Referendum to no later than June 30 based on the Executive Order. The intent is not to take that length of time, but that was the timeframe listed in the Executive Order. Once the information is in hand from the American Rescue Plan and Treasury, then this Board can pick up where they left off. The BOS did not alter the process or change the process; they merely paused and delayed the Town meeting and Referendum. She stated that there would be two referendums. She stated that the Town of Mansfield as well delayed their budget process and the Town of Ashford didn't delay their process, but their referendum is later in May already. Each of the three towns will hold just a Region 19 referendum on May 4 and then their individual budgets after that.

She stated that the BOS did speak with the Town Attorney who was working on this effort with people from the Governor's Office in conjunction with the Executive Order and they do not feel it is at all necessary to have a second public hearing. The budget that was presented in your previous appropriations did not change. This board would then be picking up where you left off and making budget adjustments if needed and then adopting the budget. So the BOF would then make changes to the budget that was presented and the budget that was presented to the public. All of that would be in public meeting where you would talk about dollars that could be removed from this budget. First Selectwoman Wiczenski went on to say that it is very costly and time consuming to hold a second public hearing. There is an opportunity at the beginning of the BOF meetings for the public to speak and they have been very vocal about making the public hearing happen. She stated that warning the Town meeting that was had cost \$1,400.00. The budget did not change from the last public hearing; there would just be the adjustments that were made after the public hearing was held. She again reiterated that after speaking with the Town Attorney and the Governor's Office, the Town did not need to hold another public hearing.

Stef Summers questioned the \$1,400.00 for the public hearing warning and First Selectwoman Wiczenski explained that it is usually around \$600.00, but the Chronicle has farmed out some of their work and this was how much it cost this time.

Chairman Makuch stated that this board could certainly entertain this hearing idea and discuss it more. He would be more concerned if this updated information was going to create a



negative impact on the taxpayers. He stated that at least this is likely to create a positive impact on the taxpayers, which makes him feel better about that.

Peter Tanaka stated that he feels there should be a second public hearing as 1.7M is something that the community really needs to entertain and be informed on. He understands that she believes that the "Present to Speak" at the beginning of the BOF meetings covers that and it is a positive impact on their budget, but if the public had that information prior to the last public hearing, that would have played into his decision as to whether a second public hearing was needed. Peter believes that the First Selectwoman had time to get the information to the BOF prior to the public hearing, allow the public to digest it and he thinks the public needs a chance to be heard. He fully supports a second public hearing.

Matt Clark believes there should be a second public hearing because if the Town gets the 1.7M (yearly would be \$850,000.00), he thinks the people of Willington deserve to know what impact this will have. He thinks presenting that to the public is the positive way to go.

Chairman Makuch believes that there potentially is a lot of good information to share with the public and it is their information and decision. As there isn't a lot of information at this time, he believes they do not need to make a decision tonight, because they do not know what date they would set for a public hearing.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that they are not spending 1.7M or offsetting the budget by that amount. It's whether the COVID related funds, that had they known the guidance, would never have made it into a budget that would have been presented at that budget hearing. If they thought they could take those items out of that budget, they would not have been included but perhaps with guidance they put them there, so they are not talking about spending 1.7M. The Town isn't even getting 1.7M in the first batch of funding. She stated your talking about the budget that was presented and then whether or not you need to include all of the dollars in that budget that they had originally thought. The budget presented at public hearing did not change. A budget was presented and then this board could make adjustments to that budget based on new information. That is why the Town Attorney stated that the BOS did not change or alter the process just paused where they left off.

Matt Clark asked when will the BOF know what was spent on COVID (the different budget items, etc.) even if just in draft form. Chairman Makuch's understanding is that the Town has tracked those items that they observe and know are directly COVID related (unusual expenses, etc.). The Fire Departments tracked their COVID expenses. He stated that because it is not known what the parameters are of the 1.7M will include, it cannot be defined yet what might be either already spent, or what could be spent in the future that would apply to that. Peter Tanaka agrees with Chairman Makuch that this board does not have enough information to decide on whether to have a meeting or not, and until the information comes in they need to wait to decide on having a meeting or not. He believes they need to be as transparent as possible with the community, let them know what is happening (Town Meeting).

First Selectwoman Wiczenski responded to some of the guidance they have. The Microsoft Office computer project was \$3,900, and they need to move forward on that for a multitude of reasons, one being that the staff can work remotely and from home effectively. That is one of the items she would not have included in this budget if she had clear guidance (one-time expense). The Library upgrade could be an expense that could be used in that instance. Some



of those items would not have been included. They have to be COVID related, very broad reasoning. She stated that the first round of funding (CRF grant) had very specific uses, so not everything they had was covered between FEMA and CRF (additional postage, additional cost of meeting, etc.). Those are not necessarily items they budgeted for and would not be in the budget. Things like how to help small businesses is not something that would be part of the budget process because those things are not in the budget. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that regardless whether or not another public hearing is held, there would and has be a town meeting per the budget ordinance, and that would be another public forum for the public to discuss and hear about the budget before it moves to referendum.

Stef Summers mentioned that it would be good if they could project the sum of what all the COVID related items are. She thinks they should be proactive about what information they get for what they need. She stated that this town needs to look at its economic development as part of this money was to go to those things (using the Hilltop Restaurant and the River and The Rail as examples of not being as busy as they once were) whether it be the Economic Development Commission or other people can start reaching out to some of the businesses in town and capture some of what they are up against. She isn't sure if this is a BOF item but it is a town item that should be addressed. Chairman Makuch stated that it is not a direct BOF responsibility or program, but could affect the town and is something to be concerned about. He believes it is an opportunity to help our town and in the end help our budget. Stef feels that the Town needs to develop a process on pivoting and moving fast on using the money, which is administrative and governmental. She would like to see the Town start being aggressive about figuring that out. Chairman Makuch believes that the First Selectwoman has been thinking about it and figuring things out without the information and will be able to react to the information as soon as it is available. More discussion was had on how the Town might manage the money when more guidelines come in. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that once there are more specific guidelines, they will be able to have a more serious conversation on this subject.

