

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

BOARD OF SELECTMEN Special Meeting Minutes

Board of Selectmen
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**Town Office Building
Zoom Platform Virtual Meeting**

**April 24, 2020
11:30 AM**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 11:30 am with Selectmen Boritz & Blessington; Department Heads & residents dialed/logged in via Zoom platform.

A. Budget workshop

First Selectwoman Wiecenski recapped that the Board of Selectmen had met on Monday, April 20th and decided to hold this budget workshop based on communication given from the Board of Finance; who have asked for two alternate budget scenarios; a zero and a -3%. The Selectmen had originally submitted a budget with an 11 ½% increase and then brought it down to a 4.5% increase which was submitted to the BOF in March. Subsequently; the Selectmen had reviewed the latest revision; which was presented at the last meeting; which was brought down to a zero.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski shared some updated information since the last regular meeting. The insurance holder which was thought to be a 7% increase has come in at a 2.3% increase and has been tried up. In addition; there is a potential reduction in fuel usage due to the busses not running. Donna is working on negotiating a rate for the Town and School with about a \$4,000 credit going into next year's fuel budget with what has been paid.

Dime Oil has been locked in for the next fiscal year (21/22) a rate of \$1.6342 for Diesel and \$1.6442 heating oil. We have not seen rates that low in about 10 years. First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Donna for securing that.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski suggested working with the 0 budget and go from there to bring down to a negative 3%; noting some reductions have been taken from the CIP Plan.

Selectman Blessington noted that there are some things he sees that should remain in the CIP; such as pillars at HMS; which need to be done as well as the boilers at HMS and TOB should stay intact. He added that he sees some items that should be cut out for now:

- *Old Town Hall septic tank – it is a project that is dear to his heart; but not for this year.
- *2011 F350 pickup truck – do we really have to replace?
- *Pickle ball court – he knows everyone wants that; but it should be cut.
- *Consultant for the building committee; we should put that off for another year

Selectman Blessington moved to make the following cuts to the CIP Plan in addition to what was already cut from the First Selectman; adding item 1.26; building committee consultant for a new school at \$100,000; Item 2.19; Old Town Hall Septic System at \$45,000; Item 2.3, Replace Public Works 2011 F350 at \$38,000 and Item 6.1; Pickle ball court at RRAC at \$39,346.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that all of the items that Selectman Blessington referenced is coming from the General Reserve and LoCIP; which are off budget so they will not affect the bottom line of the proposed

budget. Business Manager Donna Latinesics confirmed. Selectman Blessington then questioned does that mean that we don't spend the money? He then cautioned to look at what is going on with the state. – They don't have any money and the funding may not be available to us next year. He then cautioned we cannot afford to spend any money this year.

Selectwoman Boritz noted that she highlighted the same things as Selectman Blessington and asked if there is a way to take the funding from these projects and put towards other areas that we do need to spend; such as hard cost items that can't be cut?

Selectwoman Boritz then asked if we don't do the OTH septic; does that mean that the usage of the facility will be reduced? First Selectwoman Wicewski noted she does not think so; the potential of something happening there is the same as it was last year. She actually was going to recommend removing the septic project for this year and replace it with the concrete flooring in the TOB with the LoCIP funding instead. We have a weight issue in the attic and she would like to move some of the files that are housed in the attic down in the basement at the TOB. In addition the concrete would mitigate mold issues in the basement.

Selectman Blessington stated that the purpose of this meeting is to spend less; not shift money around. Selectwoman Boritz clarified she was asking if we could reallocate the funding to a different line item to relieve some pressure for hard costs we are required to pay. (Like taking money from a savings account to help pay bills when income has been reduced) She said it was just a logistical question.

Selectman Blessington asked for clarification on LoCIP funding. For example; the Old Town Hall septic; at \$45,000. First Selectwoman Wicewski clarified that we would use LoCIP funds to pay for that project. The line items that are marked 930 are budget items. Discussion was held on the CIP; which items are on budget and off budget; LoCIP funding and how the funds are allocated. Donna Latinesics explained the process that the CIP funding is transferred from the Capital Reserve; code 504. We put the money in the reserve fund through a fund transfer which is from tax dollars.

