

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279
(860) 487-3100
(860) 487-3103 Fax
www.willingtonct.org

BOARD OF FINANCE

Budget Meeting
Hybrid- In Person and Online

February 23, 2023
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):

Stephanie (Stef) Summers Chairman	Geoffrey (Geoff) Prusak Vice Chairman	Christina Mailhos	Joseph (Joe) Sherrell	Peter (Pete) Tanaka Secretary	James (Jim) Marshall	Jim Gilligan (ALT)	Elisabeth (Lisa) Woolf (ALT)
In Person	In Person	In person	Via Zoom	In Person	In person	Via Zoom	Via Zoom

Also Present:

Suzanne Chapman- Registrar of Voters- In person
Christine Psathas- Registrar of Voters- In person
Laurie Semprebon- Treasurer- Via Zoom
Kathy Demers- Conservation Commission- Via Zoom
Mike D'Amato- Planning & Zoning and Economic Development- In person
Donna Latincsics- Business Manager – In person
Erika Wiczenski- First Selectman- In person
Members of the Public

Chairman Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

SEATING OF ALTERNANTES:

Pete made a motion to seat Jim Gilligan for Geoff
Stef Seconds this motion
All in favor
Motion passes

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

None

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

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Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, stated he would like Ralph Tulis's spreadsheet to be taken into consideration while looking at the school building project.

NEW BUSINESS:

1) Budget request presentations:

a) 0121 Tolland Mansfield Probate District

Stef said to consider the \$4,000 as a placeholder until the grand list is completed, which would be a 5% increase. The assessor obtained an extension to finalize the grand list, now due February 28. We share the Tolland district court with Mansfield, Tolland, and Coventry.

b) 0126 Registrar of Voters

Suzanne Chapman and Christine Psathas presented their budget request of \$48,116, which showed a 1.5% increase. The increase was mostly due to the standard 2.75% union raise town-wide. This proposed budget does not include potential new legislature that is awaiting passing for early voting along with same day registration. Additional costs may be new ballot styles, software, salary increases, additional safety precautions due to extended hours etc. They mentioned due to new legislation that has already passed their amount of required hours has fluctuated a lot. They both have been registrars for around 10 years. Stef questioned roughly how much they make an hour, it was answered that the proposed \$27,275 annual salary would be equally divided between the two of them, each respectively earning \$13,637.50. They said their hours fluctuate year to year depending on if it is an election year or not. If they work 10 hours a week, they roughly make \$27 per hour, but they are claiming they are working 20 or so hours per week, bringing them down to around \$13 an hour. They will let us know once they hear about any legislation being passed.

c) 0131 Board of Finance

No increase, the budget is set to remain the same at \$5,018. Pete and Stef discussed the "miscellaneous expense" line item holding \$1,200. Stef mentioned it was for potential legal consult fees. Jim Marshall questioned the BOF secretary line item and noticed it hasn't been trending. The board discussed that they haven't had a regular recording secretary and now that they do, the expenditures will likely match the estimated budget.

d) 0132 Treasurer

Laurie Semprebon presented her budget request of \$11,474 which is an increase of 59.9%. This increase included the 2.75% salary increase as well as her adjustment for her actual hours worked, assuming 8 hours per week. As a reminder, on November 4th, her salary position went from 20-30 hours per week to 5 hours per week and much of the responsibilities of the treasurer were assigned to the new assistant business manager position. The treasurer is still needed to reconcile the bank accounts as a check and balance person, but by tracking her hours, Laurie discovered it really took around 8 hours a week to complete her duties, not the assumed 5, and she would like to be compensated accordingly. Stef clarified that although elected officials are salaried with pay not based on an hourly rate, she does understand that this change in the treasurer's role and its pay were based on an estimate of hours that differs from the treasurer's actual data. Erika warned that because it is an elected position it would open the door to examine all other elected officials' salaries. The registrars of voters also mentioned there are times their hours fluctuate but they are not requesting additional funds during election years, that it is what it is and you know that going into the position. Jim Marshall questioned if the new assistant business managers role was being tracked as well to see how those hours are. Erika answered that it is different because the assistant business manager is not an elected position, it is a 40 hour per week position. Laurie reiterated that because the responsibilities shifted and no one knew how many hours the new treasurer position was going to take, it is one thing to be paid for working 20 to 30 hours and

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have to do an extra 2 or 3, but to only be paid to work 5 hours and doing an extra 3 hours weekly is a lot. Pete said this was her first year working off a guess, and now they know what the reality is, so the reality should be worked into the number.

e) 0135- Board of Assessment Appeals

Donna was the stand-in budget representative for the BOAA and she stated they requested a budget of \$1,442, which is an increase of 2.5%. This increase is due to the salary increase of 2.75%. Christina mentioned these were also elected officials and this is another example of positions needed to be looked at if they were to look at the treasurer position. All elected officials are salaried positions, not hourly.

f) 0161- Conservation Commission

Kathy Demers reported that the Conservation Commission's budget has stayed the same, at \$1,500 for several years.

