

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
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BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Special Meeting Minutes
Via web interaction (via GOTOMEETING platform)

May 18, 2020
6:30 PM

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

First Selectwoman Wiczenski called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM with the following in attendance; Selectmen Boritz & Blessington; Public Works' Director, Troy Sposato; Zoning Agent; Michael D'Amato and residents.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski moved to add an item B under Old Business called CIP Plan. Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that there was a lot of discussion at last weeks' Board of Finance meeting; surrounding the CIP plan. She stated as an outcome of that meeting; she would like to revisit the plan.

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

Approval of Minutes

Selectman Blessington moved to approve the minutes of May 4, 2020 as written.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski seconded the motion.

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

Present To Speak

Jim Bulick spoke on behalf of the Willington Republican Town Committee; who submitted a letter of recommendation of Brenda Abrams to fill the vacancy on the BOE; upon Liz Perry's resignation. Mr. Bulick stated that he strongly urges the Board of Selectmen to remember the Willington Voters who selected a Republican and asked the Selectmen to do likewise; choosing a Republican to fill the slot. Mr. Bulick then thanked the numerous amount of members who came forward and offered to fill the position. Many of them have past experience on the Board of Education. He then noted that the right choice would be to appoint the person the Republican Town Committee endorsed; Ms. Abrams.

Donna Cook stated that there have been instances in the past where an elected official needed to resign. Traditionally, that individual has been replaced with a qualified person from that party to finish out the term of the person resigning; thus preserving the vote of the people. The people of Willington voted for a Republican on the Board of Education because that is the platform they wanted to support. Brenda Abrams is not only qualified but did receive the next highest number of votes. In addition; Ms. Cook suggested later when discussing the budget; the Selectmen should keep in mind that Pratt & Whitney is cutting wages by 10%; and many people have been told their wages are being frozen. Layoffs and furloughs are at approximately 15% and could go to as high as 25%. Ms. Cook stated that she is concerned for our town for our state during these unprecedented times. We have 125 children that receive free meals (breakfast and lunch) simply because their families cannot afford to feed them. This is a real problem in our town; and this all needs to be taken into consideration when working on the budget.

Laurie Semprebon noted that there is no state statute regarding appointment by current party and we do not have a town charter that says that. She added that we should choose the best person for the job; which is Laura Rodriguez. Ms. Rodriguez has raised kids in the system; was also a teacher in the system and is involved in many aspects of STEM education. Ms. Semprebon added that she does not think it is fair that the Republicans put someone's name on the ballot who didn't really want to serve; but was condoled into serving for only a couple of months before quitting. Let's get someone who is committed to helping the Board of Education move forward.

Tom Snyder; Chief of Willington Hill Fire Department asked the status of the CIP plan which reflected a cut in Emergency Services and to see if there might be a change in the decision. Mr. Snyder noted that the Hill's request is coming out of Fund 17; which is no direct impact to the Taxpayers.

Matt Clark noted that the Willington Republican party put forward three or four qualified candidates to fill the Board of Education seat; including the next highest vote getter from the Election. Each of these volunteers were voted down by the Democrats on the Board of Education – not because they were not qualified - they were voted down because they were Republicans. Tonight the Democrat controlled Board of Selectmen is slated to overrule the people of Willington by installing a Democrat in the seat that was filled by a Republican. Mr. Clark added that two towns in the immediate area have statutes or bylaws prohibiting what our Board of Selectmen are about to do in a few minutes. – These towns prohibit this action because it is wrong to disrespect the will of the voters of Willington. There should be no place for petty; nasty politics in Willington. He then asked is this really what we want for our town and to teach our children. Mr. Clark added that he urges the Selectmen to be the change they want to see. He is asking the Selectmen to table the BOE vacancy because you are teaching everyone that the will of the voters can be overruled by the majority vote. He asks the Selectmen to consider the damage they are doing to the faith of our government and also asked Ms. Rodriguez to please withdraw her name for consideration. Mr. Clark asked the honor and will of the people of Willington and advises the Board of Education to vote to appoint one of the qualified Republican candidates to fill the BOE seat.

Elena Testa spoke on behalf of the vacancy to fill noting that her major concern is about keeping the results of the Election. The Election of this town; the same as any other Election is the highest and the result was that four seats went to the Republicans and three went to the Democrats. To over-rule the decision of the highest authority is a very serious thing to do. Ms. Testa added that she truly encourages and hopes the Board of Selectmen will not overstep the authority given to it and will honorably respect the results of the election. She asked the BOS to appoint a Republican candidate; who is highly qualified candidate for the position.