Selectman Blessington then asked if the money has to be replaced. Donna agreed. Selectman Blessington said this is not money that is magically appearing here – it is still taxpayer's money that we are spending. He then warned that we are going to run into problems with taxpayers this year because so many have lost their jobs. He thought the point here was to try to lower payments. Whether we take it from the General Fund or Capital Reserve we are still using tax payers' dollars and that is what we should be trying to cut this year.

Selectwoman Boritz was in agreement; but noted that we are faced with challenges. She noted as we go through the Selectmen's budget; there are no costs that can be removed. She stated she went through the entire budget line by line and if we remove everything that is unnecessary; she found only about \$14,000 total – that leaves us with over \$100,000 in cuts that we have to make; therefore we have to be creative in how we do that. She then asked if there is a way we can use funding that we have in savings (or collected) rather than needing to collect new money to pay for things we cannot remove from our budget; like salaries; electricity; sand and road maintenance; etc. Donna Latinesics clarified that it makes sense; however those things would come from the Operating Budget; not the capital budget. Donna then clarified that there is no way to take money from the Capital budget and move to the Operating Budget. Selectwoman Boritz then asked if there is a way to transfer it out of the Capital Reserve and put it back into the Operating Budget. Selectman Blessington warned we've already done that over the last couple of years; taking funds from the Capital Reserve Fund because we needed a truck right away. Donna clarified the truck funding was taken from the Fund Balance; not Capital Reserve. The fund balance at the end of each year either has a surplus or sometimes has a deficit. If it has a surplus; it gets added or if it is year that we show a deficit; we have used and subtracted from the fund balance. Selectman Blessington asked what the fund balance is right now. Donna stated that we are forecasting at the end of the year the will be \$2.5 million. First

Selectwoman Wiecenski then asked the percentage of the fund balance? Donna stated that our fiscal policy calls for the town to maintain a fund balance in the range of 8% - 12%; we are currently at 14.6%.

Selectman Blessington said we are putting \$162,000 to put into the Capital Reserve to bring it up to \$710,000; which is our savings account. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that it is for capital purchases; not savings. She then gave an example if we needed to replace a boiler at one of the schools then we would go to that for the funding. If we didn't identify individual projects; we could put funding into the Capital Reserve and then go through the process of taking money for a project in need. She then clarified each year the CIP puts money into that fund in addition to the projects in order to use for capital expenditures. We can do a couple of things; we can remove all of the projects but leave the funding in the capital projects so that we need to draw, it is there.

Selectwoman Boritz then asked if there is any justification during difficult times to not put funding in the Capital Reserve. First Selectwoman Wiecenski cautioned that it is important to put something into capital. We could lessen the amount. There are different philosophies on how it should be funded. If we take the projects away and if something needs to get done; they would have to come before the town with a request from the Capital Reserve. She then asked if the \$162,000 is removed; what would that look like? Donna suggested if we don't add the \$162,000; she would not recommend spending \$100,000 on the school building committee consultant or funding the pickle ball court.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that one of the items Selectman Blessington suggested removing (in the motion) is a truck from Public Works. She clarified that the truck needs to be replaced – it is on the schedule to be. If it weren't replaced and then the vehicle he was using would then be a vehicle with a plow which would put us at a disadvantage. That is why we left this truck in the plan as opposed to one of the others. She then asked Troy Sposato if he could go another year. Troy noted that truck should run and clarified the plan was to replace the maroon truck; which has a cracked frame and should not be driven around. His current truck would replace that truck (because it has a plow on it). If that doesn't; we would still be down one truck for the parking lots. He noted that the old F350 can be used for the lots; however if it breaks down; we won't have a big spare dump truck.

