

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Budget Meeting
Hybrid- In Person and Online

February 9, 2023
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):

Stephanie (Stef) Summers Chairman	Geoffrey (Geoff) Prusak Vice Chairman	Christina Mailhos	Joseph (Joe) Sherrell	Peter (Pete) Tanaka Secretary	James (Jim) Marshall	Jim Gilligan (ALT)	Elisabeth (Lisa) Woolf (ALT)
In Person	In Person	Absent	In Person	In Person	Via Zoom	Via Zoom	Via Zoom

Also Present:

Alex Moore, Fire Chief WFD# – In person
Tom Snyder, Fire Chief Willington Hill FD – In person
Donna Latincsics, Business Manager – In person
Erika Wiecenski, First Selectwoman – In person
Stuart Cobb, Emergency Services – In person
Trevor Gantick, Fire Marshal – In person
Jeremy Chartier, WHFD treasurer – In person
Members of the Public

BOF Chair Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:06 PM.

SEATING OF ALTERNANTES:

Stef moved to seat Lisa for Christina
Joe seconded
All in favor
Motion passes

Pete moved to seat Jim G. for Geoff
Stef seconded
All in favor
Motion passes

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PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Ralph Tullis, 47 Village Hill Road, stated he enthusiastically supports the advancement of our schools, but he believes the option of the new school as decided by the SBC will be extremely costly for our town. He encouraged the BOF to thoroughly look at how this new school, if passed, will affect the budget going forward the next two decades and take into consideration all of the townspeople, not just the percentage that say they are willing to take on higher taxes for the new school. He would like a public hearing prior to referendum of the potential new school where the tax implications for the next 20 years are discussed as well as up and coming CIP projects that will also have an impact on the future mil rate.

Nick Tella, 49 Myrtle Road, agreed with what Ralph had to say and wanted to add that he felt the SBC hadn't fulfilled their charge of identifying the future uses of the two current school buildings. He said knowing what will happen with those buildings will help identify the actual cost of having a new school. He asked if the BOF anticipated a mil rate increase for this upcoming fiscal year.

[*Geoff entered the meeting in person and the BOF decided to leave Jim Gilligan seated for Jim Marshall.]

NEW BUSINESS:

1) Budget request presentations: Special revenue funds

a. 0518 Emergency Preparedness Fund 07- Fully Funded

Stuart Cobb reported there is work being done in preparation for a shared regional shelter serving Willington, Mansfield, Ashford and Coventry and based in Mansfield. Stef mentioned the BOF wanted to see the fund kept at about \$4000, and it currently sits at \$3964. Stu mentioned they aren't looking to add any funds to this, but it might have some withdrawals to pay for training. Pete asked Stu if there will be an expense with the future 4-town shelter to be located in Mansfield. Stu replied that so long as there is no emergency there will not be any expense. The duties are planned to be shared equally between the towns involved and, if there is a declared emergency, there are reimbursements from FEMA.

b. 0221 Ambulance Payroll

c. 0231 Fire Marshal

Fire Marshal Trevor Gantic explained they are requesting a 2.3% increase in their budget due to a slight increase of \$613 to the fire marshal's salary.

d. 0232 WFD#1, WHFD

WFD#1 Chief Alex Moore stated they are requesting a 17.37% increase in their budget due to increases in trash removal, utilities, administration, vehicle maintenance, equipment cleaning, repair and purchases. One large budget item is adding a second \$8000 propane tank, Alex said it had been in CIP to replace the oil tank and convert to propane, but by the time they got to the project, the money reserved for it could buy only one tank, not three, due to price increases. They need more than one tank to run the generator. There was discussion on how to get the money for the tank. Donna suggested having the Selectman's office write to LOCIP to ask for the increase to the appropriation due to the cost increase.

[*James Marshall joins via Zoom relieving Jim Gilligan]

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Alex said they were able to buy a 2011 ambulance from New Hampshire with ARPA funding. He mentioned there is a new regulation that after every fire the personal gear needs to be cleaned to prevent exposure to potential carcinogens. Because of that they will need to purchase a second set of gear for all paid staff who work a 24-hour shift. One setup of gear costs around \$5000. They are working on grant opportunities to help purchase gear. It was discussed that even though they received ARPA funds to get new radios, they still need to have some funding allocated for the current radio system they still have. Lisa questioned if it was normal for them to use 2/3 of their budget so late in the fiscal year and they replied yes, the trend is the highest amount of expenditures come out between now and June. She questioned why they never show any revenue generated. They replied that all the ambulance revenue goes into Fund 17. They discussed their current locked-in electricity rate is 8.29 cents per KWH until December of 2025, when the contract is combined with the other town buildings.

