

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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

BOARD OF FINANCE

Budget Hearing/Special Meeting
Old Town Hall – In person only

April 4, 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 Chair	Geoffrey (Geoff) Prusak Vice Chairman	Christina Mailhos	Joseph (Joe) Sherrell	Peter (Pete) Tanaka Secretary	James (Jim M.) Marshall	Jim Gilligan (ALT)	Elisabeth (Lisa) Woolf (ALT)
In Person	In person	In person	In person	In person	In person	Absent	In person

Also Present:

Alex Moore, Chief, Willington Fire Station #1
Donna Latincsics, Business Manager
Erika Wiecenski, First Selectwoman
Phil Stevens, Superintendent
Members of the Public

Chair Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Stephanie started the meeting by saying, "Welcome, everyone. I want to start off with a recap of the proposed FY2023-24 budget.

This budget year is an unusual one, mostly due to the Board of Education K-8 budget coming through with a less than 1 percent year-over-year increase, and our Region 19 portion showing a slight, negative amount.

The education budgets are the major drivers in our town spending, 70 percent of it, and are restricted by 90 percent-plus contractual spending. So, the local board's work went a long way to counterbalance a bigger increase.

The General Government budget reflects an 8 percent increase. Together, with the schools, the \$19.5 million budget total reflects an overall increase in town spending year over year of 2.7 percent. Strategic cuts by the Board of Finance, took that increase down from 3.4 percent.

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With a fund balance in excess of \$3 million, the Board of Finance also initiated an idea to reserve funds, starting with \$1 million in this budget, to address the schools, no matter which way the recent referendum would go. It would serve as a "shock absorber" in the heaviest years of bonding -- whether the vote went toward a new consolidated K8 school or to a concentrated plan to repair and renovate our elderly facilities -- or, at the least, 'seed money' to start the planning.

The Capital Improvements Plan committee, which agreed that we did not want to sit out the next year without addressing the schools issue, voted last Thursday to earmark \$1 million in Capital Reserve in this proposed budget and plan for equal reserve amounts in the following four years of the 5-year plan.

That \$1 million in this budget will funnel through the Selectmen's budget and show a false 26 percent increase in spending when the actual increase is 8 percent.

Thank you for your participation as citizens and the BOF looks forward to hearing your questions and comments."

Laurie Semprebon, 271 Turnpike Road, thanked the boards and stated she wanted to make sure we are going to spend money on fixing the schools. She also thinks the School Building Committee is important in playing a role in that.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, thanked the boards and appreciated the ability to have a public hearing to discuss the budget. He would like to hear more about the needs of the schools and a plan on how to fix and fund them. He is concerned about the growing ambulance budget.

WFD1 Chief Alex Moore spoke about his budget and said most of the increases were contractual.

Stef commented that the BOF removed a newly requested administrative salary as well as altered a few other requests, taking that budget from a 26.4% increase to 11.3%. She added the fire department is working on a negotiation with the town of Union for the ambulance services we provide to them.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, is concerned that the \$1 million set aside in the CIP is attached to the SBC, and he is hoping for that verbiage to be removed. He is also concerned that the SBC is going to push for another referendum for a new school. He hopes the money will only be referenced and used for "school repairs." He mentioned past referendums in town where they first failed and then came back and passed a second time.

Jen Goodale, Clover Springs Drive, spoke of the CIP meeting and stated that board is taking into consideration how the townspeople voted and are coming up with a plan to move forward.

Joan Taraskiewicz, 15 Liska Road, thinks the SBC is important and should not be dissolved because they know all the background and she doesn't think we should reinvent the wheel. She thinks the million dollars should go to a study to see what it would cost us to have an analysis to fix the problems at the schools. She brought up the library and is protesting its budget, saying the programming will be deficient because they were turned down on adding a programmer.

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Deb Linares, 100 Eldredge Road, a co-director of the library, read a citizen letter praising the library and requested the BOF to reconsider the library budget. She said they need these funds to get the library fully staffed. She said the 5% increase they are receiving will not be sustainable for their needs.

Tracey Webb, 37 Schofield Road, asked Deb if they have applied for any grants for the programs they are asking to be funded.

Deb answered they have applied for some grants, and they are missing out on grants because they don't have enough employees to qualify for some of the grants.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, asked if they hired the extra staff needed to qualify for those grants, would the grant money be enough to cover above and beyond the additional overhead. Deb said she is 90% sure they would.

Lisa Woolf, Board of Finance member, says townspeople could go in and help write grants. Deb welcomed that idea.

Stef added for context on the library budget, a 5-year look back shows a growth of \$100k. She said 2 years ago they had an 18% increase and last year it was 7.5%. This year the BOF zeroed in on double-digit requests.

Jim Linares, 100 Eldredge Road, said the co-directors are more affordable than hiring someone with a degree and paying for their health benefits. He offered an idea of getting a high school student to fill a roll. He says the best way to utilize the building is to get the grant money. He said maybe we should hire someone to look for grants for all town departments.

Stef stated the library budget is \$254k this year.

Lisa Woolf thought the BOF did a good job this year being fiscally responsible particularly with the ambulance budget. She said we need to look at it further and the fire department members should look at the difference between BLS and ALS emergency services and how to get the most out of Mutual Aid.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, said we are paying a lot for providing services to Union and we should figure out why they haven't been willing to come to the table to negotiate with us.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, questioned Region 19's decrease and is wondering if it is a decrease based on our enrollment and is it a trend. Stef said this year they have 36 Willington graduating kids and next year it is projected at 55. Erika said last year they knew it would decline and it is due to enrollment. Peter asked if there is a cohort between the years significantly or do they average out. Phil Stevens said we are typically between 35 and 46 students. Christina added that it is our students from Willington and the percentage they take up within Region 19.

Erika mentioned there are a lot of departments in this town that could use staff. She brought up the idea of a facilities director.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, is concerned with the salary for the facilities manager position. He thinks we should look at a contractor instead.

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Adjourned at 7:46

Chair Stephanie Summers called the BOF Special Meeting to order at 7:46 PM.

Present to Speak: None

New Business: Christina Mailhos, CIP chair, spoke about the 5-year plan. She said after the referendum failed, they removed the bond payments and added a \$1 million "savings account" in the reserve fund for future repairs for the schools. Peter brought up that we need a lot of money for a lot of things and he hopes the school projects aren't prioritized above many of the other projects that need to happen. He hopes we can come up with a cohesive plan to work on and fund all of our projects. Peter said the SBC's charge does not include repairs for the schools. He said the board voted unanimously 3 times to fund a new roof and the state took the reimbursement away once they found out we had a new committee looking into a new school. He thinks at a minimum the charge for the SBC should change so we don't have that issue again now that there will be no new school.

Stef moved that they accept the budget request for O-004 transfer out to Capitol Reserve for Schools Project/SBC for \$1 million dollars

Peter seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Present to Speak:

None

GOOD AND WELFARE:

Stef thanked everyone in town for their participation and appreciated the great weather. Geoff was thankful to be in person. The board likes meeting in the Old Town Hall.

Peter moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:09 pm.

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Sperry

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Recording Secretary, Board of Finance

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WILLINGTON, CT.

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[Signature]
TOWN CLERK