Selectman Blessington noted that everyone is going to have to make sacrifices this year and getting along with less. This is a nice to have item; but maybe we should see how things are going to be next year. First Selectwoman Wiecenski cautioned that if something breaks; we still have to make sure we have equipment to plow properly. It would then be us coming back to the town to make a needed purchase from these funds. If it were just a matter of a truck we wanted to replace; she would have removed it. If we take this truck off; we just cross our fingers and hope for the best. She noted it is possible.

Selectwoman Boritz noted that we cannot foresee the future - we don't know what is going to break down. She noted that she does not see a way we can save all of these capital expenditures and have also our staff. We either have to choose if we want to take that risk and if we do need to get a truck we still have the ability to go back to the Board of Finance for funding. She would rather do that process; even if it takes a little longer. In the event we have a breakdown; request the additional funds; than preemptively have to cut staff so we can purchase a truck just because it could break down; which we don't know it will happen or not.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then clarified that these cuts would get us to the -3%; which is \$104,670. We could put the \$104,670 less into our Capital Reserve and preserve the remainder of the budget. First Selectwoman Wiecenski reminded that there is a motion on the floor; but also has another proposal that does not affect CIP; and would still allow us to cut the \$104,000. Selectwoman Boritz then asked if we can table Selectman Blessington's motion. Selectman Blessington noted that we are looking at \$204,000 if we take off the items he made in his motion:

\$100,000 for the School Building Committee
\$45,000 Old Town Hall Septic

\$38,000 replacing the Ford F350 pickup truck
\$39,346 a new pickle ball court at River Road

First Selectwoman Wiecenski cautioned that she wouldn't recommend cutting that much funding from the Capital Reserve fund. We could say no to the projects but it is important to put some funding in there. For example you still put money into the fund source (reserve fund); eliminate the projects but not eliminate every dollar for that fund; there would be no project associated with it; so in the event there were a capital need; the request would have to come back to the town and request the money from the Capital Reserve. So instead of cutting \$145,000 from the reserve fund; we cut the \$104,000 to get to the -3%. It would then leave some funding in there for unnamed projects. Selectman Blessington said he does not recall asking to not put the money into the Capital Reserve fund; he is talking about spending money out of it. First Selectwoman Wiecenski agreed; but said instead of cutting the total amount of dollars out of the fund; we would just say cut the fund by a certain amount of dollars and there are no projects – they don't exist. Selectman Blessington cautioned that we do have projects that we will be doing. First Selectwoman Wiecenski cautioned that the projects he has on the table would not happen; for example the septic would not be cut from capital (because it is LoCIP). Selectman Blessington then said we'd be cutting the \$100,000 from the school building consultant. First Selectwoman Wiecenski said only if the motion passes. Selectman Blessington asked where the funding for pickle ball court comes from? First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted the pickle ball court comes from the reserve; but could potentially come from LoCIP funds instead. Selectman Blessington then said the majority would come from the Capital Reserve with the exception of the septic. First Selectwoman Wiecenski then cautioned that she wouldn't recommend cutting equal dollars from the reserve fund. You can cut the project and then adjust dollars we cut from the reserve fund. Selectman Blessington said that works for him.

Selectwoman Boritz moved to table the current active motion on the table.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

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

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then noted that she has been looking over the budget with many of the department heads; who are also logged in virtually to this meeting. There is not a whole lot in their budgets that can be cut. First Selectwoman Wiecenski added that she has also been reviewing with Troy and has removed some money from his budget. Troy has a suggestion that would be able to remove the entire \$104,000 from his budget.

Troy noted he would like to remove the \$115,000 from the chip sealing (which would be approximately 6 miles of road for the coming year). He would then use the \$145,000; which was earmarked for paving to do much needed prep work on several roads; such as shimming doing overlays, fixing the edges of the roads and drainage. This would allow the crew to spend more time and detail on the prep to prepare for the following year; crack sealing and adding rejuvenation to the roads. Then, Troy said he would like to carry the proposed \$115,000 and \$145,000 and put both into the chip seal for the following year; which would allow them to chip seal between 10 – 16 miles of road because of the detail spent this coming year. He said he believes we should be putting more money in the roads; but this is not the year. This is just a suggestion; but would like to do something like this before we have to cut staff.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said she did not expect to see a \$104,000 cut from Public Works; but it is an interesting concept.

