

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Budget Meeting
Hybrid — In Person and Online

February 15, 2024
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):

Bruce Lawler Chair	Geoffrey Prusak Vice Chair	Christina Mailhos Secretary	Walter Parsell	Jason Ross	Stephanie Summers	Melissa Miller (ALT)	Britt Rothausen (ALT)
In person	Absent	Via Zoom	Absent	In person	In person	In person	In person

Donna Latincsics, Business Manager – In person
Peter Tanaka, 1st Selectman – In person
Christine Psathas, Registrar of Voters, Democratic – In person
Suzanne Chapman, Registrar of Voters, Republican – via Zoom
Mike D'Amato, Zoning Agent – In person
Chief Alex Moore, Willington Fire Department #1 – In person
Doug Roberts, Treasurer – In person
Carol Jordan, Treasurer, Conservation Commission – via Zoom
Kathy Demers, Chair, Conservation Commission – via Zoom

Residents in person and via Zoom

Call to Order

Bruce Lawler called the meeting to order at 7:00PM.

Seating of Alternates (if needed):

Ms. Summers motioned to seat Britt Rothausen for Geoffrey Prusak and Melissa Miller for Walter Parsell.

Mr. Ross seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – January 18, and February 1, 2024

Ms. Summers motioned to approve the minutes of January 18th as amended.

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Ms. Mailhos seconded the motion.

Edits: Insert under Present; Chief Tom Snyder, Willington Hill FD, In Person; James Knight, President, Willington Hill FD, In Person; item 3, 2nd paragraph, 12th sentence, insert, "Tom" and "determine" to read, "Willington Hill FD Chief Tom Snyder explained that this will determine if everything will fit on the property, and if they can move forward."; 4th paragraph, strike, "the Town Meeting" and replace with, "a Town Meeting"; strike "following" and replace with, "sometime after"; 6th paragraph, 1st sentence, strike, "Representative Joe Courtney, State Representative Tammy Nuccio, and State Senator Representative Jeff Gordon" and replace with, "Congressman Joe Courtney, State Representative Tammy Nuccio, and State Senator Jeff Gordon"; 3rd sentence, strike, "Representative Courtney" and replace with, "Congressman Courtney"; 5th sentence, strike, "of Representative Gordon" and replace with, "State Senator Gordon"; insert, "State Representative" before, "Nuccio"; 7th paragraph, 1st sentence, strike, "Mr. Marshall" and replace with, "CIP member James Marshall (attending on Zoom)"; 10th paragraph, 1st sentence, Board member correction – strike, "38", replace with, "34"; 6th sentence, insert, "25 Old Farms" before, "property"; 11th paragraph, strike, "Ms. Summers noted that Willington 1 is 40 years old and Willington Hill is 52 years old.", replace with, "Ms. Summers noted that Willington 1's building is 40 years old and Willington Hill's is 70 years old."; 14th sentence, strike the first, "for"; 12th paragraph, 1st sentence, insert, "Willington Hill" before, "emergency services" item 4, 2nd paragraph, 2nd sentence, replace, "senior" with, "Senior Center"; 15th sentence, replace, "Mr. Tulis" with, "Ralph Tulis, a local engineer,"; item 5, strike, "Christina Mailhos motioned to nominate Ms. Summers to be a delegate." and replace with, "Christina Mailhos motioned to nominate Ms. Summers to be the BOF a delegate to CIP."; 1st sentence, insert, "CIP" prior to meetings; item 6, 3rd paragraph, 3rd sentence, insert, "be" prior to, "used"; 6th paragraph, 1st sentence, insert, "head" prior to, "the"; under Communications, 4th paragraph, 1st sentence, insert, "household hazardous waste" prior to, "consortium".

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)

Ms. Summers motioned to approve the minutes of February 1st as amended.

Ms. Mailhos seconded the motion.