Stef Summers spoke on behalf of Laura Rodriguez; potential appointment to the Board of Ed. Not only has Ms. Rodriguez educated a ton of children in town and the STEM field which is crucial for female role models; she has done that supremely well. In addition; Ms. Rodriguez is pursuing her doctorate; she has taught at a college level and is one of the most qualified candidates that has come forward in a while. Ms. Summers noted it is very important to have the most qualified candidates come forward; and it should not be a matter of partisan politics.

Elaine Newcomb read a statement sent to the Board of Selectmen:

I volunteered to be considered to fill the Board of Education vacancy created by the resignation of Liz Perry. I would like to offer some clarity regarding the replacement process. The Board of Education meeting of April 23, 2020 took up the business of filling the vacant seat from three volunteer candidates. Despite pertinent professional history, prior service in town government, and solid qualifications to serve, the Board of Education did not vote a majority for any one candidate. At the Board of Education meeting of May 12, 2020, the Board again addressed the item to fill the vacancy. At that time two additional qualified candidates offered to be considered. As the Board of

Education by-laws requires the Board of Selectmen to fill the vacancy if not filled within 30 days by the Board of Education, it seems obvious that the three Democrat members of the Board of Education locked arms to ensure a tie vote, twice, to pass the task on to the Democrat-majority Board of Selectmen to deny a Republican candidate replacing a Republican resignation from the Board of Education. Having run for office and being elected to your positions, one would think you have some respect for the electoral process. It therefore seems the obvious candidate for you would be the next highest vote-getter in the 2019 election- Brenda Adams, Republican. The only reason to deny her the seat would be pure partisan politics. As a fellow candidate I endorse her to fill the vacancy.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham spoke in support of Laura Rodriguez and why the Democrats unitedly chose her as the nominee. It is because of Ms. Rodriguez's experience – she has over 20 years of teaching experience; and is currently an assistant Professor of Science Education at ECSU; and she taught Science at HMS for more than a decade. Ms. Cunningham noted the reason Ms. Rodriguez is unable to connect to tonight's meeting because she is at a Willington Scholarship Foundation meeting; which she has served for over 12 years. Her dedication to the town is unparalleled and it also makes her the strongest candidate. Ms. Doucette Cunningham added while there might have been a gentleman's handshake years ago; the Board of Education has not been following that principal for quite some time. This is not something new and they are not changing rules. She noted that she was not aware of any agreement or rules when she started on the BOE. The idea should be that the candidate that is most qualified should be chosen to be appointed. She then noted that the BOE disagreed about the process on how to do it and did not have time to have full vetting of all of the candidates at their last meeting. A few months ago, the BOE began the process of changing the policy to give them more time to look at candidates; and determine the best qualified; but it is still in the committee process and has not been brought to the full board. She asked the Selectmen break the tie that has crippled the capacity of the BOE and choose to appoint Laura Rodriguez based on her qualifications and commitment of being present to all of the board meetings and serve the rest of the term.

Tracey Anderson stated putting aside politics and traditions; she asked the Selectmen to choose the best candidate who is going to uphold balancing our fiscal responsibility while continuing commitment to our students and help us maintain small class sizes with personalized attention; ongoing professional development for staff and after school activities; which have been all been stated as priorities of our community; and BOE.

Elizabeth Pezcuh; who is Willington's Region 19 BOE (R19BOE) representative for E.O. Smith High School spoke regarding item A under new business. She noted the Region 19 BOE unanimously voted to hire a School Resource Officer (SRO) to support E.O. Smith at the beginning of the school year. The SRO program was approved last year, based on security concerns at the EO campus. The hiring of two SRO's were done by the new Mansfield Town Manager at the time and payroll was administered by the Mansfield Town office (based on the location of the school). It was not until the Town Manager was let go; that they realized they SRO's were on the payroll and decided to end the program.

This past winter, many people have come to speak in support of the SRO's (including students) and Ms. Pezcuh stated it is important to note that the town of Mansfield is making the decision on behalf of the Region 19 BOE; even though the R19BOE had voted in favor of it. This is not something that we can control; as it is based on statute; and for the fact we are a regional district. The only other option would be to hire armed security officers if Mansfield no longer wants the SRO's on the payroll. Ms. Pezcuh noted if we went ahead and hired security officers; they would be less trained and less qualified – a route we most likely do not want to take. The R19BOE is asking for support from the Willington (and Ashford) Boards of Selectmen to not allow the Town of Mansfield to override this.

Correspondence

There was no correspondence to review.

