

Town of Willington

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Regular Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via ZOOM

March 17, 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
Christina Mailhos
Stephanie Summers
Joseph Sherrell
Lisa Woolf – Alternate

Members Absent:

Jim Gilligan – Alternate

Also Present:

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecewski
Town Attorney Ryan O'Donnell
Business Manager Donna Latincsics
Department of Public Works Director Troy Sposato
Human Services Director Jennie Arpin
Parks & Rec Director Alan Humphrey
Revenue Collector Janice Clauson
Superintendent Phil Stevens
Willington Fire Department #1 Chief Alexander Moore
Members of the Public

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:06pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

None.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road: I wanted to address the forthcoming budget appropriations that are on the agenda this evening. I am very concerned about the budget that's evolving. Normally, I like to wait until the public hearing but in this case there is cause for concern. It appears the First Selectmen's budget is hovering somewhere around an 11% increase. This seems to be a staggering number to me. I recognize it's still early in the process but it's virtually twice even the high rates of inflation that we're experiencing now. When I look in my Chronicle, I see towns in our neighboring towns increasing spending somewhere in the 5% to 7% range so

I'm not quite understanding why we're so high. I would ask the Board of Finance to send this back to the Board of Selectmen for consideration. I don't want our townspeople to be in a situation where they would have to choose between purchasing food or paying their rent because our taxes increased so dramatically particularly for our senior citizens and single parents and students that live in our town. So I ask that this be reconsidered by the Board of Selectmen even before the Board of Finance appropriation process so we have a cleaner start. I also ask that CIP be looked at in particular. There's a dramatic increase there if I'm reading it correctly, from our historic 2% to something in the neighborhood of a 10% increase. Again, I'm puzzled by this and it's concerning to me that so many items would be placed in that budget, it almost seems like nothing is prioritized anymore and everything simply becomes part of that CIP budget and that becomes unsustainable. I urge prudence by the Board of Finance and revisitation by the Board of Selectmen. Thank you so much.

Jim Bulick, Laurel Drive: I was personally very uncomfortable working on that Selectmen's budget and then as time went on, everything shot up. We had the fuel costs and all that. I think we passed a different set of numbers than what ultimately ended up and I am more than happy to review this again. I know we have some upcoming meetings scheduled and all that. I am willing to work with the Board of Finance here. This is a very tough situation and if you're not comfortable with this budget, as I'm sure I'm not comfortable then please use our help and send it back to all of the departments, whoever, where you need it. I think we could look at CIP as there are a lot of things on there, and even other ends of the budget, as we've made some generic assumptions and we've said okay here's come adjustments and salaries and things like that. Not that the inflation has seemed to have taken off and since we started this budget process we have a Ukraine situation that's spiking things. I think it warrants a second look so just want to let you know that we're a resource available to you. Thank you.

Matt Clark: I would like to echo Peter and Jim's comments. I didn't have 11%. I read the minutes from the First Selectmen's meeting, which I think was 9.7 or 9.8%, so I don't know where 11% comes from, but that's again what Peter said, that's about twice as much as the real felt inflation. The Fed doesn't use the CPI, they use a price deflator, blah, blah, blah. It's complex but it's not really 7.5% or 7.9%. They're looking at the number they use is about 5.5 / 6%. I think that a 5.5 or 6% increase in order to keep pace with inflation is good. That's acceptable. That would be acceptable to the town. I share Peter's concern about people that are on fixed incomes and the less fortunate who are going to get hit with apparently, I don't know what, a 10% increase. It seems very, very high and I would ask them to go back and take a look at it again. Thank you.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham, 41 Liska Road: Good evening. I am very concerned about the budget as well, in part because we have been kicking the can down the road on a number of repairs for a very long time. I think it's important for us to start thinking about investing in our infrastructure, rather than paying for more expensive repairs later. That's exactly where we are at with our schools; we're going to be at a point where we're going to have to make more expensive repairs the longer we delay a decision. Certainly that's at the school building committee right now, but the looming potential school building project of whatever size and scope that is, must be playing and weighing heavily on all of your minds as you're looking at this year's budget because the more we invest now, the more we will need to invest, you know, the less we'll have available to invest in other infrastructure projects. So I don't envy you the difficult decisions you have in front of you. I don't think that it's nearly as dire as the previous speakers have brought about but I do think we have to be cautious in spending that has long term implications such as new equipment or other types of expenses that have long-term leaves over time or salaries because salaries similarly impact future budgets. I'm just urging you to consider not looking at being pennywise and pound foolish but to invest in the infrastructure that we need to first and then move forward with that. But that said, we do not need to keep tons of money for a rainy day. We've had the rainy day, we're moving ahead, it's good to be cautious but there's no reason to be alarmist.

OLD BUSINESS

1) ARPA Process

ARPA Chairman C. Mailhos gave an update on the ARPA Commission. There will be a public hearing on Monday, March 21st at 6:30pm; during the meeting, the Commission will present their submission and approval process. There will be 6 or 7 projects for discussion, with a potential Commission vote after the hearing on each project. The public hearings will be held on a regular basis while the funding is available.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski forwarded the legal memo that outlined the authority for the Commission and its legality. The conclusion of the memo was that the process that was approved at town meeting is legal. Town Attorney Ryan O'Donnell was present for the meeting and clarified the questions from the Board in regards to the legality of the Commission. The Commission was voted upon during town meeting. There is not an ordinance or state statute that requires the Board of Finance to have any oversight over the process. Chairman Makuch stated that he was looking for clarity on the issue, as taxpayers had come forward with complaints. Discussion continued on the ARPA Commission and how the money can be spent and appropriated by the Commission.