Edits: Under Call to Order, insert space to read, "Bruce Lawler called the meeting to order at 7:00PM."; under Present, strike, "Karenann" and replace with, "KarenAnn"; item 2.d, 2nd paragraph, 6th sentence, strike, "explaining" and replace with, "explained"; 5th paragraph, strike, "Ms. Summers asked about the salary for the director who left the position" and replace with, "Ms. Summers asked about the salary for the previous full time director who left the position";

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0).

Present to Speak:

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, expressed concern about the state of the economy and noted that it is not good. Connecticut economists have stated that there has not been a recovery from the last recession. Jobs have not been recovered and they have not achieved the level of growth there was at that time. It is compounded by COVID and the crumbling foundation situation. Willington is part of a weak CT economy that is masked by the state that is flush with COVID funds from the federal government, but these are disappearing. Mr. Latincsics expressed concern about the grand list which is growing by a paltry 1% and an approximate 4.5% inflationary increase. He urged the Board of Finance to focus on the expenditure side of the budget. This is how, in the infinite wisdom of the forefathers, how they vote on the budget. They vote on the increase, or decrease, in spending. A 4.5% increase to

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sustain services is approximately \$900K, a serious increase in the \$20M operating budget. At the same time, Willington taxpayers are being buffeted by economic forces that are not good. Mr. Latincsics asked the Board to focus on the CIP portion of the budget. He is pleased to see the \$1M/year for educational improvements and believes the town supports this. He would like to understand how it will be sustained and hopes to hear more discussion about this as well as how they will approach bonding for the large projects being discussed. As a senior citizen who has observed for a long time, he has seen that the town moves slowly and methodically in approaching spending. This is a positive. He encouraged the Board to spread large CIP requests out over a period of time. He noted that the town committed to not having another large bond until the library bond was retired. It would be nice to see the next bonding phase begin when that one ends.

Alex Moore, Chief, Willington Fire Department #1, commented that he wants to confirm that all of the requested reports were received. He noted that he received a request from Ms. Summers for an Ambulance Payroll Update, and he has not yet provided this information. Chief Moore requested that when referring to paid staff that they not refer to them as "ambulance service" as it makes it sound as though they are two separate organizations. They are firefighters/EMTs who drive fire trucks just as much as anything else.

Old Business:

1. Approve 2024-2025 Budget Letter for Town Departments

Ms. Summers commented that it would be helpful to the Board if the Business Manager's template could be used. It shows line-item percentage and dollar changes year-over-year, which is easier for the Board to look at when reviewing budgets. Mr. Lawler agreed and commented that it would be easier if one form was used by all of the departments. Ms. Latincsics confirmed that everyone receives an Excel template. Ms. Summers explained that information could then be seen in an at-a-glance format and the Board would not have to hunt for the information in different formats. Ms. Summers added that the dollar increases are important too because a small percentage increase may be thousands of dollars.

Ms. Mailhos motioned to adopt the 2024-2025 Budget Letter for Town Departments.

Ms. Rothauser seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)

2. Discussion regarding 2024-2025 Budget Calendar

Mr. Lawler noted that a change was made to accommodate the Board of Education.

A discussion took place regarding the schedule.

Ms. Mailhos noted that the CIP Committee has heard all of the requests and next week will look at the overall plan with funding sources. She requested that the full CIP discussion be held on March 14th rather than on March 7th. Ms. Latincsics noted that the Revenue Presentation scheduled for March 7th would not take much time and could be done on March 14th. Ms. Summers recommended inking-in March 28th as it sounds like the meeting will be needed. She asked that they consider an additional date for discussion. Mr. Lawler asked about the CIP discussion. Ms. Mailhos explained that they need to approve year 1. There are some big asks

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this year. She noted that while she is unable to attend on March 7th, the Board could start the discussions.

The Board will have the Revenue Presentation and open discussions on March 7th. Discussions will continue on March 14th and Ms. Mailhos will present the CIP report on March 14th.

Ms. Summers motioned to accept the changes to the 2024-2025 Budget Calendar.