First Selectman's Status Report

*The replacement of the fuel tank at Public Works is still slowly progressing; as we wait for the tank to arrive and are still planning to begin in June/ beginning of July.

*Concrete testing on municipal buildings (Senior Center; Library & pump house) - we are hopeful to review the report in June as it is still being finalized.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she put the town on a budget freeze for non-essential spending in March; when the pandemic hit. We are forecasting a \$100,000 surplus for this fiscal year.

*The financial software implementation is still moving forward. Training is in full swing. The Finance Department is working on their daily work; finishing up the fiscal year as well as training. First Selectwoman Wiecenski recognized how hard they are working on this.

*The CBA is set to end on June 30th. We were preparing to begin negotiations until the pandemic hit and in-person meetings were halted. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she spoke with this board a few times about working with the union to get an MOU in place and extend the contract. She worked under guidance of the Town Attorney to extend the contract for one year (ending June 30, 2021). The only change is a 2% in union wages; but no change in health insurance.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski recognized that there was question regarding whether she had the authority to sign the MOU. The Town Attorney; Ryan O'Donnell was present; noting that this process has been very common over the past few months with regard to municipalities; private sectors and bargaining units. He noted that right now it is very difficult to meet and negotiate virtually. Attorney O'Donnell added that it made the most sense to freeze everything for the time being as there is a lot of uncertainty and it would not be right to put proposals together for the next three years with so many unknowns. We'd go with the 2% increase— although it was not budgeted; which was consistent with what they were getting anyway and since the contract hadn't expired; Attorney O'Donnell noted that the First Selectman had the authority to sign the MOU under the contract.

Selectman Blessington said he is confused – freezing the contract for one year was actually originally his idea and that would have been fine; but not piling on an increase. He noted that he had suggested freezing everything and asking for support from the Governor; but the First Selectman said it would be unfair without bringing before the people (which we were not able to hold a Town Meeting) and now apparently it is fair to give them a 2% increase without bringing it to the people. Selectman Blessington added that we have all sorts of zoom meetings; could we not have done union negotiations with zoom? He does not think this was right.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified she had asked for a MOU with zero numerous times. She added that she did not do this to go around the people; and noted that there have been several other MOU's signed by her in the past. In addition; she had stated at several meetings that she was working on the MOU. There were several discussions with mention that the union was not interested in freezing the contract without an increase and continued on as there was no direction from the Selectmen. She noted that the union was uncomfortable with holding virtual negotiations. There are many other municipalities that are in the same situation; entering into MOU's with soon to expire contracts.

Attorney O'Donnell clarified that they should look at it from a strategic standpoint – 2% in the current environment is good regardance in terms of what other states and comparable towns are getting. It is not something out of turn; and is better than the average. It is not something that should be a real negative. It will give us a lot of ammunition going forward when we approach the table with these people in a few months – showing them how reasonable the town was – and will guide us in the strategic framework over the next couple years as well.

Selectman Blessington disagreed; noting that 2% is very good. He added usually when it comes to union negotiations; we engage a legal firm that specializes in that because they are dealing with unions. Selectman Blessington then asked how many other First Selectmen or Town Manager just went ahead and signed an MOU without feeling necessary to speak with anyone first? A 2% increase in an ordinary year with no Coronavirus everyone would have been happy with; but Corona HAS happened – we are going downhill. While 2% is very nice; it should have been discussed further.

Attorney O'Donnell clarified that he is a labor attorney and stated that he has had plenty of run-ins with different unions in the private and public sector; so there should be no concerns. As far as other towns go, every town is different; and they all have different approaches. Many of them have MOU's that are signed by the CEO of their town. He noted if the contract had expired; it would have been a different story. As long as the contract is intact; it would be unusual for the CEO to come back to the board to discuss before signing. Selectman Blessington warned in terms of good governance; there is a problem there; noting adding a raise is not extending the contract; it is signing a new contract and calling it an MOU. There is nothing we can do about it now. Attorney O'Donnell noted it would create tremendous legal wrangling which would not work in the town's favor at all.

Selectwoman Boritz said she does not disagree with Selectman Blessington; noting it would have been nice to know before signatures went on the paper but also added that legally we understand this is one of the many powers given to the First Selectman; which is why her position is full time and for the title over their titles. She added that she would have liked to know what was happening; to understand what was happening but would not have recommended any different course of action.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that she was in agreement with the Selectmen; noting that a little of it was her making an assumption that they understood the process of what was going on. We now learn going forward. She then clarified that she wanted to make it known that this was not some go around to put something in place on behalf of the town. We were in unusual circumstances in unusual times and trying to move forward without re-negotiating a contract – which neither party was willing to do. This will make room for us to discuss moving into negotiations next year.

