

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279
(860) 487-3100
(860) 487-3103 Fax
www.willingtonct.org

BOARD OF FINANCE

Meeting Minutes
Via Public Online Video Conference

September 17, 2020
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
Matt Clark
Stephanie Summers
Christina Mailhos

Members Absent:

Lisa Woolf – Alternate
Mike Perry – Alternate

Also Present:

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski
Business Manager Donna Latinsics
Joseph Colangelo – Chairman, Parks and Recreation Commission
Maureen Parsell – Director of Parks and Recreation
Members of the Public

Chairman Mike Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:05pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Peter Tanaka made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of August 20, 2020.

Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Vote: 4 Yes (M. Clark, S. Summers, P. Tanaka, M. Makuch), 0 No, 2 Abstain (C. Mailhos, G. Prusak)

Stef Summers made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of July 16, 2020.

Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.

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

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Peter Latinsics of 97 Trask Rd. stated that he would like to follow up on three issues:

- 1) Hall school roofs. Peter stated that at the last BOE meeting, Superintendent Stevens confirmed that he did not get to this issue during the summer and is overwhelmed at this point and cannot manage that project. Peter respectfully asks the board to act tonight and direct our Town Engineer to assume that responsibility.
- 2) Peter stated that the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) issue was raised at the BOE meeting and falls into the same category that the Superintendent does not have time to dedicate to this task. Peter requests the board act tonight and direct that task to the town Financial Manager, especially since Willington has twin issues of enrollment that may affect MBR; the reduction in Region 19 enrollment in this budget cycle and reduced enrollment based on what's happening with COVID. Peter believes the Superintendent reports enrollment to the state in October, so it behooves us to have the MBR sorted out so the town has a good baseline. Both events should have a favorable impact on the MBR which will help at budget time.
- 3) He would like to hear tonight where we are on restructuring the fund balance with our accounting firm and what suggestions they've put forward so that we're not vulnerable fiscally to bargaining units or other entities that would view the fund balance as something to spend.

Chairman Makuch replied that the school roof project and MBR issues, while not on the agenda tonight, have not been forgotten; Capital will be discussed.

OLD BUSINESS

1) Public Health Crisis Update-potential effect on municipal budgets

Chairman Makuch shared that the unemployment numbers are not yet available for August, but that the July numbers showed Willington at an unemployment level of 8%, where normal is 3.6%. Selectwoman Wiecenski shared that the numbers have been released around the 20th of each month, so should be released soon.

Chairman Makuch continued that service industries like restaurants are doing okay right now, though they are wondering what happens in the winter because they're seating most people outside.

Selectwoman Wiecenski shared that the town has not received any COVID reimbursements as of yet. As of yesterday afternoon, tax collections are on par with a typical collection year. People have until October 1 to pay without interest, then interest reverts to July 1. We are at 49% collection on real estate (expect about half at this time of year), 69% collection rate on motor vehicles, and 60% collection rate on personal property. The personal property number is better than it has been in past years at this point in the collection cycle. People are making regular appointments to make payments, and payments are coming in the mail every day as well, which shows that people are taking advantage of the extra time to pay. Collection is about \$50,000 short of \$7 million collected. There has been no information at the state level about deferring January tax payments, but that is not foreseen.

Selectwoman Wiecenski continued that the town has hired a new Town Clerk, and this is a busy time with the election season. We are incurring some additional expenses due to changes in

absentee balloting. Though the changes may seem minimal, they were not budgeted for. New Town Clerk Robin Campbell has calculated projected expenses for ballots. The postage on the absentee application is covered, but not on the ballots themselves. The office will need additional staff to process the estimated 60% of voters who will vote by absentee ballot. Robin has budgeted \$6,250 for absentee ballot expenses due to COVID. The Secretary of State plans to reimburse Willington \$1,829 based on their formulas. The budget included \$2,500 for the August primary, the Presidential election, and the town referendum, so that will not be enough. They are not asking for a transfer, as they are going to see how things shake out and what is actually reimbursed. The Secretary of State's office did say that they will "make towns whole" to cover all expenses incurred to cover absentee ballot changes in this cycle, so we will wait to see if that is true. It's a small amount, but she wanted to make the Board of Finance aware in case transfers for that department are necessary.