Mr. Ross seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)

New Business:

1. Budget request presentations: Elected Official and Commissions

A. 0121 – Tolland-Mansfield Probate District – Finance Office

Ms. Latincsics explained that the Probate District is made up of four towns: Mansfield, Tolland, Willington, and Coventry. The office is in the Town of Tolland and the four towns pay to support the office. Cost is allocated based on the grand list which is due to OPM on January 31st unless an extension is requested. The Town of Coventry requested an extension, and their grand list number will be available on February 28th. On February 28th, the Probate Office will provide information on Willington's share. This year, Willington's share was \$3,976.00. Ms. Latincsics expects there will be slight increase.

B. 0126 – Registrar of Voters – Suzanne Chapman and Christine Psathas

Christine Psathas, Registrar of Voters, Democratic, introduced the Deputy Registrar of Voters Chopeta Lyons, Democratic. She noted that the Deputy Registrar of Voters, Republican, is Kathy Mikel.

Ms. Psathas noted that at the budget presentation on February 23, 2023 it was mentioned that early in-person voting would start in CT. In the early days of 2023, they did not have much information including the days and hours involved. On March 9, 2023 a discussion took place about putting \$15K into the Board's contingency fund to provide for the what-ifs of early voting. Last fall they learned that the state would provide a grant in the amount of \$10,500 to all CT municipalities for costs related to implementing and conducting early voting during the Presidential Preference Primary that will be held on April 2nd. The town applied for the grant and was awarded the funds. Ms. Psathas explained that they now have a clearer picture of how early in-person voting and same day registration will affect jobs.

Ms. Psathas reviewed the Early Voting Days Calendar. The Presidential Preference Primary in April will have 4 early voting days, the State/District/Municipal Primary in August will have 7 early voting days, and the General Election in November will have 14 early voting days. The increase in the

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number of hours the office will need to be open is as follows: 32 hours, Presidential Preference Primary; 64 hours, State/District/Municipal Primary; 120 hours, General Election. Currently, the office averages 50 hours/month.

Ms. Psathas noted that the greatest increase is in line item #0126 116, Early Voting Salary. The budget detail has a breakdown for the registrars' stipends and the election officials' salary for working the days noted on the calendar. At this time there is no indication that any additional state funding will be forthcoming to aid the town with early voting and same day registration costs.

Mr. Tanaka asked how many people will need to work on the additional days. Ms. Psathas responded that they are scheduling four people for each of the days. They will track expenses for early voting so they will have a better idea next year how to plan the budget.

Ms. Psathas confirmed that the \$10,500 grant from the state was received. Some of this has been spent on items that will be needed for early voting and items that will be used on an ongoing basis such as laptops and signage. Part of the grant money will go toward salaries. The state is requiring that the funds be spent by December 2024.

Mr. Lawler confirmed that voting will still take place at the Town Offices building.

Suzanne Chapman, Registrar of Voters, Republican, commented that the state is working on a new module for the Connecticut Voter Registration System (CVRS) which will be used to process voters.

Ms. Summers asked if space is available upstairs in the Town Office building for what will be needed. Mr. Tanaka noted that the Board of Selectmen may come before the Board of Finance for funds to build storage space.

Ms. Psathas explained that the Registrars do not have sufficient storage space and have approached the DPW and Mr. Tanaka for additional space upstairs. She noted that they are working with the state to get new tabulators at no cost to the town. These are large units and would need to be securely stored.

C. 0131 – Board of Finance

Ms. Latincsics presented the budget.

Ms. Summers noted that last year the Board budgeted a contingency for early voting. Ms. Latincsics confirmed that this is still in the Board's budget. The 2024-2025 BOF Budget Request form only shows department 0131. The contingency is another department that is in the realm of the Board's responsibility. Ms. Summers recommended that it be retained in case unexpected issues arise with early voting and may be a good line for the Board to use to become more educated about bonding.