Public Works

Troy Sposato was present. He reported the crew has been busy doing the following:

- Finished grading dirt roads around Town
- Loamed Town green and seed where we did test pits
- Loamed/ seed and finished drainage project on Turnpike Rd
- Sweeping is all complete for the year
- Built a donation box for Human Services
- Curb pick up around town and repairing curb around town
- Mowed Transfer Station
- Roadside mowing is still continuing

First Selectwoman Wiccenski noted this week is Public Work's week. We will be having a truck to collect food at the TOB to benefit the food pantry. She added if you see a member of the Public Works crew around town; give them a wave and thank them for all they do.

New Business

A. Resolution – Region 19 School Resource Officer

First Selectwoman Wiccenski noted that we heard from Liz Pezcu regarding the situation at E.O. Smith and their School Resource Officer.

First Selectwoman Wiccenski then moved to adopt the following Resolution:

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF A SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER REGION 19 SCHOOL SYSTEM

WHEREAS, The Willington Board of Selectmen recognizes that securing the safety and security of Region 19's students, staff, families, and visitors is a critical objective of the Region 19 Board of Education, the Region 19 Administration, and the Region 19 Member Towns and their respective governing bodies; and

WHEREAS, The Willington Board of Selectmen recognizes that it is the role of the Region 19 Board of Education, comprised of elected representatives of the Towns of Ashford, Mansfield, and Willington, to take such action as it shall determine is necessary and appropriate to assure the safety and security of Region 19's students, staff, families, and visitors in accordance with Connecticut State Law, Region 19 Policy; and

WHEREAS, The Willington Board of Selectmen acknowledges that the Region 19 Board of Education voted unanimously at its December 4, 2018 Regular Meeting of the Board of Education "to approve developing an agreement with the CT State Police and the Town of Mansfield to create a position of School Resource Officer for E.O. Smith High School with the goal of searching and hiring for the 2019- 2020 school year or sooner"(the "Region 19 Board Action"); and

WHEREAS, The Willington Board Of Selectmen acknowledges that School Resource Officers (i) hired by the Town of Mansfield under a memorandum of agreement between the Town of Mansfield, Region 19, and the Connecticut State Police, and (ii) subject to the rigorous ongoing training and certification requirements required of School Resources officers under applicable Connecticut law and regulations, is a prudent and effective measure for meeting the shared school safety and security objectives of the Region 19 Board of Education and the Region 19 Member Towns.

NOW THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED, that:

The Willington Board of Selectmen affirms its support for the Region 19 Board of Education's decision to engage School Resource Officers, in the exercise of the Region 19 Board of

Education's authority and responsibility, to assure the safety and security of its students, staff, families, and visitors;

RESOLVED FURTHER, that:

The Willington Board of Selectmen supports the continuation of the Region 19 School Resource Officer Program for the 2020-2021 School Year and thereafter on such terms and for such purposes as will give full effect to the Region 19 Board Action; and

RESOLVED FURTHER that:

The Willington Board of Selectmen urges the Mansfield Town Council to support the decision of the Region 19 Board of Education to engage School Resource Officers and to take such action as will give full effect to the Region 19 Board Action, including entering into and maintaining such agreements and/or Memoranda of Understanding with Region 19 and the Connecticut State Police as shall be necessary and desirable to implement and continue the School Resource Officer Program contemplated by the Region 19 Board Action.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the Town of Ashford adopted a similar Resolution last week. The Region 19 BOE representatives are asking for support of the process by member towns for how these decisions are made. It is more about supporting the process in which Region 19 has its own governing body and as member towns; we vote on people to act on our behalf. Although the Mansfield Town Council no longer wants to support the SRO program; it is still the decision of the Region.

Selectman Blessington asked what the difference is between an armed security guard and a School Resource officer. First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked Liz Peczuh for clarification. Ms. Peczuh noted that the SRO have required training that they need to obtain and certified by the State Police and added that the R19BOE is asking to be backed by their town that sends their students to EO Smith. Selectman Blessington noted if the R19BOE representatives voted in favor of the program; then we would have already shown our backing for it. He then asked if the SRO's are police officers. Selectwoman Boritz noted that the job description is very specific and it is more than just a title - it is a more in-depth school based model that is used across the country. School Resource Officers are trained to do more in terms of community wellness and safety where as an Armed security guard just controls the door.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that the resolution is more the process supporting Region 19 authority to make these decisions. She added that this has been a hot topic issue at the last few R19BOE meetings. The Officers were in attendance at the meetings and have far exceeded the way they could support our students at E.O. Smith and there has been a positive impact.