Troy clarified that he would instead use the \$145,000 earmarked for paving; to shim and fix the sides of the roads. He noted that crack sealing can last 4 – 5 years. We have such a small budget for crack sealing as it is. He noted that depending on how bad the road is cracked; one mile costs approximately \$6,500. We could do maybe 5 miles of crack sealing (depending on the roads); and those roads would be preserved for 5 years. In addition; he would like to rejuvenate 5 miles of roads. One mile of rejuvenator would cost somewhere between \$12,000 - \$15,000;

prolonging the life out of these roads. Some of the roads that need to be chip sealed need to be shimmed and crack sealed anyway. In short; Troy would like to spend more money and time this summer prepping the roads to get them ready for chip sealing instead of just chip sealing them.

Selectwoman Boritz then said if what Troy is saying that this could potentially be a long term benefit; focusing on the structural integrity of the roads rather than just chip seal them as standard process. She said she does not see much of a downside; as long as we have the ability to maintain the dirt roads as well; because they always need maintenance coming out of the winter season. Troy clarified that the dirt road maintenance will not be touched. Selectman Blessington said road maintenance is one of the basic functions of our government and we always put it off because of budget cuts. This makes him nervous because not doing chip sealing now might mean a lot more money in the future. Selectman Blessington said he went through the budget; and found some places where we might be able to find money here and there; but not \$104,000. He then read an editorial from Chris Powell from the Journal Inquirer from April 18, 2020 that he wanted to add to the minutes:

It's bad enough that the wages and benefits of state and municipal government employees have been completely protected even as the governor's own orders have thrown tens of thousands of people out of work in the private sector. For state government to pay raises while unemployment explodes in the private sector and state tax collections collapse would be crazy, more proof that nothing matters more to state government than the contentment of its own employees, whose unions long have controlled the majority political party.

But the governor is not helpless here. Using his emergency powers he could suspend collective bargaining for state employees and binding arbitration of their contracts for six months at a time or "modify" those laws to strengthen public administration during the emergency. He should do so, for as the treacle on television says, we're all supposed to be in this together. – Chris Powell; Journal Inquirer

Selectman Blessington said the elephant in the room is our employees and the cost of them. He is not saying we should lay anyone off; but how much are we spending on salary increases this year? . First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted that the Government side increases at 2% amount to \$30,335. Selectman Blessington then asked for the education numbers. First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted she doesn't have those numbers and the Selectmen do not have control over that budget.

Selectman Blessington noted that he made a motion the other night to send a letter to the Governor to issue an Executive Order to freeze increases. He added the only other thing we could possibly do is to cut increases for non-union employees. He thanked First Selectwoman Wiczenski for not putting an increase for herself; and added the other Selectmen should follow suit. Selectman Blessington then asked if there is anyone else we could bypass a raise for this year as well? Selectwoman Boritz said she is more than happy to have the BOS not get a raise. It would show solidarity and a good gesture; however it only adds up to \$234.00 between the two Selectmen; but absolutely is in favor of cutting. She added in considering Troy's plan; if what he is telling us in the long term, this plan could be more beneficial for the quality of our roads; she does not necessarily see how we lose by going with it.

Selectman Blessington said if we say the roads won't get too much worse by cutting the \$104,000; we might think about it; but now we are being told they will be better than ever.... Then why wasn't this in the budget in the first place? Selectwoman Boritz said we asked everyone to think creatively about their budget. Do we say because you didn't propose it in the first place then it isn't a good plan? Or do we say, we've given an opportunity to review your budget and now you've come up with something better; should we reject it because initially it wasn't proposed when we didn't know we were going to have a budget crisis months ago. So the fact that he didn't mention earlier doesn't make it a bad idea. If he is telling us it is a good idea and if it works' why wouldn't we consider it as a viable option.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that Troy had originally increased the budget; he knows our roads need attention and is now proposing a solution to save funds; and what he thinks he can do with the funding he has available to better prepare our roads. She said she has concerns when she hears we shouldn't chip seal and what that might mean; but we have a Public Works Director with knowledge of our roads and it is important to take him up on that. She is still torn about doing this. Troy is trying to do the best he can with the funding he has. It is worth having the conversation.

