

Town of Willington

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Special Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via ZOOM

February 10, 2022
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):

Mike Makuch – Chairman
Geoff Prusak – Vice Chairman
Peter Tanaka– Secretary
Stephanie Summers
Joseph Sherrell
Christina Mailhos (*joined meeting late*)
Jim Gilligan – Alternate
Lisa Woolf – Alternate (*joined meeting late*)

Members Absent:
None.

Also Present:
First Selectwoman Erika Wiecewski
Business Manager Donna Latinsics
Emergency Management Director Stuart Cobb
Willington Fire Company #1 Chief Alexander Moore
Fire Marshal Richard Palmer
Willington Hill Fire Department Chief Tom Snyder
Members of the Public

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:05pm.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES

P. Tanaka moved to seat Jim Gilligan in place of Christina Mailhos.

G. Prusak seconded the motion.

5 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, J. Sherrell, S. Summers, P. Tanaka), 0 No. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Jim Bulick, Laurel Drive: I attended the last town meeting that we had and spoke out against the formation of the American Rescue Plan Act Commission to make spending appropriation decisions. It was my opinion, I made arguments at that point in time that that's the Board of Finance's responsibility so I would strongly urge

the Board of Finance to take that role back. I believe that you should be doing and making the decisions about these appropriations. I believe this commission should be advising you on priorities or what needs to get done where, that seems like a very reasonable thing to do but I think the actual appropriations I believe should be made by the Board of Finance. Thank you.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road: I too would like to comment on the ARPA Commission and ask the Board of Finance to exercise their traditional role in approving any appropriation that may be recommended by the ARPA committee and followed by our normal practice of town meeting approval. I think that's important, it's important to the townspeople and I urge you to do what you always do. Thank you very much.

NEW BUSINESS

1) Budget Request Presentations: EMERGENCY SERVICES

a) Fire Marshal

Fire Marshal Richard Palmer presented the Fire Marshal budget with a 0% increase. The budget will currently be maintained as is. The only increase would be if the town approved an increase for the nonunion staff salary.

Discussion was had on the salary of the fire marshal and the other nonunion positions that are not included in the contract and if there will be an increase. If there is to be an increase in the fire marshal salary, it would need to be included in this budget.

b) Willington Hill Fire Department

Fire Chief Tom Snyder presented the Willington Hill Fire Department budget.

Chief Snyder stated that 25 Old Farms Road is being rented. The Fire Department is applying to the Board of Assessment Appeals for the real estate tax bill. The Department would owe approximately \$11,000.00 and currently has collected an estimated \$12,000.00 from the property rental fees. The Department is applying to the Board of Assessment Appeals to remove the tax liability.

The Department has a 2.37% increase in the budget because of increased costs with supplies, etc. There are no additions to the budget. The cost increase is \$3,200.00 for a total budget of \$138,500.00.

Note 1# for Line Item #10 (Building Supplies, 24 Old Farms) is based on the percentage of the line item that has been spent year to date this year. Note # 2 (Accounting/legal fees), #3 (printer contract), #4 (insurance 24 Old Farms), and #5 (response software) are cost increases to the department.

Line #49 shows a decrease in protective clothing purchases and discussion was held on the purchase of protective clothing for members. Most members have up to date gear and at this time, only a few sets are being included in the budget.

Discussion was held on electricity costs; the current budget was estimated on the year to date spending for this category.

S. Summers asked if the department has applied for ARPA funding for any projects. Chief Snyder replied that the department has not applied for any funding yet but did have multiple CIP requests that will be sent to ARPA as well. This includes the funding for a new service truck and SCBA airpacks, as well as the joint submission with Willington #1 for the radio system.

Chairman Makuch inquired about Line #68 (fund balance) and Chief Snyder replied this was the fund balance left for the current fiscal year.

Line 25 (insurance 24 Old Farms) is at an 8% increase for insurance because the two properties have been combined.

c) Willington Fire Department #1

Fire Chief Alex Moore presented the budgets for the fire protection budget, the Willington Fire Department #1 budget and the ambulance budget.

In the fire protection budget, there is no change requested in the AED budget. This covers the defibrillators in the town buildings and would allow for the purchase of two new AEDs to replace the outdated ones. This year, the heartsafe community recognition was given to the Town of Willington. The department is continuing to train with town employees, school staff, and town residents. There are AEDs housed in every town building and both fire departments.

In the fire department operational budget, Line 9 (telephone general) is for the ipads in the trucks that run the I Am Responding program (between Willington #1 and Willington Hill) that are in the service truck, ambulance and the squad/rescue pumper. This line also covers the wireless modem in the ambulance which is needed to run the heart monitor so that it can transmit. The \$2,800.00 increase is for the three ipads; there was a grant to do the ipad installation last year.