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

B. Appointments

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the position on the EHHD Board of Directors has not been filled since Paul Schur resigned. As of now, Willington does not have a voting member on the board. She has been attending the meetings and participating in the discussions but is not able to vote. She noted that she is willing to represent Willington; especially during these times.

Selectwoman Boritz moved to appoint Erika Wiczenski as Willington's representative for Eastern Highlands Health District Board of Directors; (filling a vacancy) effective May 18, 2020; expiring May 30, 2021.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiczenski, Boritz & Blessington)

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that the Board of Education had a resignation on April 17th and they have not been able to fill the vacancy. According to their by-laws and policy 9221; if the board is unable to fill a vacancy within 30 days; the Board of Selectmen may appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy until the next municipal election.

The Selectmen have received correspondence from the Republican Town Committee; with a nomination of Brenda Abrams and a letter from the Democratic Town Committee; recommending Laura Rodriguez as well as a letter of interest from Ms. Rodriguez.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that neither Ms. Abrams nor Ms. Rodriguez are dialed into the meeting. She would have like to hear personally from each of them why they are interested. She added that she would have liked for the Board of Education to make their own decision; noting that she was in attendance of those meetings. She added that she is unsure why the BOE voted the way in which they did; but knows that it is our role now to fill the vacancy. We have 2 candidates before us and follow state statute; noting that this has now become a political issue. She added that she thinks maybe it is time that we do put a policy in place to make sure future Boards of Selectmen are not in this position in the future. She added it should be about picking the best candidate to maintain education in the Town of Willington rather than being political.

Selectwoman Boritz asked if the Selectmen are obligated to fill this position or can we push it back to the Board of Education? She added this is the second time the Board of Education has been unable to fill their own seats and the second time the Board of Selectmen have been asked to do so. She then added with some pretty unpleasant accusations in the mix directed towards the Board; specifically the two Democrats. She added it is unnecessary in this process. Selectwoman Boritz then added she would love to see the Board of Education be able to fill their own seats without needing remediation of the Selectmen for this contentious process. She added that having the Board of Ed fill their own seat would be her first choice of action. – They were voted in to the Board of Ed; thus they should be the ones making the decision.

Selectman Blessington said this has become a totally political question. He added that the Board of Education tried to put into the bylaws that the party in which person has resigned was able to endorse the replacement; but were told by the Town Attorney that it was not possible because a state statute doesn't say it can be done; but then again it doesn't say it can't be done. He added that a neighboring town that does not have a charter and is ruled by a Board of Selectmen has in their bylaws. Be that is it may; he agrees with Selectwoman Boritz; that it should be sent back to the Board of Education – this is political and hopefully they can work it out or reach a compromised candidate. He added that he doesn't think the decision should be made tonight and not here.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski said she is not sure if the Selectmen can just not move on it and for how long because they have a policy. She thinks maybe it is time we put something in writing across the board to set something in place for the future. If we had a charter, it would be spelled out. Willington doesn't have any such rules on the books; while other towns do. She is incredibly disappointed by the accusations made – we weren't even able to hold a conversation on this before they decided how and we were going to vote. Selectwoman Boritz stated that the assumptions are truly unfair and she encourages people to reach out to her directly to hold discussions or ask questions regarding the decisions she makes.

Selectwoman Boritz asked if it were possible to send it back to the Board of Education; because she is at the point where she would have to abstain. Neither of the nominees are on the call and all she has to go by is a brief paragraph of why they are suited to fill the position. There is no way for her to be able to make a decision based on having no information.

Selectman Blessington clarified that we were not told that if we had a charter we could go by the parties recommendation but we couldn't do it because we didn't have a charter; but rather we were told if we had a charter that said that, then we could do it. We could not pass bylaws by the town. The Board of Ed was told that they could only operate under state statute. He said he thought it was kind of strange – we can't change state statute; but we can operate under our own laws. First Selectwoman Wiczenski agrees – we hear people say there was a gentleman's agreement; but that is all it is. Each time politics is at play; we (the Selectmen) are put in a predicament to make a choice. She added that she spent 8 years on the Board of Education and while serving; she only focused on the Education; not politics at all. She added that is what she wants to see on that board – the best person there and she wishes the BOE made the decision.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that she asked the Town Attorney to rejoin the meeting to see if it is possible to kick back to the BOE; as long as it is in conjunction with their policy and to see for how long; noting that meanwhile important decisions can be held up because they only have 6 members. At some point someone will have to make a decision.