Troy said he did originally budget more to fix the roads. He added crack sealing and rejuvenator will buy time and fix the roads the correct way. He does not recommend doing this every year; but for this year; instead of cutting staff; it is an option.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said we have a potential of cutting the \$104,670 from the CIP, or taking all of it from Public Works Chip Seal and she is also hearing Selectman Blessington's suggestion of taking in other places; specifically salary increases; which is about \$30,000. We could also consider a combination of the two proposals.

Selectwoman Boritz then asked what if they decided to split between the CIP and chip sealing. Would an additional \$52,000 get Troy more than nothing? Troy said that he can work with whatever number they bring his budget down to.

Donna then removed ½ from Capital Reserve and ½ from the chip seal in the draft worksheet. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted the Board of Finance will take the information from all budget writers and review to see what that looks like for the entire town and will decide if they should reduce -3%. Selectwoman Boritz said we should send a letter to BOF along with the proposed budget; informing them that this means we have fewer roads that will be paved and less money in the Capital Reserve.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated when the BOF talked about the cuts; they looked at scenarios and what a mil rate would look like if they took \$400,000 from the fund balance; would allow them to have a flat mil rate. She added that this would be the fourth year in a row with the same mil-rate. It is not an increase in services for Willington. First Selectwoman Wiecenski added that Region 19 has approved their budget. The schools will be hindered by MBR; and if they are penalized for going under the MBR; would come from ECS.

Selectwoman Boritz asked if the Board of Finance will be looking at individual budgets and pick and choose who will be cut at -3 and leave others flat? First Selectwoman Wiecenski said they did not talk about it. They had an individual member who wanted to see what a -3% looked like. The board as a whole wanted to see what a -3% would look like in terms of not just dollars but the affects as well; noting that a -3% impact is very different from the Selectmen's budget versus the Emergency Services budget, etc. It would make a very different bottom line increase.

Selectwoman Boritz acknowledged the editorial that Selectman Blessington read into the minutes and notes she doesn't disagree in a big picture; but Willington is not matching its peers in keeping pace with salaries. We are an anomaly – for a long time we have been under-funding our services and staff positions. We have been making minimum increases to staff funding for a very long time.

Selectwoman Boritz moved to accept the plan of splitting \$104,000 from Public Works Chip Seal and ½ from the Capital Reserve funds (\$52,000 each).

First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.

Selectman Blessington noted if we are talking about Capital Reserve; there were several items that were in the motion there that was tabled. Are we going to name them or just give a dollar value? He then said we are taking a tremendous amount of money from one program that he feels is fairly important. Maybe it will make the roads better; but again he questions why it was in there if it could so easily be cut out. Selectman Blessington then clarified it is not that we underpay our workers so much; it is perhaps that other towns overpay. No one he knows of has decided that they can't afford to work for this town; so they leave – when that starts happening he will worry about it. Selectwoman Boritz disagreed that we have seen it but she is not interested in engaging in that debate at the moment.

Selectwoman Boritz then asked if we take the pickle ball court from the CIP; would that affect our bottom line for next year? First Selectwoman Wiecenski recommended voting on the budget first; then look at CIP to go through with the decreases and figure out how to make the funding work by looking at the individual projects in the plan.

Selectwoman Boritz said the pickle ball court would be nice to have; but this year we most likely wouldn't even be able to enjoy it; so pushing it off makes sense as well as pushing off the OTH septic. Removing those items will equal \$83,346.