ARPA Chairman C. Mailhos discussed the salary increase for the Human Services director and assistant positions, that is to be funded by ARPA funding, as well as partial town operating budget funding. There have been additional requests that have been submitted to the Commission since last week's BOF meeting as well.

2) Budget Discussion

Chairman Makuch inquired about the Moose Meadow Road repairs and First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the Board of Selectmen will be voting on a vendor for the Moose Meadow Road repairs at the next BOS meeting. Currently two quotes have been received (one for the total fixed cost of the project and one for the project with estimated totals); a third should be submitted shortly. Public Works will do the drainage work themselves and then replace the guard rail. The project is for 3,900 feet of road for repair and is from Moose Meadow Road to Turnpike Road. Currently the estimated cost of the project is \$298,000.00 but it's important to have some contingency funding included in the project, if needed. This would bring the total funding of the project to approximately \$343,000.00; this would be for the current fiscal year, not the next budget. Discussion was held on the funds that would need to be utilized for this project; the fund source will most likely be the capital reserve fund.

P. Tanaka started the budget discussion with possible ideas for cuts based on the percentage increases that are shown on the spreadsheet, including the Revenue Collector's budget, the Senior Center Operations budget, and possibly the Board of Education budget. Discussion continued on each of these items with input from various other Board members. Chairman Makuch inquired about the dispatch fees for the town. Further discussion was had on the Emergency Services expenditures in regards to the transfer out – ambulance grant fund and the transfer out – WFD1 fund. Discussion was held on the Parks & Recreation proposed budget and the contracted services that are needed. S. Summers suggested looking at the new programs and/or new purchases for the next fiscal year, as the contracted services, materials, fuel oil, etc. are expected to increase.

Chairman Makuch and Business Manager Latincsics discussed the fund balance and the effect of the mill rate. Discussion followed on the appropriation for the transfer out – WFD1 fund for the reduction of the ambulance payroll budget by \$50,000.00 and then the appropriation for the transfer out – Capital Reserve fund for the reduction of \$100,000.00 to remove a dump truck in the CIP plan.

NEW BUSINESS

1) Moose Meadow Road Repairs

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the action for the Moose Meadow Road project can be added to the town meeting by the BOS, if requested by the Board of Finance.

2) Budget Appropriations

P. Tanaka made a motion to move to table budget appropriations until next week.

M. Makuch seconded.

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

S. Summers inquired about the salary portion of the budget and First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that the contract is still not yet ratified.

CORRESPONDENCE

All correspondence has been forwarded.

PRESENT TO SPEAK

Matt Clark: I wanted to talk about the ARPA issue. So regarding the ARPA legality, I thought Mr. O'Donnell's opinion was unconvincing. Let's put it that way. Noone's questioning whether we should be following the ARPA guidelines; that part wasn't useful at all. The key question is, is the legislative body of Willington allowed to relinquish its sole authority to approve spending money. At the federal level, the courts rule that Congress can't do that. You're not allowed to hand your own spending authority over to anyone else, the agencies or anything like that. If that's the case, why is it okay for the Town of Willington? It doesn't make any sense. And how do we handle the conflict between the two ordinances? We have one ordinance that says town meeting can approve spending, it won't say that only the committee can approve spending. And then we have another one that says a non-elected board is going to approve spending. Anyway, lastly, why are we doing this? To say we save one week in the approval process by not holding a town meeting. I'm not buying it, that doesn't make sense. I think the real issue is making sure that the people don't have the opportunity to vote on spending. So, thank you.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road: I want to express my gratitude to the Board on two levels tonight. First your sober and careful look at the budget. I see that you're working in a direction that will help the town and still maintain services and I think that's great. More importantly is the point that Matt Clark just made regarding the ARPA discussion tonight by our attorney. I was really pleased to see our chairman, other members of the Board, Christina with ARPA, all express abhorrent regard about this ordinance. Not the part that meets the requirements of ARPA spending and what. I have complete confidence that that committee can identify projects that are appropriate for that funding. To circumvent our time-honored financial practices, and more importantly our form of government that defines who we are, that precedes the statutes, whether it may be state or federal because Willington was here before Connecticut and before the United States. That's who we are. It defines who we are. And if something doesn't feel right, it's usually wrong. I suggest a better path forward. The committee, by the ordinance that we voted for, the attorney's correct about that, can establish the projects, identify them, and we can voluntarily still submit ourselves to the normal practice of the Board of Finance, reviewing the final expenditures and approving them in groups or on mass in town meeting. Nothing precludes us from doing the right thing and I strongly encourage you guys to do so. Thank you

GOOD & WELFARE

Thank you to L. Woolf for joining us tonight. Chairman Makuch thanked the Board members for their care and hard work tonight.

P. Tanaka stated that J. Gilligan could not attend the meeting tonight because his son was getting married today; we wish him all of the best of luck. P. Tanaka stated that a resident told him they thought Chairman Makuch put in a lot of work as Chairman of the Board and was very thankful for that.

G. Prusak inquired about the status of Board meetings via Zoom.

P. Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:19pm.

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 3:31

TOWN CLERK