In Line 13 (electricity: station 13), there is a \$400 increase for the main station and Line 14 (electricity: station 213), there is a \$200 increase for the south station. There is an increase in heat and propane for both stations. Line 21 (insurance) the insurance is renewed as of January 1st. This will be going out to bid again in October/November. The increase is from the employee EAP (emergency assistance program). Normally employee costs are covered in the ambulance funding, but this policy covers all volunteers and paid staff.

Line 38 (protective clothing purchase) shows an increase of \$1,400.00 for sets of gear for newer volunteers and the per diem staff. It typically costs between \$3,000.00 and \$5,000.00 to purchase gear. This would allow for two to three sets to be purchased. Line 21 (fire equipment purchase) shows an increase because the thermal imaging cameras (TICs) are in need of replacement. The last time they were purchased, they were bought from a larger department and were used but are now in poor shape and some are not working.

Line 45 (medical equipment) for medical equipment is a \$2,000.00 increase because call volume is up and the cost of medical supplies has significantly increased.

The total increase of the budget is 11.57% or \$15,520.00; most of this budget is fixed costs.

P. Tanaka asked if there would be any requests for ARPA funding submitted. Chief Moore stated that the department is hoping to submit a request to purchase a second ambulance. There is currently a joint radio project and fit test machine purchase request between both Willington #1 and Willington Hill.

Discussion continued regarding the costs and specifications of the radios, as well as discussion on the purchase of a second ambulance and the cost of the repairs for the current ambulance.

In the ambulance salary budget, the biggest increase is the wage increase. The employees were given a wage adjustment midyear. There is an increase of 6.85% which is equal to \$40,490.00 to the total payroll expense. That is a built-in increase for July 1st with the contract. Chief Moore stated that the Town of Union approved \$13,000.00 from their ARPA funding for the Willington ambulance service payroll. That amount is half of the anticipated increase for this year. Chairman Makuch asked if the department intends to apply this funding to the current fiscal year if needed, and if not, the funding would roll into the next fiscal year.

Chief Moore stated that he is still working with the Town of Union for additional funding. The Town of Union would pay the fire department directly for providing the ambulance service and then it would be transferred to the town to be used strictly for payroll.

S. Summers stated that a rough analysis was conducted and after the outlay of the population, etc. it was estimated that a direct share of calls would be \$48,000.00. S. Summers asked what the Town of Union plans to do after ARPA funds.

Discussion in regards to the Town of Union and the Town of Willington providing ambulance services occurred. Chief Moore will continue the conversation that has been started with the Town.

Discussion was held on the tower revenue that the department receives. These funds are used to help offset the cost of the night-shift position. The remaining funds are used to pay for cable at the firehouse, annual meeting expenses, holiday party for the members, etc. The funding that is received varies depending on the carrier that is using the tower.

S. Summers asked if the next report from the department can include the revenue from the ambulance billing, as well as the tower revenue.

Discussion was had on Fund 17; Chief Moore stated that Fund 17 typically pays for fire apparatus, the ambulance, purchasing fire or EMS related equipment, and there is a transfer for payroll that occurs.

Discussion continued on the Town of Union mutual aid ambulance service and the service that the Willington ambulance provides. The Union/Willington agreement occurred prior to Chief Moore and the discussion was had between the towns, not just the fire department. The calls are typically billed to the patient's insurance; on January 1st, the percentages that can be billed went into effect. The State initiated a 4.1% increase.

The department has moved forward with the repairs on the current ambulance, but is still trying to fund a second ambulance. The call volume of the department has significantly increased in the last two years. It is projected the department may respond to approximately 1,000 calls within the next year and a second ambulance is needed for the additional calls when necessary, as well as a backup in case the current ambulance breaks down.

d) Emergency Management Director

EMD Cobb presented the Emergency Management Director budget with a 0% increase, with a total budget of \$7,047.00. There is a \$6,000.00 request for the EMD stipend. There is \$1,047.00 included for the generator maintenance at Hall School. Last week, the block heater needed to be replaced on that generator.

P. Tanaka asked EMD Cobb if he would be requesting a nonunion pay increase as well and EMD Cobb replied that he would not be requesting that. Chairman Makuch stated that this is associated with the emergency management performance grant.

2.) ARPA Update:

Chairman Makuch read an email from C. Mailhos that provided an update from the ARPA Commission to the Board of Finance.

ARPA Commission: There have been two meetings of the ARPA Commission so far. Most recent was Monday, February 7th. The Commission has received some informal ARPA funding requests from various departments including the CIP Committee. The Commission discussed a process for soliciting requests, a process for vetting and prioritizing requests and how the appropriation process will work. A funding request form will be disseminated as early as next week with the goal of having some formal requests in hand by the

next meeting which is February 28th. The ARPA Commission agrees that it is important to get funds to businesses and families or individuals who need it asap and hope to have fleshed out proposals from human services and economic development to consider. The CIP Committee has requested provisional approval for several projects that would provide relief in the coming budget process. It is possible that the provisional approval or even actual appropriations for some requests could be voted on at that meeting but the Commission would like to understand the full scope of requests and get public input before making major decisions. As a reminder, per the ordinance approved in December, the appropriations will not go through the usual process of Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen and town meeting approval and the appropriations will be handled by the ARPA Commission directly. This is unusual and the actual process for making the appropriations, for example how to word the motions is still being worked out. I'm attaching a copy of the ordinance for your information. Respectfully submitted, Christina Mailhos.