Selectwoman Boritz amended the previous motion removing \$84,346 from Capital Reserve and remainder \$19,654 from Public Works Chip Sealing; totaling \$104,000.
First Selectwoman Wiecenski second the amended motion.

Selectman Blessington noted we ignored the \$100,000 for the building committee consultants. Are we going to have a building committee this year? He warned we are headed into a recession and could be looking at a depression by the time this whole virus thing blows over. He is not sure we are going to be able to afford a new school. He would cut it out in addition to the pickle ball court and septic system. That would be your savings right there.

Selectwoman Boritz asked for further clarification on the school building committee consultant funding. She said she was under the impression the funding would not impact the bottom line? First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified it would come from the Capital Reserve fund and said the townspeople voted in favor to form a committee and she feels we are obligated to move forward with a school building committee. It was put off because we were waiting for Selectman Blessington to return to the table and also put off to find the proper way to address the appointments. First Selectwoman Wiecenski added that we held a town meeting and a vote was taken - we still have to honor that. It doesn't mean that we need a new school or can afford one; that is not the question. It allows a building committee to do that – and in order to get a proper answer and see a savings in our schools; it remains to be seen. She is in the mind set to leave the funding as is so we can get answers and move in one direction. She then answered Selectman Blessington's question – yes we will still have a school building committee and is hopeful sooner rather than later. Selectman Blessington said he remembers that town meeting and during that meeting; First Selectwoman Wiecenski assured the townspeople that it's just forming a committee which was going to just be a study and wouldn't cost the town any money. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that the vote did not have any money attached to it and she was very clear about that. A future project is going to have some dollars; but forming a committee does not. Eventually the Committee will come to us and they will have to spend some money to move forward. First Selectwoman Wiecenski then said we cannot argue semantics. She then reminded the Selectmen there is a motion on the table.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then asked Donna if LoCIP funds would be available towards the pickle ball court instead of the old Town Hall septic. This is assuming LoCIP funds become available. Donna confirmed instead of spending \$45,000 on the OTH septic; \$39,346 will go towards a pickle ball court using LoCIP funds. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the cuts that are proposed do not come from the same source. We can still cut the reserve fund by those same dollars but allow for the pickle ball court to remain if our LoCIP funds are

available. She clarified that we have heard nothing from the state as far as reduction in revenue as of yet; although it could change.

Selectman Blessington asked if we are going back to what was said at the previous meeting; if the Labor Department hasn't said we are in a recession then we are not in a recession. He then said we are doing semantics here. Assuming LoCIP is going to pay for a pickle ball court?? What happens if LoCIP doesn't come through – right now things change day by day? First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that if the funds don't come through then the project can't happen – we would have to secure the funds before beginning the project. Selectman Blessington then clarified that the funds cannot go towards the septic system? First Selectwoman Wiecenski said if one project was dropped and the septic system needed to be done; we could see if there were loCIP funds available; but if there are no funds then the funds would not be able to come from there.

Selectman Blessington said he is still in favor of dropping both pickle ball court and septic at the OTH.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski recapped that the motion on the table is to remove the \$84,346 from the Capital Reserve and \$19,364 from Public Works; which gets us to the -3% decrease.

Vote: 2 yes (Wiecenski & Boritz) 1 No Blessington.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that we now have two budgets; zero & -3% to present to the Board of Finance.

Selectwoman Boritz moved to have the First Selectman forward both budgets to the Board of Finance. First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.

Selectman Blessington said that he isn't sure why they are voting on this motion. It passed by 2-1 vote. He is hopeful it is made clear when drafting a letter to the Board of Finance. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that a majority vote is now the Board of Selectmen's budget. It is our proposed 0 and -3% budget. Selectman Blessington clarified that it was not a unanimous vote. First Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified no one said it was.

Vote: 2 yes (Wiecenski & Boritz) 0 No. 1 Abstain (Blessington)

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she will forward both budgets to the BOF.

**First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:58 PM
Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.**

First Selectwoman thanked Donna and all department heads for their work on their budgets.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Campbell
Office Manager
Town of Willington