Ambulance Alex said they are requesting a payroll increase of 26.4%. They will be negotiating with the employees' union so they forecasted what they thought the increase might be. On the revenue side they have been speaking with the Town of Union and they agreed to negotiate compensation for us answering their calls. Last year they gave us \$12,500 from their ARPA funds, but that is the only payment they have made in the last 15 years of Willington providing them with service under a state Primary Service Area agreement. It was discussed that, unlike other neighboring towns, Union does not provide mutual aid to Willington as they do not own their own ambulance; they rely on ours. Alex and Stu said if we stop going to Union, we will lose the roughly \$22,000 revenue going into Fund 17 without it lowering what they have budgeted for expenditures. Either way Willington would be answering Union's calls because we are the closest Connecticut town with an ambulance. Stef said she believed the agreement to add Union to Willington's PSA was made between an ex-Fire Chief and Union with no involvement with Willington's town officials. Geoff and Alex mentioned they are not sure that is an accurate statement, more research needs to be done. Stef believes Union should be paying at least \$48,200 annually to Willington to encompass the amount of calls Willington answers there. Alex says the First Selectman of Union is unwilling to sit at the BOF to discuss the matter, and he will work diligently to establish a negotiation with Union to resolve this issue, as well as keep the BOF up to date with any new information regarding reimbursement. Lisa would like to see what the revenue is that is going to Fund 17. Pete agrees Union should be paying us to hold their PSA, but he doesn't think the math is as simple as charging them 10% of the town's cost (\$48,200) because 10% of our calls are for them. Lisa questioned the transparency of the revenue coming into the town from the ambulance and the BOF's ability to help establish a budget with that lack of information. Alex said all the revenue goes directly to the town, not to the fire department, so they would have to get the reports from the town. It is not up to the FD to provide that information, he said. Stef mentioned the Ambulance and WFD#1 did really well with ARPA funds and both budgets have been trending double-digit growth in the last few years. She would like them to bring their budgets under better control, as well as focus on Union for that negotiation.

WHFD Chief Tom Snyder said they are requesting a 5.96% increase to their budget, most of the increases being from cost of supplied goods and services and maintenance repairs. They are working on updating 25 Old Farms Road. They have applied to be able to start using that new property. There are repairs that are needed because it is an older property, but that was known at the time of the purchase. There is an upcoming state-mandated \$10 per firefighter charge for the cancer relief funding that is not currently included in this budget. WHFD shared a lot of the same encumbrances and increases as WFD#1. They have two new volunteers starting who will need gear. Each volunteer also needs a physical, which the fire department pays for, unless the volunteers are able to use their own insurance.

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It was discussed that they don't receive a lot of grants and the grants that are up for grabs have become a lot more competitive.

e. 0234 Emergency Management Director

Emergency Management Director Stu Cobb requested the AED budget stay the same at \$6,000.

2) ARPA Update

They are closing out some projects that are finished and some of those came in under budget and are returning unused funds. They placed a contingency of \$50,000 into the Human Services budget for fuel and heating needs for residents in need.

3) SBC update

Stef said she plans on using the BOF meeting on February 16 for an SBC presentation and intensive discussion before it votes at a joint BOS/BOF meeting on Feb. 27 on sending the SBC PreK-8 school recommendation to town meeting and referendum. The SBC is working on what the direct tax impact will be from the school project itself. Erika stated instead of a town meeting to vote on this project, they are recommending a selectmen-initiated referendum. The tentative date is March 28. It was discussed that we have a strong bond rating, and the debt limit for a new school building is \$59 million. Jim Marshall reviewed the past SBC meetings, including the Jan. 26 community forum, the survey results and the SBC's decision of choosing the new school as the option to bring to referendum. Because of the survey results showing an interest in the addition of the auditorium, the SBC voted to add that as a second question in the referendum. There will be large cost variations depending on the square-footage waiver that voters should be aware of.

4) Our process and calendar

CORRESPONDENCE:

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Lisa Woolf wanted to speak again on the ambulance issue. She brought up some rough calculations that she did for approximate reimbursement from insurance for ALS services and stated again that she would like to see what revenues are coming into the town from the ambulance services we provide as well as what we pay to the billing company and what they collect on their behalf and our behalf.

Alex Moore stated that he wanted to make clear we are a BLS service, not an ALS service so the numbers Lisa shared are inaccurate. He reiterated that the reports from the billing service go directly to the town, not to them so it is unfair for Lisa to say they aren't being transparent when it is not their information to share.

Nick Tella, 49 Myrtle Road, stated he is concerned about how much money is being spent on the property on Old Farms Road that the fire department purchased. He questioned the accuracy of the estimated \$500k operating savings from building the new school. He stated this was said to be from reduction in salaries from going from two schools to one and asked if that means there will be a higher student to teacher ratio and questioned if the BOE had a stance on that possibility. He brought up the BOF should ask the SBC to inform them what the plan is with the two school buildings as that will affect the future budget and is within the SBC's charge. He would like to see the new mil rate impact go out at least 10 years versus the original 5-year forecast.

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Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, stated he appreciated the BOF wanting to have a separate meeting to encourage discussion on the potential school project. He agreed with Ralph's prior comments and was interested in seeing a public hearing prior to town meeting and referendum.

Jeremy Chartier, 12 Mason Road, clarified that the hospital does not pay for 911 calls to go to the hospital, but pays for transfers from hospital to hospital. He added the property at 25 Old Farms Road that was purchased has been abandoned for many years and they are working on fixing it up to use as a training facility as well as a potential space for people to rent as a hall. All of this information was known at the time of purchase. They have been doing a lot of the repairs on their own time instead of hiring out to save the town money on labor, he said.

Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill Road, said all the prior information given to the public from the SBC included multiple options that the public had to decipher and now it is narrowed down to one option of the new school with the potential addition of an auditorium. Because it is down to a single option, he felt the boards can do a better job of dialing in the financial impact and they should present that to the townspeople in the form of a public hearing prior to the town meeting and referendum.

Allen Ayers, 38 Timber Lane, said he has been watching the SBC videos online and noticed there aren't a lot of view. He stated the information is out there and available for those who are interested in attaining it. He noticed the same people commenting in present to speak and wanted to be a fresh view. His belief is some of the numbers projected are scare tactics from those who don't want the new school to be built.

GOOD AND WELFARE:

Peter moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:53 pm.

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passes

Respectfully submitted,

Samantha Sperry
Recording Secretary

RECEIVED
WILLINGTON, CT.

2023 MAR 10 A 9:12


TOWN CLERK