g) 0171, 0172, 0176 Planning & Zoning, ZBA, IW

Mike D'Amato stated the P&Z has requested a budget of \$145,387, an increase of 7%, the zoning board of appeals has requested a budget of \$5,147, an increase of 2.1%, and the inland wetland commission has requested a \$2,000 budget, a 0% increase. Part of the increase for the P&Z is a new \$5,000 expenditure for document retention. The towns historic building and land use files have been stored in the Town Office Building's basement, which until recently had a dirt floor, inadvertently degrading a lot of the files. The \$5,000 will help continue the efforts of sorting through the files and cataloging them electronically to be preserved and to be more readily available for the public to view. If they were to put the whole amount in as a CIP project, it likely would cost \$50,000- \$75,000 to do all the files at once. There are grants available from the state to aid in covering the costs, and Willington has obtained some of those monies to help with the Town Clerk's books in the past. When they applied for funding to help with the land use files they were told we should have learned our lesson to take better care of our documents and we can't keep getting money for the same issues. Jim M. questioned if there was any danger with causing further damage to the files in phasing this project versus paying for it to be done sooner. Mike said there is now a concrete floor in the basement and a new ventilation system, the cabinets containing the files are elevated off the floor, everything that was moldy was removed, so he believes no more damage will be done. The other increases are to the salaries of the assistant land use agent (\$45,388 – 7.5% increase) and the planning and zoning secretary (\$42,799 – 3.2% increase). Jim M. questioned the expenditures for the inland wetlands if they aren't being allocated correctly or if they are unnecessary as they haven't been trending. Stef questioned why the salaries were higher than the standard 2.75%, Donna answered that the assistant land use agent includes a step increase, and the P&Z secretary includes a longevity milestone. Jim M. asked about the land use consulting expenditure of \$42,000, which would be Mike and his company, Tyche. Jim noticed it has been the same amount for years and wondered what the commitment was to using them. It was discussed that this is an annual contract that the town has had for a while and includes a commitment of one day a week of office hours as well as attending any necessary meetings. Erika commented that she has reached out to Mike on days other than his in-house office days and he has been responsive and helpful. Jim said it seems like a premium expense for what we are getting. He questioned if we have explored other options or put this contract out to bid. Erika said in the past the town had a hard time filling the role with the pay they had to offer. In hiring a consultant instead, they increased the hours of the assistant to be full time. Mike mentioned at that time, he decreased his fee to cover the benefits needed to make the assistant a full-time position. Jim reiterated he believes there is an opportunity for savings there and we should be shopping that contract, especially when it is also a consultant expenditure for economic development.

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h) 0175 Economic Development

Mike D'Amato stated that the Economic Development commission has requested a budget of \$23,000, an increase of 0%. Jim M. questioned why there wasn't a breakdown of this commission and why it only shows the total. Mike said it has always been only a single line item, but it includes their contract (\$18,000), signage, general expenses, etc. Jim asked if Mike's contract was a flat fee or a not-to-exceed arrangement. Mike answered that they charge a flat fee every month. Jim said on the contract it says "not to exceed" and yet they are still charging the town the same amount if there weren't any meetings for months; if it was a true not to exceed, the total would be the most they could charge, but it would be a variable rate based on workload for the consultant. Erika, Jim and Mike discussed their perceptions of this terminology to no avail. Jim questioned the \$1,500 line item for the zoning reg revision project that has yet to come to fruition and has been spent at 0 for a few years. Mike said that was an existing line, and there is no answer as to why it hasn't been used yet. Pete questioned if it was expected to spend the entire \$23,000 by the end of the fiscal year. It was answered the \$18k was for Mike's company to consult, and the remaining \$5K was for the sign project and yes they are expecting to use that budget in its entirety. Christina asked who was on the EDC and who was the chair now since the previous chair resigned unexpectedly. Matt Clark is the interim chair, but no one from the board has seemed to grab the ball with leading the EDC. Christina recalled 5 or 6 years ago when the EDC's budget was \$1,000 and they would come and ask for a few hundred dollars to do a mailer, it was pitched to implement this consultation to improve and expand this commission, but if no one is driving the ship to get the worth out of the cost, she wondered if they should be continuing this amount of spending. Erika mentioned it is concerning to find out that the other members of the EDC aren't taking the responsibility of continuing the efforts of the commission to its full capacity.

