

Town of Willington

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BOARD OF FINANCE

**Special Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via ZOOM**

**February 24, 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
Peter Tanaka– Secretary
Stephanie Summers
Joseph Sherrell
Christina Mailhos
Lisa Woolf – Alternate

Members Absent:

Geoff Prusak – Vice Chairman
Jim Gilligan – Alternate

Also Present:

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski
Business Manager Donna Latinsics
Tax Collector Janice Clauson
Treasurer Laurie Semperebon
Registrar of Voters Suzanne Chapman
Superintendent Phil Stevens
Board of Education Chairman Michelle Douchette Cunningham
Willington Fire Company #1 Chief Alexander Moore
Members of the Public

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES

S. Summers moved to seat Lisa Woolf in place of Geoff Prusak.

J. Sherrell seconded the motion.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

None.

OLD BUSINESS

1) Previously tabled budget presentations

Treasurer Semprebon presented the Treasurer's budget, which is a decrease of \$26,006.00 because of the position change for the Treasurer (was originally 20 to 30 hours per week and is now 6 hours per week) and the salary now associated with that position. The salary was originally \$32,680.00 and has now decreased to \$6,674.00 for the next fiscal year budget. Treasurer Semprebon apologized to the Board for the delinquency in the presenting of the Treasurer budget due to traveling last week.

Chairman Makuch stated that the Board of Finance budget needs to be reviewed, as well as the Board of Finance contingency budget, which can occur at next week's meeting.

2) ARPA Process Update

Chairman Makuch stated that an email response was received from the town auditor today in regards to the questions from the Board of Finance. *This email will be included with these minutes for this meeting.*

Discussion was held on the auditors (Mahoney & Sabol) answers to each of the questions that were asked. P. Tanaka stated that he interpreted the answers as to say do what the town usually does, because that's how things are normally done, but there is a loophole that allows for another practice. Chairman Makuch stated that the ultimate goal is to help the town with the money, but he wants to feel sure that this process is valid. S. Summers inquired if the spending of the money would still create a need for a town meeting.

C. Mailhos stated that the next ARPA Commission meeting is this coming Monday and the Commission is in the progress of receiving submissions.

Chairman Makuch asked if First Selectwoman Wiecenski had discussed this further with the town attorney and First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she had spoken to both the town auditor and the town attorney. The ordinance allows the ARPA Commission to disperse all of the funds for ARPA. There is an item in the ARPA ordinance that the Board shall create the controls for writing the checks. In the ARPA Commission, there is a need to formally approve the procurement and dispersal process (which would be the town finance department and utilizing an approved state vendor or the town required three bids).

S. Summers asked if wording would need to still be considered for creating the motion for funding. Chairman Makuch stated that the Board of Finance does not and First Selectwoman Wiecenski has reached out to the town attorney for a formal answer.

3) Corrected Registrar's budget request

The Registrars' budget had to be revised to include an additional referendum for the Schools project. While revising their budget, they also found a formula error. Registrar Chapman apologized for the error in the original submission. She also stated that in the last BOF meeting there was discussion of including the additional referendum in the BOF budget, but the ROV office decided to add the additional referendum in their budget to be included. The budget request is amended for a total combined increase of \$1,979.00 and \$150.00.

P. Tanaka agreed that the ROV Budget is the correct place to add the additional referendum.

This budget represents a 14.5% increase without the salary increase for the registrars; typically the elected officials receive an increase with the contract finalization. Next year the budget may be less because it will depend on how many events will need to be held (this current budget includes five events: 3 referendums, 2 primaries, and 1 election).

NEW BUSINESS

1) Damage to Moose Meadow Road

Chairman Makuch stated that he was contacted by a resident last week due to damage that was caused to Moose Meadow Road. This resident stated that he believed the damage was caused due to trucks traveling to and from the Love's Truck Stop, hauling material.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that her office received a call on Friday and she notified the DPW crew leader who inspected the road and then contacted DPW Director Sposato. DPW Director Sposato and First Selectwoman Wiczenski inspected the road on Friday night as well and documented the damage. There is an estimated 3,900 feet of road that will need to be repaired. Cost estimates are being obtained. The first cost estimate that was received was \$409,000.00; there is not enough money in the current budget for this and so there may be a request for funding once all of the quotes have been received for the work. Currently there are two quotes and DPW is awaiting a third quote. Ultimately the condition of the roads is the town's responsibility to maintain and repair, when needed.

C. Mailhos asked if the road is passable/safe. First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that the road is passable; the road will not be easy to be plowed but the contractor was out this weekend to review the area, if needed. If the road becomes unsafe for residents to travel the DPW will close the road to traffic. This is a road that hasn't seen a lot of maintenance over the years. Discussion continued on the condition of the road and the possible work that will be necessary for repair.

2) Budget Request Presentations

a) Board of Education

Superintendent Stevens presented the Board of Education budget. Since the BOE approved the budget, there is a significant change. The Board went from a 3.86% increase to a 0.99% increase. The Board has three goals this year: student growth and success, school culture and climate, and sustainable and strategic investments. These goals equate to the budget that is presented and is tied to long term goals.