Selectwoman Wiccenski continued that they are looking at no longer using CHA to host Willington meetings due to the cost, as the virtual meetings have gone on longer than anyone expected. Instead, they are looking at smaller one-time costs of purchasing licenses, and those costs will be submitted with COVID-related expenses as well.

Chairman Makuch made a motion to add MBR to the agenda as New Business Item #2.

Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.

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

2) Capital funding process: continued discussion

Chairman Makuch summarized that the Board has discussed at previous meetings the option of seeking input from the accounting firm that performs the town's audit. The Board would have to agree to ask the accounting firm to provide a task letter with a number of hours to advise the Board on Capital process and accounts.

Matt Clark suggested that the Board would have to specify what it would want the firm to do, so should agree on some bullet points.

Chairman Makuch asked Board members to come prepared to the next meeting with suggested specifics for the firm to explore and any necessary definitions to be made; to be discussed at that meeting.

Matt Clark inquired whether the accountants provided any guidance to the Board of Finance or other Willington officials regarding efficacy or appropriateness on our financial management, other than providing an audit.

Chairman Makuch replied that there was a series of compliments, not only on how the financial office was managing the process, but also on Willington's financial soundness. Maintaining a fund balance has been a challenge in things like negotiations with bargaining units, but is good fiscal practice for protecting the town. The firm made comments on the health of our finances in that they compared our fund balance percentage-wise to budget, debt service per capita, debt service per the size of the expense budget, etc., and made positive comments that the town had

been fiscally prudent, keeping the debt service low, retirement commitments low, and a strong fund balance.

3) Monitoring the current FY budget

Discussion was held on the efficacy of the budget printout tool, how to read it, and how best to use it for the Board's purposes.

4) Board of Finance manual/policies/etc.

Need to move forward with gathering that information so new board members have access to good, easy, clear information, as brought up by Mike Perry.

Christina agreed to work on compiling information from her files and the town website.

5) Annual report-previous year

Mike D'Amato forwarded Chairman Makuch a copy of what was sent in last year. It appears there was a loss of emails in the transition between Board Chairs and everything will be together for the next meeting.

6) CIP

Selectwoman Wiczenski and Chairman Makuch talked to CIP Chair Stuart Cobb last night. He doesn't feel it's useful to call a meeting until he has certain information available from the Business Manager. Chairman Makuch told him that's not the answer the BOF is looking for now that we have progressed so far into the year. However, Stuart thinks it would be effective to start the CIP process sooner, maybe November, this year and that this would be a more effective way of dealing with the plan. There is still no COVID protocol for the public to approve the 5-year plan, as the Governor's orders haven't addressed it; the BOF can only approve appropriations for Year 1. Stuart is proposing to begin CIP earlier this year, resolve procedural issues, and rebuild the 5-year plan.

Stef Summers clarified that as far as the historical archive, this last plan will just be year 1, and then the committee will move forward and start over on the next year's plan.

NEW BUSINESS

1) River Road Athletic Complex (RRAC) lighting project

Director of Parks and Recreation Maureen Parsell summarized that they were approved by the CIP Committee for a lighting project at RRAC for lighting the basketball court, flagpole, playground, and volleyball court. CIP approved it in FY19-20. After passing the budget, the next step was to go to Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), which they did in February. PZC approved the permit. The next step was to go to BOF to appropriate funding, but that's when COVID hit and stopped in-person Town Meetings.

