

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Special Meeting Minutes
Via web interaction (via Zoom platform)

February 16, 2021
6:30 PM

**Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM with the following in attendance; Selectwoman Boritz, Selectman Blessington, Business Manager Donna Latincics and Public Works Director Troy Sposato.

A. Present to Speak

No one was present to speak

B. General Budget Discussion

First Selectwoman Wiecenski started the discussion with reviewing the budget changes provided by the Finance Business Manager Ms. Latincics. It was discussed on the first tab on the updated excel spreadsheet you will see the budget changes based on our last special budget meeting on February 8, 2021. She met with the DPW Director Mr. Sposato to discuss the Public Works budget and made some adjustments which we will discuss. There have been some adjustments made as well with cell phone plans that will be cost saving. When we met last week the budget that Ms. Latincics presented to us was a 14.7% increase which represented \$518,311.00. That is a significant increase, the group consensus was that we may not be able to facilitate all of those changes in one year. The Public Works Director voiced his concerns that he believes all of the increases are necessary. While the Selectmen value and believe all the recommended work needs to be completed financially it is not feasible. A lot of the increase in the PW budget was for personnel which reflects \$327,563.00. At our last meeting the Board asked Ms. Latincics to provide two scenarios to review.

Scenario 1 if we removed the two laborer positions with benefits while leaving the additional Administrative Assistant increased hours from 15 to 25 hours. An additional change in Town Hall Operations we had a onetime maintenance & miscellaneous project that will not need to be paid next year, you will note the (\$9,000) credit. \$6,103.00 was added in for a potential communications software place holder based on data from the Emergency Communications Task force. With all of the adjustments that would bring the budget to a \$361,623.00 increase or 10.3%.

Scenario 2 reflects adding one full time laborer and removing the additional hours for the Administrative Assistant. This would reduce all of the benefits calculated in scenario 1. It was noted that if we have the additional staff member then there would be no need for a snow contractor, you will note a (\$23,265.00) credit. The next line you will note the camera project credit (\$9,000) and the additional \$6,103.00 for communications software as mentioned above.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski met with the PW Director to review the budget line by line to determine where it was feasible to trim. The second largest reduction was in the chip seal line items which is reflected in line 22 (\$35,000) chip seal roller and chipper, line 23 (\$55,000) chip seal-asphalt, & line 24 (\$24,000) for chip seal-crack seal. The discussion was to lay out the Public Works plan for the chip seal program and for road maintenance for the upcoming year. One of the identified roads on the plan to be completed may be impacted by the LOVES project beginning. The road on the plan for road maintenance would be impacted by construction of the new truck stop and there would be potential damage. That would be a frustrating endeavor to fix a road, fixing potential issues then have to go back and repair any potential damage from the new construction. With that said the dollars reflected above would represent the cost it would take to fix that particular road in the next fiscal year. There were additional reductions (\$1,000) in miscellaneous supplies, (\$5,000) in vehicle maintenance, (\$6,000) in road maintenance, (\$1,000) parts & supplies, (\$5,000) asphalt, (\$3,000) crack seal, (\$10,000) in equipment purchase, (1,000) transfer station general supplies. We are still investigating if we can find cost savings on some of our contractual services. Additionally as mentioned above we have been shopping around to get the best price on Town owned cell phones. With the addition of the First Selectmen's phone being covered by the Town, we will spend less for three phones than we did for the previous two Town owned phones. The reason is we previously had unlimited text and data but only a limited number of minutes for the two cell phones that the Town currently pays for Public Works and Animal Control. When a user goes over the limited number of minutes the Town then has to pay per minute on the overage. With that said in reviewing, instead of a flat cost the cell phone bill fluctuated based on minute usage and overages. With the new plan combining all three Town owned phones Animal Control cell phone budget went from \$700.00 and reduced to \$500.00, The Public Works cell phone budget went from \$950.00 down to \$500.00 and lastly the First Selectwoman's cell phone budget was \$950.00 and has reduced down to \$500.00. With all the reductions represented that brings the grand total increase to \$257,007.00 which reflects a 7.3% increase. You will also note that out of the \$257,007.00 there is \$150,299 out of Capital Expenditures in the CIP plan. Those dollars are reflected in the Selectmen's budget however CIP has not finalized year 1 as of yet. There is potential once approved that we would see a reduction of \$150,299.00 out of the \$257,007.00 budget increase.

Selectman Blessington wanted to know the percentage and total increase if the Capitol Expenditures were approved and removed from the Selectmen's budget as a scenario example to reference.