At 8:25pm C. Mailhos joined the meeting.

Discussion occurred in regards to the ARPA Commission and the appropriation of funds by the Commission. Chairman Makuch stated that the current fiscal year budget included funding for attorney services, but this may be the appropriate time for the Board to seek proper town attorney type financial guidance. C. Mailhos stated that when the ARPA Commission needs to appropriate the money, it is unclear what the actual motion the Commission is going to make. Normally the Board would recommend that the Board of Selectmen call a town meeting and then this would give the Selectmen the authority to sign the checks. The procurement ordinance would still be followed in regards to obtaining three bids over the set bid amount. Chairman Makuch reached out to several other towns to see how they are also handling the distribution of ARPA money as well.

P. Tanaka moved to ask M. Makuch as Chairman to pursue legal advice on this issue.

S. Summers seconded.

Discussion: Discussion was held on if legal advice was needed or municipal accounting advice was needed. Chairman Makuch stated that the Board does not have the say to tell the Commission to stop their work; this would be to resolve if the Board of Finance participates or does not participate, in a legal way, so that the Board is protecting the responsibility of the taxpayers. C. Mailhos stated that in the past with STEAP grants, there was a vote at town meeting to accept the grant and then another vote to spend the funds. If the Selectmen do not agree with that, they still have to sign the checks. The ordinance gives the ARPA Commission that power. S. Summers stated to ask legal counsel what the nature of the motion would be on the behalf of the Board of Finance, because the Board wouldn't be recommending calling a town meeting to appropriate the funds, unless the legal advice is that you have to have a town meeting. G. Prusak stated the ARPA committee can function as an advisory committee and C. Mailhos replied that the ARPA Commission was created by a special ordinance. The commission manages the disbursement of the funds, the commission is the grant administrator, and follows the current procurement procedures, etc.

6 Yes (C. Mailhos, M. Makuch, G. Prusak, J. Sherrell, S. Summers, P. Tanaka), 0 No. Motion carried.

Chairman Makuch stated that C. Mailhos joined the meeting so she automatically reclaimed her seat from J. Gilligan.

CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence has been forwarded. Will send the budget information from EMD Cobb as well as the email from C. Mailhos in regards to the ARPA Commission.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Matt Clark: I have the same concerns; I echo Selectman Bulick's comment. The Board of Finance should maintain a traditional role as the approver of town spending and at the town meeting, I too voiced the support of the ARPA committee as an advisory group but I disapproved of circumventing and going around the Board

of Finance and the town meeting for spending the ARPA funds. That's particularly important since the ARPA meeting is held during regular business hours, working hours, when the citizens of Willington are working. I think you guys have identified the problems; we should avoid these problems, we don't need to do this. We should avoid those potential problems with the approval process by just following our normal appropriation process. Why do we want to get around a town meeting? It's fast. How long can it take? It only takes like two weeks. I don't know why; It should be an advisory group and then go through the regular appropriation process. That's my comment.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road: I want to thank the Board for looking carefully, and particularly, Christina, as I see she spent some time on it for looking at this ARPA issue carefully. I think I share everyone's feelings that we all left that town meeting on this topic not feeling good about this. Yes the attorney gave us some legalese that said we could do this if we were somewhat like Stafford, which was unclear to everyone. But I agree with some of the sentiments expressed tonight. Why would we deviate from our normal practice? So I am glad you're going to seek additional legal counsel but I'll also suggest an alternate path for the Board of Finance. Even if the attorney comes back and says well you can do this because we found a way for you to do this, we can still add our normal processes. Nothing precludes us from doing that. We have a town meeting form of government. That's what the people of Willington are comfortable with. We like the idea of you guys in particular, being our financial stewards and then shuffling into our little cozy town meetinghouse as we do, to approve even a dump truck, let alone 2 million dollars worth of federal funding. I understand that this is government spending money obtained from government. I'm trying to wrap my head around that and it's difficult, however it's never wrong to do the right thing. I have a lot of faith in you folks and I encourage you to carefully consider what the attorney says but then do what the townspeople of Willington also would like to see. Thank you very much.

GOOD & WELFARE

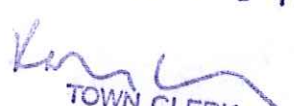
Chairman Makuch thanked everyone for their hard work and all that gets put into these meetings; the only way that it is done right, is if we pay attention to it and ask questions and includes all the members of this group who are serving on other committees, like Christina representing the Board with the ARPA Commission and the others who have volunteered.

P. Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:43pm.

S. Summers seconded the motion.

All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Kelsey Allard
Interim Recording Secretary

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WILLINGTON, CT.
2022 JUL 12 P 3: 16

TOWN CLERK