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D. 0132 – Treasurer – Doug Roberts

Treasurer Doug Roberts noted that the budget has a 0% increase for all line items except for one which can be a contingency fund based on recent experiences with M&T Bank. In 2023, M&T Bank agreed not to charge any service fees for the calendar year. In early January, the bank charged the town over \$9K for 2023 in service fees. The bank agreed to refund the money. Mr. Roberts added that in October 2023, the bank stated that there would not be any service fees to the town in 2024. He spoke with the bank, and they agreed that this is still the case. The budgeted amount is for 6 months of 2025 in case the bank does charge fees. The fees for two months of 2024 were just over \$1K each and this is what the \$6K in the budget is based on.

Mr. Lawler asked if this is standard practice with all banks. Mr. Roberts explained that local banks have been swallowed up by bigger banks and there are not a lot of options given that the town, which has a lot of accounts, needs a full-service bank.

Ms. Summers asked if Willington has a more complicated branch of accounts than similar New England towns. Mr. Roberts explained that it is a normal practice for each budget to have its own account. He does not know what other towns are doing and a local branch presence is needed. Further, there is no assurance that if they were to change banks that a new bank would not charge fees at a later date. Given the system used that integrates the information and other factors, changing banks would take time.

E. 0135 – Board of Assessment Appeals – Finance Office

Ms. Latincsics noted that she worked with Karen Coté, the Assessor, and Edward Taiman, Jr., a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals. The Board of Assessment Appeals is a three-member board made up of elected and compensated individuals. Ms. Latincsics reviewed the budget and noted that the requested increase is for a member to attend a seminar.

F. 0161 – Conservation Commission – Carol Jordan/Kathy Demers

Carol Jordan, the Treasurer of the Conservation Commission, explained that as things change, funds may not necessarily be spent as outlined in the budget request. The Commission is not asking for any additional funds and for the 13th year in a row it is requesting \$1,500. Given inflation, it is a good deal. She highlighted areas where they will focus work and noted that the Commission was granted ARPA funds for major construction projects such as bridges.

Ms. Jordan noted that the Commission is looking for an additional member and two alternates. They could also use some people who are interested in conservation and would like to do hands-on construction work.

G. 0171, 0172, 0176, - Planning and Zoning, ZBA, IW – Mike D'Amato

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Mike D'Amato, Zoning Agent, reviewed the Planning & Zoning Commission budget and noted two changes as compared to last year. Line 0171-500, now in the Planning & Zoning Commission Department budget, was formerly in the Building Department budget. The \$368. increase is associated with a contractual increase for the permit portal used by the town. Mr. D'Amato manages the portal to keep better tabs on contracts given that many vendors are asking for multi-year contracts. Line 0171-402, Zoning Reg Revision Project, has a request for an increase associated with an existing contract for a program that the department uses to make property files accessible to the public.

Mr. D'Amato noted no increase has been requested for the Zoning Board of Appeals or Inland Wetlands.

Mr. D'Amato explained that a bill was proposed and will be heard at the Capitol on Wednesday that would allow towns to post legal notices online. They do not know what the costs or implications would be.

Ms. Summers asked about the request for an increase in the Regulation Review Project line. Money was budgeted for the past two years and was not spent. Mr. D'Amato explained that this line has been in the budget for many years and is to revise zoning regulations. Many of the updates were done in conjunction with the Commission's attorney Halloran Sage. This comes out of the Land Use Attorney line. Mr. D'Amato does not know how it was used historically, but over the past couple of years the funds have been used for codification and digitization. One of the ARPA projects is to codify zoning regulations and ordinances. This line will be for annual updates and items associated with this project. The increase is related to LaserFiche, the program used to host the files. Ms. Summers asked if going forward it will be \$3,500+/year. Mr. D'Amato responded that it would not be. This is the first increase since the town acquired LaserFiche. Ms. Summers asked if there is a predictable number for advertising legal notices. Mr. D'Amato explained that the bill has been proposed in the past but failed. It is being backed by CCM this time and others, so they are hopeful. The type of application necessitates how descriptive the legal notice needs to be and when paying by how much is written, they average \$100/advertisement and are required to advertise three times (two before and one after) for each application. Thus, the cost per application is about \$300. Ms. Summers asked if Document Preservation will sunset or if it is likely to continue. Mr. D'Amato explained that after the coming fiscal year, and the next, the project should be completed, and the line will be removed.