Selectwoman Wiczenski summarized that except for approving municipal budgets, there's no Executive Order that mandates towns not to hold in-person Town Meetings or referendums, but there is also no mechanism in place to hold a virtual or hybrid Town Meeting. If we can find a safe way to hold a Town Meeting, it seems it can be done. Typically, Town Meetings don't draw

a lot of attendance, but they sometimes do, so it needs to be planned carefully. If someone comes out and feels the event is not safe and that they can't vote in person, there is no mechanism in place. The town statute says you have to be in person to vote at a town meeting. It is possible we could find a safe way to hold a Town Meeting, but it's also possible someone could take issue with that. We don't have a large enough indoor room for the number of people who might show up, but we could do something outside.

Peter Tanaka inquired about the mandate that there are no gatherings larger than 100.

Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that that does not pertain to municipal meetings.

Peter reasoned that if it's not safe for anyone else to hold a gathering over 100, it's not safe to have a municipal meeting with over 100 people.

Selectwoman Wiecenski agreed that that's why towns aren't holding those types of meetings. She continued that the Executive Orders give the option to conduct meetings in the virtual world, but does not mandate it if towns can find safe ways to hold meetings. Some towns with different technology capabilities are holding hybrid meetings, giving some people the ability to attend in person and others virtually. The problem with Town Meetings is that you have to be in person to vote, as there's no way to verify who someone says they are over the phone without seeing them. Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the largest room in town is the Hall School gymnasium, and the use of school facilities is currently off the table for any activities due to the cleaning requirements to maintain a safe environment.

Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the loss of the use of Hall School facilities right now also ties back to the reason for the timing of Parks & Rec lighting request, as Parks and Recreation won't be able to hold indoor programming at Hall School.

Stef inquired whether the lighting project can be considered a pressing need to approve under COVID, as there is a lack of facilities for programs due to the pandemic.

Selectwoman Wiecenski read: "certain Executive Orders, if given the option of having elected town boards make the decision instead of the regular Town Meeting or referendum... if they document certain specific findings related to the nature of the emergency that requires a decision now rather than waiting until the emergency is over". She is not sure this falls under the emergency. We used that option in June for items needing payment out of CIP because we didn't want to default on payments. It really comes down to whether we can determine and document findings that this is an emergency.

Chairman Makuch inquired whether the funds for this project are going to expire at any point. Business Manager Donna Latinsics replied that they are not.

Joe Colangelo commented that he understands the pandemic has created hard times, but we have to find a way to get together and vote. We can't stop governance. There is a chance to do something good here and have lighting at night so they can play. We are trying to do things outside that make it easier for people to participate safely. Can we meet at River Road and vote?

Selectwoman Wiecenski replied that she thinks we can, but is waiting for clarification from the Governor's office to be sure. It will get harder to hold meetings outside as it gets colder and darker. There is always the concern that someone will be concerned and doesn't come because of COVID.

Joe commented that we are going to wait forever if we wait for the Governor and for everyone to say they feel safe coming out to vote.

Chairman Makuch commented that the discussion just needs to be had so we don't put ourselves in a legal issue down the line. He reviewed the motion and clarified whether the BOF recommendation to the BOS to hold a Town Meeting carries any time limit in which they must act. Donna clarified that it does not.

Selectwoman Wiecenski added that the guidance from the state is to consult the town attorney, which she will do. She gave the opinion that towns have to continue to conduct business and not everything is an emergency.

Maureen added that the Department of Public Works is renting an excavator for the month of October. Director of Public Works Troy Sposato has already set aside a week for this project. If we lose out on it then, the excavator is going to have to be rented again, which will cost additional money. By the end of August people playing basketball already had to have their headlights on. Basketball isn't the only program that's been lost with restricted access to the HMS gym. Programs have been running successfully at the park all summer. They are hoping to get this project done and get a Town Meeting so they can get residents outside.

Geoff asked why the Presidential election voting will be happening at the HMS gymnasium if they are restricting outside activities.

Selectwoman Wiecenski replied that there will be no school on Election Day and that it was an extraordinary circumstance that was agreed upon prior to the restrictions. There is a very big difference between one day with no students in the building and daily usage of the gym with folks in and out.