Chairman Makuch (sticking with agenda item 1b) clarified with First Selectwoman Wiecenski that the budget process they had already laid out before and the calendar also (in part) continues as it was to handle Region 19. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that Region 19 will warn that referendum which will still happen (only Region 19). A Town meeting needs to be held before holding the Town referendum. She stated if they picked up right where they left off, the BOF would tackle what they now have listed as items 2 a and b and then it would move to a Town meeting and the Town meeting would adjourn to Referendum. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that Region 19 holds their own public hearing and referendum. The BOF does not need to do anything for the Region 19 referendum.

Matt Clark asked when there would be more input from the Governor. Chairman Makuch stated that May 11 is when they get the guidance from the American Rescue Plan. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she and other town leaders are pushing the Treasury to get them some information. She stated that the Treasury has 60 days from the adoption of the plan (March 11) to get the guidance and turn the money over to the State.

Matt Clark stated he would like to see the Town Economic Development Commission reach out to all businesses and ask them about the COVID impact on their business so there is some data to decide on what to do with them and all other areas impacted in town.

C) Update on federal funding (American Rescue Plan).

Chairman Makuch stated that he thinks they have already covered most of this. They are very clear that the guidance deadline is May 11; they hope to get it sooner.

Brenda Abrams mentioned that she is in agreement with Peter and Matt about a public hearing. She thinks it would fall under the COVID guidelines because it would be a Zoom meeting. She thinks it would be a well spent \$1,400.00. She stated it is really important that the public hearing is held. She would like the public to be aware of the entire picture of what is going on.

Geoff Prusak stated that they have talked about various departments keeping track of their COVID expenses; he would like to see them. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that there are listings and they have already been reimbursed from the money they got from the CRF, there is an absolute accounting of every dollar spent, and there were things that were spent COVID related that were reimbursed prior to this. They kept their expenses down once there was no additional COVID related funds and they tried to stick within their budget at this point.

2) Tabled items from previous meeting:

- a) Budget Adjustments-if needed based on above 1-c.

**Chairman Makuch moved to again table budget adjustments until a time to be determined based on the information.**

**Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.**

Chairman Makuch stated that he thinks this is exactly what they have been talking about tonight. They have the potential of a positive impact and potential budget adjustments leading to affects on the budget, so they should hold off a little bit longer until they have a better idea of what that is.

**Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, S. Summers, M. Clark, C. Mailhos, G. Prusak) 0 No.**

B) Adoption of 2021-2022 Budget.

**Chairman Makuch moved to table the adoption of the 2021-2022 budget until a time to be determined.**

**Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.**

**Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, S. Summers, M. Clark, C. Mailhos, G. Prusak) 0 No.**

**NEW BUSINESS:**

1) Board of Finance representative for Town contract negotiations.

Chairman Makuch asked First Selectwoman Wiecenski to clarify which employee groups this covers. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that there is just one union in the town which includes Public Works and except for two, it is everyone but department heads in the Town Office Building. They have reached out to the Union, but have not heard back from the Union. Typically they send a demand to negotiate, but that has not happened so the Town has reached out to them. There are no dates to meet yet, but a representative from this board is needed.



Chairman Makuch moved that the BOF approves Peter Tanaka to represent the Board in the negotiations with the Town Bargaining Unit.

Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Vote: 5 Yes (M. Makuch, S. Summers, M. Clark, C. Mailhos, G. Prusak) 0 No, 1 Abstain (P. Tanaka).

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

No new correspondence.

**PRESENT TO SPEAK:**

No one present to speak.

**GOOD AND WELFARE:**

Stef Summers stated that they are good as Town leadership in terms of being fiscally careful about spending and cutting money out of budgets and spending time to do smart spending. She doesn't feel they are well versed to spend money when it does come their way, partly because it doesn't happen that often. She would like to urge the Board to spend their money wisely that is coming their way and being prepared for it, thinking creatively, doing the most that they can with it and be as rigorous as they can with figuring that out. She quoted the great Broadway figure Dolly Levi "money pardon the expression is like manure, it's not worth a thing unless it is spread around encouraging young things to grow". Stef also wanted to compliment Geoff Prusak as he made her think about what he said all week. She stated he was talking about being fearful of the guidance and the overhang of what that will mean for them and none of them want to mess up with the money coming in, and then he said no one is exactly going to come out and audit all these towns about how they use the money because that isn't what this is about. This is about helping young things to grow. Stef stated that she thinks he is absolutely right. She thinks we could be frozen in the headlights because of the bureaucracy of doing this because it is a big thing and they haven't ever done this before. She appreciated that comment. This board, of course, should hold off doing anything untoward. She thinks there will be a lot of openness for how it is spent.

Chairman Makuch stated "continue to take care of yourselves as we are experiencing spring and some other positive signs. Let's take care of each other and our community and get back to health carefully and thank you as always to everyone as always on this group and to the public for their participation".

Peter Tanaka moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, S. Summers, M. Clark, C. Mailhos, G. Prusak) 0 No.

Respectfully submitted,

*Eileen Smith*

Eileen Smith

Recording Secretary

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TOWN CLERK