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Ms. Summers asked if spending is backloaded. Mr. D'Amato explained that some are annual expenses and not based on a fiscal year such as LaserFiche. He is working with the permit system support as they are asking for a 3-year contract to lock in a rate to prevent an "uplift". They have not demonstrated what the rate increase will be for. He is awaiting further information before this is paid. Additionally, effective last year, the PZC and ZBA Commission members are required by statute to attend at least four hours of training.

H. 0175 – Economic Development – Mike D'Amato

Mr. D'Amato noted that there are no requests for increases.

He explained that the single line is for the contract with his firm for the services provided. It also includes the Commission's Welcome Signage Project. They have gone out to bid and will be working through this over time.

Ms. Summers asked about the status of the Commission. Sometimes the full contingent of the budget is not needed when there is not someone to do the due diligence of spending. Mr. D'Amato noted that it has been a little challenging following last year's warehouse application and the availability of members with other commitments. The Commission held a meeting in January and the Commission will be kicking off the strategic plan. The Commission received ARPA funds for this and has brought a consultant on board. Two residents have reached out and expressed interest in serving on the Commission as well. Moving forward he expects there to be a fresh charge and the Commission will strategize with other boards and commissions in regard to the strategic plan.

Ms. Summers asked for an update regarding the ARPA grant to energize local businesses. Mr. D'Amato explained that small businesses and non-profits were able to submit applications for up to \$15K but they did not all request or receive the full grant amount. Thus, he does not know how much was provided but approximately \$60K was returned back to the ARPA funds due to the eligibility of those who submitted, and the funds requested. Some requests were for proactive items such as adjustments to technology infrastructure to be better prepared if something like the pandemic were to happen again and others were for capital expenditures and lost revenue replacement.

2. **Presentation of State of Connecticut 2024 Economic Forecast and recent Census Data – BOF Chair Bruce Lawler**

Mr. Lawler reviewed the article, "Will CT revive its comatose economy?" written by Fred Carstensen, Director, Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis. He is also a Professor of Finance and Economics at the University of Connecticut School of Business.

Mr. Lawler reviewed census data for the Town of Willington and highlighted the Income & Poverty section that shows that the median income is \$85,893 but the per capita income in the past 12 months (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022 was \$43,822. In Willington, Persons in poverty is

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13.5%. Mr. Lawler noted that 13.5% is extremely high. He explained that part of the reason the poverty rate is high is because the town has students from the University of Connecticut. He asked that this not be looked at as data but people they will be telling that money will be needed to fund some of the capital improvement programs. Mr. Lawler commented that he hopes they will use discretion with how money is spent, who it is given to, and if it truly fills and fits the needs of the Town of Willington and its residents.

Ms. Summers motioned to add agenda item, January 2024 Financial Report.

Mr. Ross seconded the motion.

Discussion: none

A roll call vote was taken.

Motion passed unanimously. (6-0-0)

January 2024 Financial Report

Ms. Latinsics presented the Revenue and Expenditure Report for January 2024.

She noted that there are no expenditure concerns at this time. On the revenue side, interest rates are still high. The Licenses, fees, and permits line also exceeded its budget due to unanticipated conveyance tax and more building permits than were budgeted. Revenue is strong.

Ms. Latinsics reviewed the Budget Increases – Five Year Look Back. She noted that it has been updated with the Ambulance Payroll without offsets.

Correspondence: - none

Present to Speak -none.

Good and Welfare: Ms. Summers did a shout out to Claire Twerdy, the longtime serving Probate Court Judge.

Adjournment:

Ms. Rothauser motioned to adjourn at 8:39pm.

Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

Motion passed (6-0).

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Pascuzzi

Lisa Pascuzzi
Recording Secretary

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[Signature]
TOWN CLERK