Mike Makuch made a motion that the Board of Finance recommends that the Board of Selectmen call a Town Meeting to appropriate \$45,000 from the Capital Projects Fund - LoCIP - RRAC Basketball Court Lighting for the purpose of installing lights at River Road Athletic Complex at the Basketball Court, Volleyball Court and Playground to be reimbursed by the State of CT Local Capital Improvement Program.
Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Matt asked for explanation on the reimbursement. Donna explained that the project is funded by OPM and is eligible for 100% reimbursement. Each year the town gets an allotment of about \$60,000, which is factored into CIP. When CIP is designed, they allocate it to different projects and this project was one of them.

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

2) MBR

Chairman Makuch summarized that the calculation is comprised of many different items. Peter Latinsics has been asking for and recommending we do as much of the calculation as we can in advance so when we receive the numbers from the state we can plug them in and hit the ground running. Not sure if this will save us much time in the long run. He asked for other input.

Peter added that every time the BOE budget comes up, the MBR comes up, so he thinks it's important we have that number. He thinks the Board should ask the Superintendent to get us that number, and if he can't, if he can assign someone else to calculate it.

Chairman Makuch clarified that he doesn't think we can finish the calculation and have that number until information is received from the state.

Selectwoman Wiczenski replied that the state determines the number. If you look it up, you can see previous MBR numbers, but there is no number that comes from the town. The worksheet is available to look at. She and Superintendent Stevens have tried to look at the end result and work backwards using the information from the previous year and they weren't able to get to the state's number, so there's something in the state's formula that is an unknown. It's not that the Superintendent doesn't have time to do it, it's something that the state calculates themselves.

Peter commented that there must be some data they require from the towns. He asked whether our data has been submitted.

Donna Latinsics confirmed that she submitted the data to Catherine Chambers and now we are just waiting for them to give us a number. All the groundwork that could be done by anyone in Willington has been done.

Christina commented that she would be hesitant, even if we had 90% idea how the number gets calculated, to make an estimate. We've never been able to predict it. Whether it's Superintendent Stevens or somebody else who tries to calculate it, that estimate is almost a meaningless number until we have the number from the state, so it seems like a waste of time.

Peter commented that now that the Board understands that the town has done everything under its control, we should move on.

CORRESPONDENCE

Chairman Makuch showed the map of River Road Athletic Complex showing where the lights will be located.

Chairman Makuch will forward the email from Maureen Parsell to the board.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Peter Latincsics of 97 Trask Rd. stated: at the risk of contradicting the town Financial Manager, I did attend the last BOE meeting and asked if the MBR calculations have been submitted and he said no. What I'm looking for in that calculation, because Stef is quite correct that normally the MBR is based on the previous year's budget, that our MBR should go down a minimum of \$190,000 because of the Region 19 reduction that we experienced due to lower enrollment by Willington students there. He would like some sort of confirmation of that so we have a baseline that is accurate. He would like subsequent confirmation that when we have an additional enrollment decline that is reported to the state of Connecticut in October that that's added to the baseline of the MBR. Enrollment is the only thing that can change the baseline and we need to make every effort to take advantage of it.

Matt asked for clarification on why the HMS gymnasium can't be used for a Town Meeting.

Selectwoman Wiczenski replied that this has already been discussed. The election issue was an extraordinary issue; we needed the ability to social distance and don't have that capability in other facilities in town. The election must be held there to guarantee a fair and safe election. When the registrars went to the Superintendent about that matter, it was very specific for that, but the understanding is that there are no other activities being held. Most other towns are doing the same.

Matt stated that Town Meetings are just as important as elections.

Chairman Makuch commented that it is a different mandate. The federal election has to happen on a certain day and Town Meetings are a little more flexible than that.

GOOD & WELFARE

Chairman Makuch – thank you to the board as always. Glad that the board is still healthy and town is maintaining a fairly good number health-wise.

Geoff – welcome new town clerk and wish her all the best. It's a very important position, and good that it's being served by a resident of the town again. He wishes Robin well.

Peter Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:19pm.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Marysa Semprebon
Recording Secretary