Start with developmental budget assumptions/costs: The medical insurance premium will not increase this year; we have joined a collaborative to make the group bigger, but there is a 0% increase to the cost this year. Dental insurance should not increase more than 5%. There is one placeholder in the budget for insurance, if needed. Heating fuel and diesel fuel was budgeted for \$2.50 per gallon. Last year this price was \$1.64 per gallon. After national news broke last night, rates have been locked in at just under \$3.00 per gallon today. The electrical rates should remain flat; the current out placement is now two instead of three; and the cost of the buses is expected to increase roughly 3%. Cyber insurance is needed; IT projects need to be done prior to the cyber insurance taking effect.

What percent of the budget is contractual? 60% of the budget is salaries, 17% is benefits (health insurance, dental insurance), and 20% of the purchased services (PowerSchool, telephone, internet, disposal, IT). This is 97% of contractual services.

The increases are Program 7 (Utilities) and Program 9 (Systemwide Support) and Program 10 (Fringe Benefits/Substitutes) No increase in fringe benefits, but an increase in insurance costs.

The ongoing efforts for savings include the insurance program (joined a collaborative) and working towards grants.

Chairman Makuch inquired about fuel costs and Superintendent Stevens responded that the BOE had budgeted for \$2.50 a gallon for transportation fuel and heating fuel but today the fuel prices were locked in at \$3.00. This is an increase of \$9,000.00 (Program 4 Transportation) and \$17,500 (Heating Oil) for a total increase of \$26,500.00 to the current BOE budget number. Discussion followed on the current cost of heating oil and fuel.

P. Tanaka inquired about the MBR and Superintendent Stevens replied that he has not heard anything as of now. Chairman Makuch stated that it could be a few months before the information is shared.

S. Summers inquired if the budget presented represents a fully open and functioning school. Superintendent Stevens replied that the budget does include the school remaining fully open.

Discussion was held on the current enrollment rates in the school system and the return of the students who homeschooled during COVID 19. Superintendent Stevens reported that an estimated 90% of the students that were homeschooled, have now returned back to school.

P. Tanaka inquired about the Region 19 Board of Education budget and Chairman Makuch stated that it's not typically presented in front of the Board, it goes to referendum. L. Woolf stated that the budget can be heard through the Region 19 Board of Education meetings. Chairman Makuch stated that the share of the enrollment was going to go down this year, but it's the same as last year, and the cost per student has increased. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that it increased 10% last year and this year is estimated at a 3.4% increase. Herb Arico stated that one budget meeting has been held and there will be a regular meeting on March 1st and a budget review meeting on March 8th at the Media center in Mansfield.

CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence has been forwarded to the Board. This is a reminder to look for an email from IT about the new email. The town is moving from @willingtonct.org to @willingtonct.gov.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Sarah Baker: Thank you all for being here tonight and taking the time to go through all of these budgets so carefully. I thought that Phil did a great job with that presentation and honestly, I think inflation is at 7.5% and with fuel costs being what they are, that 1.3% is a miracle. Great work by that team for keeping us on a really tight budget. I just wanted to say that; I appreciate it and thank you.

Peter Latinsics: Thank you. I tried to speak during the first Present to Speak but was unsuccessful in unmuting somehow. I want to thank the Board for taking the extra steps to look into the ARPA use of funds. I was pleased to hear tonight that the auditor seems to be recommending that we follow our standard practices for appropriating funds, using funds. I want to encourage the Board to move in that direction, and use our normal Board of Finance approval, town meeting approval process for the ARPA funds as well. I agree with Peter Tanaka's comments earlier. It's just easier to do the right thing even if there are legal loopholes that allow us to circumvent them. We shouldn't do that. The townspeople have a comfort level with our process. There are a large amount of funds and I'm confident you guys can act quickly when needed to follow our normal process. Thank you very much.

Melissa McKinnon, 63 Luchon Road: I wanted to make a comment about the ARPA funds. I think that with the ARPA funds, it needs to get into the hands of the townspeople and the businesses quickly. And I believe that whatever process, whether it's the ARPA Commission divvying out the funds, is the way the State is anticipating doing it the correct way. Not doing it through town meetings and you know, I don't think people realize how much it costs through all of the town meetings and that kind of thing. I'm glad they're getting the advice from the town attorney, but I believe the whole purpose is getting the money into the hands of the people who have been hurting the most in town through these last two years. Thank you so much.

GOOD & WELFARE

Chairman Makuch reminded everyone to be careful with the weather tomorrow and thank you as always to the team.

S. Summers stated that it would be appropriate to make a comment on the passing of the late, great Penny who has been so important to the fabric of the town over the years. A lot of people who have had kids in the school know that there was a sort of light in the eyes when they were doing history day or Shakespearean day. Pat Pinney lived a lifetime in Somers and was an educator here in Willington for most of her pretty stellar career. I am going to miss her, but I definitely have some great memories of what she contributed to the kids at Hall.

P. Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:32pm.

M. Makuch seconded the motion.

All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Kelsey Allard
Interim Recording Secretary

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2022 JUL 12 P 3:18

TOWN CLERK