The Selectmen moved on to the next item until the Attorney was able to join the meeting.

*Continued Discussion

Once Attorney O'Donnell returned to the meeting; the discussion resumed. First Selectwoman Wiczenski recapped the discussion. She added that this has become a contentious item and asked if the Board of Selectmen can kick this back to the BOE to try once more; noting the policy; which states "if the board is unable to fill the vacancy within 30 days after it occurs; the Board of Selectmen may appoint a qualified person to fill the vacancy. Attorney O'Donnell clarified that the word "may" does not direct the Board to absolutely do it; and it is not a mandate. It will then fall back to the Board of Education.

Selectwoman Boritz then stated that she would like to suggest to push this back to the Board of Education and if they become deadlocked; they do so with much more conversation and information to the Board of Selectmen so it does not happen on the fly – and can be done more of an intentional process. She really feels the BOE needs to come to a point where they can negotiate with each other. She noted that she is speaking to both parties; the Republicans as well as the Democrats.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted when this conversation started; she said she was hopeful she would be able to hear from both candidates; and she believes that both of them have joined the meeting since. She noted that she would at least like to hear from them to see why they are interested. By hearing them; it might help the BOE make a decision as well.

Laura Rodriguez began the conversation because Brenda Abrams was having difficulty with her audio. Ms. Rodriguez apologized for not being in attendance; as she is also in a meeting of the Willington Scholarship Foundation; in which she is the Chairperson. She has been a resident of Willington for over 18 years and taught 7th & 8th grade science at Hall School for 12 years. Because of her teaching career; she was not able to serve on the Board of Education; however she joined the Scholarship Foundation in 2008. Ms. Rodriguez recently entered the Doctoral program at UCONN and just submitted her dissertation to her committee and will defend it on May 29th. In addition; Ms. Rodriguez just finished her first year teaching at ECSU; Science being her major. Education is her life's passion. When this opportunity came up; it was perfect timing now that she has finished. Her work load is back to normal and she would be able to focus on serving the children of Willington once again.

Lastly, Ms. Rodriguez noted upon review of the bylaws, responsibilities and duties of the BOE; there were two points that jumped out at her; #5 & 6; they are both very important to state and think about; especially in this highly politicized world that we live in today and deadlock the BOE is encountering.

#5 states that one of the responsibilities of a BOE member is to work harmoniously with other board members without trying to dominate or neglect shared work and also to respect the opinions of other board members. Ms. Rodriguez noted that it is critical that the BOE job is for the children of willington; we want them to get the best education.

#6 is to vote and act impartially in board meetings for the good of the school district and to abide by the majority vote in all cases and to support the resulting decision. Ms. Rodriguez noted that she feels we need to make an effort to put politics aside and work together and figure out what the best solutions are for our school system and community.

Brenda Abrams stated that especially in this time of the COVID; we really need to come together as a united front. It is important to allow our community to be stronger. She was also an adjunct- teacher at MCC for quite a few years. She is very concerned about students and their future. She said she wants to be real – it really doesn't matter if you are a Republican or Democrat – the real purpose is for the children and the student's success. She added that we need to come together at this time as a united front to make the community of Willington stronger. She is willing to work as a united front with all of the board members to make that happen.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked both candidates and said it is very important to hear from both parties. She then said we can do one of two things; we can move forward with an appointment of the BOS or we can move to kick back to the BOE and give them another opportunity to have a discussion about the candidates as opposed to the political process. No one wins in this – the ones who lose are the schools when it becomes political.

Selectman Blessington said he thinks we should kick back to the BOE for them to make the decision in 30 days. He then asked if we could move this to a Town Meeting. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we do not have a mechanism to hold a town meeting for this particular reason; this would not be considered a financial emergency situation. She noted that it is refreshing that all three Selectmen are in agreement to hand it back to the BOE.

Selectman Blessington moved to return the issue to the Board of Education for 30 days. Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked everyone who voiced their opinion; while not everyone agrees, she appreciates that all Selectmen can have a good conversation about this process and understand that we are all looking to make the best decision for the town. She then reminded everyone to remember why each of us are in the position we are in and use that going forward; and not for individual reasons; otherwise we will have to do the tough work and in 30 days will have to make the decision.