Ms. Latincics responded by saying in that scenario if we credit (\$100,235.00) the total LOCIP, that would leave a total increase to the budget of \$156,722.00 or 4.4%. This is inclusive of adding 1 laborer to Public Works with family benefits.

Selectman Blessington agreed that with the potential added laborer we have to plan for the max benefit since it is a variable. Overall a 4.4% increase seems more achievable than what we initially started with.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski responded by saying if we go with the scenario that represents a 4.4% increase we as a Board will still have to roughly trim an additional \$100,000 from our departments to maintain the capitol expenses needed to adequately function.

Selectman Blessington stated that he is feeling a little bit better with this scenario than what we had started with last week. Coincidentally in reading the BOF minutes he feels we would be hard pressed to convince BOF with an increased budget. He believes it will be a hard battle to win since other departmental budgets outside of the Selectmen's Budget are requesting large increases when the BOF is requesting flat budgets.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski responded by saying she agrees that we have fiscal constraints however we need to ensure we adequately budget for the functions of the Town that this Board is responsible for. Remaining flat is operating at a loss and is a disservice to our department heads and residents. Public Works takes up a large portion of the Selectmen's budget and we need to support and nurture our

infrastructure to maintain the level of service that residents expect. Although it is a large increase some of that is for capital expenditures for debt repayments on leases for PW vehicles. While the PW budget appears like a large increase that budget over a seven year period has only gone up \$100,000 30% of that was due to salary. We have not adequately invested back into our infrastructure in some time for a department that is in charge of maintenance and repair. For the purpose of comparison I met with Mr. Sposato and we were able to trim the PW budget down by (\$168,265.00). Mr. Sposato reluctantly agreed to the suggested cuts as he believes all of the budget request increases are necessary to adequately run PW and have forward progress with maintaining our facilities and our roads.

Mr. Sposato responded by clarifying the edited budget is staying at zero however there are only 3 line items that have been left as increases, vehicle maintenance, tree removal and salt expenses. There is potential risk and liability if we do not remove identified compromised trees.

Selectman Blessington expressed fear of what will happen with the economy this year. As an example he went to get grain for his chickens which he does every two weeks. In the space of two weeks the grain feed increased \$17.00 that is a large increase in a short span of time. In comparison on a small scale there is a large increase on an unforeseen large scale of everything increasing seems daunting. The average price of gas in Connecticut since January 20, 2021 has gone up .17 a gallon. Lastly he was sad to learn that TA truck stop restaurant has closed, that will not be good for the local economy. With that said, he agrees the increase of \$257,007 seems to be the most appropriate out of all the scenarios discussed.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski responded by saying that CIP has not finalized year 1 or year 2 through 5 as of yet. We may see some reductions in our budget reflected in those decisions being finalized. We may need to schedule another Special meeting next week to finalize as our budget is due to the BOF on Tuesday March 4, 2021. Based on conversations she believes year 1 is solid however it is still very fluid, a vote could not take place last week as they didn't have a quorum.

Selectwoman Boritz agrees with Selectmen Blessington our financial situation is a concern. In this fiscal year we have a little bit of a buffer and she will encourage the BOF to use the buffer that we have to help alleviate some of the financial stress that we may be facing. That is what the rainy day fund is for is to give back into the budget when we are in these kinds of situations. She also noticed this past Friday that the Truck stop restaurant has gone out of business which is not an encouraging sign to our local economy.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that based on our discussion this evening it appears scenario 1 taking a stepped approach with adding 1 Laborer seems to be the consensus with an increase of \$257,007 7.3% increase.

Selectman Blessington believes that even though we have cut the budget, it will still be a tough sell to the BOF. He does not have any additional recommendations of areas that can be cut.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski wrapped up the meeting by saying that the BOF is asking us to take a look at our budgets and they would like to see a zero increase flat budgets. We all know a zero increase is a cut, we would have to make significant cuts to get to zero. We don't know yet what our contractual obligations will be with the union negotiations. We have to contend with increases with insurance costs and other contractual agreements. All of those increase bring us above zero which is operating at a loss continuing to function this way for a decade is what has gotten us to this point. We are finding it harder to maintain things, our department heads are doing what they can with limited resources. Our staff works really hard and we don't often give them all of the resources and tools that they need to go further. I feel this is a solid budget for what we need without the additional wants. The next step will be to approve our budget in our regular Selectmen's meeting. There is some reluctance to schedule the budget approval while we are still waiting for CIP.

The group consensus is to wait for CIP to finalize their plan and push the BOS final budget approval to March 1, 2021.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:00 PM

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

Respectfully submitted,
Heather Sharpley
Administrative Assistant
Town of Willington

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WILLINGTON, CT.

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TOWN CLERK