i) Board of Education

Superintendent Phil Stevens shared his requested budget of \$9,164,473, an increase of 0.99%. Phil said 97% of the budget is contractual, so any cuts would be coming from supplies for the students. The increase came from supplies, curriculum materials, purchased services, transportation, and utilities. Phil shared information about grants they have received and said some other BOE's don't share that information with their towns. The current enrollment is 407 students. Phil shared the amount of money returned from the BOE budget from the last 10 years and the anticipated return for FY 22/23 is \$275,000; with \$150k requested to be put into the non-lapsing fund in the fall and at least \$125k to be returned to the General Fund. The non-lapsing fund can be 2% of the current budget expenditures. Pete asked if Phil is having trouble with bus drivers. Phil said if a bus driver calls out the company has been good about merging routes, it may take a little longer, but transportation is guaranteed, and we get credited for it. Some line-item changes include 'building maintenance' at Center School going from \$76k down to \$31k, Phil said the reason was due to an adjustment from doing a project. Another change was at Hall School 'purchased services' increase roughly 10 fold. Phil said this was due to the shortage of World Language teachers, so they purchased Rosetta Stone and hired a paraprofessional and have had success with it. Jim M. questioned the drop in the Special Education teacher and paraprofessionals. Phil answered that it is based on need. Jim M. questioned the Energy Performance lease payment. It was discussed that we are in year 10 of a 17-year contract with Siemen's that was originally established in hopes of saving energy. The concept was the energy savings would pay for the cost of the project, but unfortunately some technology has surpassed what was installed and, although there are better options, LED lights for example, we still have to pay for the original project using the technology that was available at that time. Phil mentioned this may be something we pay off with end of the year funds. The BOE is putting things in place to become eligible for cyber security insurance.

2) CIP update

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Christina highlighted the CIP budget, indicating that the projects in bold are already promised and the non-bold are requests. Christina mentioned that there is a line item showing the "goal" spending and with all the potential projects, we are tracking to overspend, in some years by 4 times the amount. Year 1 of the CIP budget is proposed to the townspeople and voted on for approval in a budget referendum. Christina discussed the CIP page 10 chart showing the 5-year budget projections from the four funds.

3) SBC Update, Feb 27 BOS/BOF meeting

Stef reminded everyone of the upcoming joint BOF/ BOS meeting on February 27.

4) Budget season follow up, as needed

CORRESPONDENCE:

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill Road, stated he hoped the BOF will be mindful of the CIP's multiple-year impacts, especially if and when a school project is decided on. He mentioned that the spreadsheet he created was for himself, and to help aid boards in running speculated scenarios to see potential mil rate impact and he will happily sit with anyone who would like to see it exercised.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, stated he is concerned about the CIP budget that was passed by the BOS. He stated there are large projects and commitments on the CIP budget, including a potential new firehouse and potential large-scale and medium-scale projects that could run congruent with the potential school project. He felt that there was no plan with the CIP. If someone requests something, it gets written up as an extension of the department's budget and he didn't agree with that concept. He is concerned with the overall budget. He stated he hopes there will be a public meeting for this years budget and he is disappointed there will be no public hearing for the school project. He believes public hearings are a way to help the public understand the process and scope.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, stated he believes the combination of the CIP budget and the new school will severely hurt the taxpayers. He asked if some of the grants we currently are receiving would go away if we did end up going from two schools to one. He said the total of \$1.3 million that was claimed to be returned from the BOE over the last 10 years should have gone to the repairs of the schools instead of going back to the general fund.

GOOD AND WELFARE:

Stef mentioned there is a lot to think about prior to the joint meeting on Monday so please do so.

Peter moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:48 pm.

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passes

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Sperry

Samantha Sperry
Recording Secretary

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2023 MAR 14 A 9:55

Kenneth
TOWN CLERK

Presented to BOF 2.23.23
Christine Psathas, registrar

We are asking for a slight increase of 1.5% over the current fiscal year's budget. Our budget is dependent on election cycles, so it does tend to fluctuate from budget year to budget year. We are mindful of our spending throughout the fiscal year and have over the years returned funds to the town.

In our cover memo, early in-person voting is mentioned. Currently there are 3 bills in the legislature and we need to state that we just don't know which bill will be passed, how many days of early voting will be required or how many hours in those days early voting will take place.

The only thing we do know is that our workload will increase and the number of hours we will be required to work will increase.

A bill may be passed within the next 6 weeks. All the proposed bills state that early voting will start at each regular election on or after July 1 2023 and primaries after January 1 2024.

Secretary Thomas has said that she would like the state to help with or provide the funding for updated software, new hardware and training for all registrars state-wide. But will the state help us financially with the increased costs for the printing of additional ballot styles, with the additional cost of programming the tabulators' memory cards, for hiring additional personnel or for an increase in our salaries?

The last items that I mentioned are normally built into our budget but tonight we do not know what these increased costs will be and they are not in the budget we are presenting for fiscal year 2023-24.

We would also note that there are 2 areas of security that need to be addressed.

- 1) All proposed bills state that at the conclusion of each day during the early voting period, the registrars shall transport the secured depository receptacle to the town clerk who shall retain the ballots until election day. While there is a vault in the building, the town clerk currently does not have an area or a cabinet that could safely store these ballots within the vault.
- 2) We are concerned about our safety since early in-person voting will occur before and after regular work hours at the Town Office Building. We are suggesting a doorbell that will be heard in our office be installed at the front door and that lighting in the parking areas be increased.

The budget we are presenting tonight reflects what we do know right now; there will be many changes coming soon.