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

C. Award Propane Contract

We sought 6 bids for the annual propane contract and received 5 back. (One was "return to sender" from E.Osterman in Plainfield, CT)

The bids received are as follows:

Company	Trip Charge	Price per gallon	Labor rate normal	Labor after hours	Labor rate holiday/weekend
High Grade Gas Service	No	\$1.07	\$75	\$120	\$120
Hocon Gas	No	\$.99	\$65	\$75	\$75
Northeast Oil & Propane	\$99/ \$190 Same day / after hours	\$1.09	\$129	\$193.50	\$193.50
Superior Energy	No	\$083.9	\$99	\$99	\$99

Selectman Blessington moved to award the 2020-2021 propane contract to Superior Energy as per their bid of 083.9 cents per gallon and \$99 labor rate for normal/after hours and holiday/weekends.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

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

Old Business

A. COVID-19 Update

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that there is a re-open plan for the state on May 20; but the pause button has been pressed on salons and barber-shops until June 1st. Decisions are being made for safety purposes and will look for clarification soon.

The TOB is following guidelines for office re-opening and are working in conjunction with EHHD and will also begin the re-certification opening process with DECD as things progress. As part of the process we must implement new policies and a plan with various aspects that will protect staff and public as we slowly open. We will slowly migrate employees back in the office beginning on June 8th including staff rotation (one week on and one week off of one person in each office); so in the event someone falls ill; it will not affect the entire staff all at once. Many offices will be reconfigured and all of the open counter spaces will have glass installed to separate public and staff but will still allow business to be conducted.

Plexi-glass barriers will also be installed between employees for everyone's safety. Changes will also be made in the restrooms. We are looking to install automatic touchless water faucets, soap and paper towel dispensers. In addition; a new cleaning plan will be implemented as well. As part of the re-certification; all employees must be trained on cleaning protocols for their own areas. The Restrooms will also be on a cleaning schedule between Public Works and custodial staff from the schools.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the ultimate goal is to re-open to the public; but we are unsure when. She is hopeful July 1st (for tax collection); but we will have to see how things progress once the state opens on Wednesday. Willington currently has 11 positive cases.

Chief Moore was present. He said we are starting to have some staff return to rotation (noting that we had a total of 5 responders out). Some are still out and it has been a slow process; but they are slowly progressing.

Chief Moore also noted that responders have also implemented changes in the way they respond to calls; as they split the personnel up (they are no longer traveling together in one vehicle) and only a few will come to the door; keeping others back for safety. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we saw how quickly it can spread. She then thanked Willington Hill Fire Department for allowing use of their new

house; which is being used for COVID-positive first responders and it has been very helpful. We will be taking care of properly cleaning the house; once this is over.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the Town has applied for FEMA reimbursement; but have not submitted anything as of yet. OPM has requested all towns to submit anticipated expenses at the beginning of May; and we submitted our estimations as of last week. OPM believes that they will be able to cover 100% of all expenditures for all of the towns that responded. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we will seek reimbursement from OPM before going to FEMA; which will only cover 75%.

Since we submitted the original form to OPM; we have additional expenses from the office changes; so we will update that information with them ASAP.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared some data that was discussed with BOF last week. The unofficial data from unemployment shows that Willington had 10.96% of unemployment claims processed paid to date; versus the actual initial claims from a week prior to that. She added that she will keep everyone posted once we get more data. She added that she is curious to see if the numbers change with the re-opening on May 20th.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that everyone at the TOB must wear a face mask while walking around the building; getting water; going to the restroom; or to another department to talk to another employee; and even when entering or leaving the building. She noted a typical Monday morning entails several complaints about lack of wearing masks over the weekend at the Transfer Station. She urges everyone to wear a face covering when you cannot keep a 6 foot distance from others. At the Transfer Station; especially when it is busy is impossible to keep such a distance and therefore she asks everyone to cover their nose and mouth while at the Transfer Station.

The discussion of the BOE Appointment was resumed at 8:11 PM *See continued discussion under BOE Appointment (New Business)

B. CIP Discussion

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that years 2 – 4 on the CIP plan were not finalized before COVID. The plan itself was to be voted on by the legislative body. Year 1 of the plan was approved and voted on by the Selectmen; then sent to BOF; who held lengthy discussions last week; much discussion was around Capital. First Selectwoman Wiecenski listened what BOF had to say and revisited the CIP. She has offered up some changes to year one. She then cautioned that anything we do is going to throw the rest of the plan into limbo. The money for year one is actual budgeted dollars and included in our budget. The plan itself (for the out years) is approved at Town Meeting – and we have not been instructed as to how we would be able to do so as of yet.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted with the lack of information of what next year will bring brings uncertainty and she suggests the following changes to Year 1 of the CIP:

All items on Year 1 have been removed with the exception of the following:

Items to remain on the plan:

- boiler, valves and pumps at HMS \$8,765 (this will put new equipment to go with the new boiler that was recently replaced)
- new boiler at TOB \$10,000
- CPR device for Ambulance
- Bunker gear
- replace oil tank at Station 13

The following items will be **removed**:

- exterior pillars at HMS
- Consultant for the School Building Committee
- Old Town Hall Septic
- Replacement PW vehicle
- Drainage at Village Hill Road
- Liska Road culvert
- Pickleball court

With the removal of the above mentioned items; we would still be putting money into capital and in the event we had an emergency, we would have to go through Town Meeting. The updated amount to go back into capital is \$180,356. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she heard the Board of Finance's concerns. She would like the Selectmen to consider this and put forth to the BOF before their meeting on Thursday.

Selectwoman Bortiz asked if we would be putting in a comparable amount back in the reserve for what we are pushing out – in the event one of the trucks break down; would we be able to draw from that? First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that we were putting \$165, 011 into the Capital Reserve but now we would be putting in \$180,356. What we did was remove the projects; but put money into capital and if we had an emergency situation we could request funding from BOF; and then call a town meeting. In short; we are funding capital but with no particular projects.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski warned there is a need to put things on hold that we don't believe that are emergent. She would then recommend for the CIP to take a strong look at years 2 through 5. She added that she thinks it is the best thing to do for our town with the uncertainty.

Selectwoman Boritz then asked if there is a mechanism that can be used in the event we have an emergency in which something needs to be replaced or fixed? First Selectwoman Wiecenski said yes; there is an Executive order that allows us to move a town meeting for emergency financial situations.

Selectman Blessington stated that this looks very reasonable.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to approve the current CIP Plan as presented.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

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

Present to Speak

Jim Bulick stated that he would like to point out that the Board of Finance is an even number member board and it is possible to run a meeting with an even number. The only difference is that the strategy is different and you need to compromise. It is an option for the Board of Selectmen to appoint no one and force them to move on.

Matt Clark stated that he believes the meeting went well. The BOE issue is contentious; political and not fun. He would say the Town should consider passing whatever the lawyer said we should pass to avoid this in the future. He was asked by Christina Mailhos why he did not show up to functions; 2 years ago when he started here; there was an issue on the BOE where the same thing happened. The BOE received a resignation and the Republicans put up a candidate and a democrat was placed instead. He suggests that the BOS pass a policy on this and that would tell the different boards in town what we would like to see in the future. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that such a policy would have to be adopted at Town Meeting; not the Board of Selectmen.

Elaine Newcomb stated that she wants to get the facts out about the first BOE meeting; there were 3 candidates; Brenda Abrams, Peter Latincsics and herself. Each one of them submitted a letter of interest to the board. Laura Rodriguez was not even a candidate at that time. There was a deadlock and the second vote taken by the Board of Ed; two new candidates were added - George Debski and Laura Rodriguez. She noted that the Board of Selectmen were never given the original paperwork (interest letters of submission); and she feels the BOS never saw that paperwork. Ms. Newcomb added that the Board of Selectmen was not given the fullness of information as you came into this meeting as to the actual sequence of events and history because Laurie Rodriguez was not in the initial pool. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that a letter was sent by Ms. Rodriguez to the Board of Selectmen; the Board of Education did not send any information.

Good & Welfare

The Flag Display Committee has put the flags up around the Town Green; down to the Senior Center and extended down route 74 to the Cemetery. It looks beautiful. First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked the Committee; made up of Phil Monty; Joe Csiki, Joe Rondeau and help from Rich Mindek who put the flags up last week. Due to the generosity of numerous residents; they were able to purchase additional flags and to replace some as well. The flags will be left up until just after the July 4th holiday.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski gave a Memorial Day update – Sadly, we will not be holding our annual Memorial Day services this year; but instead a few VFW members will be recording a very short ceremony at the cemetery and it will be streamed on the Town's you Tube Channel. It will broadcast on Memorial Day. Details are forthcoming.

There will be a food drive held here at the Town Office Building on Friday; from 8AM – 2PM; where Human Services will hold a “fill a Public Works Truck” with food and health/ beauty care items. The items will restock our food pantry.

Human Services will hold another drive in food distribution event on May 29th from 10am – 12 pm. More information will be posted closer to the event.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Mike D'Amato and CHA for moderating the meetings.

Executive Session – Personnel Matter

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to go into Executive Session regarding a personnel matter and invited the Town Clerk at 8:58 PM.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to come out of executive session at 9:11 PM

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Campbell
Office Manager
Town of Willington