

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Regular Meeting
Hybrid- In Person and Online

March 16, 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 Chair	Geoffrey (Geoff) Prusak Vice Chairman	Christina Mailhos	Joseph (Joe) Sherrell	Peter (Pete) Tanaka Secretary	James (Jim M.) Marshall	Jim Gilligan (ALT)	Elisabeth (Lisa) Woolf (ALT)
In Person	Absent	In Person	In person	In Person	In person	Via Zoom	Via Zoom

Also Present:

Michael VanDeventer, Mahoney Sabol & Co – In person
Joe Colangelo, Parks and Rec – Via Zoom
JoAnn Taraskiewicz, Library Board – In person
Rebecca Cartabiano, Library Board Treasurer – In person
Tyler Millix, Vice President of WFD1 – In person
Tom Snyder, Chief of Willington Hill Fire Dept – In person
Matt Clark, Economic Development Interim Chair – Via Zoom
John Guskowski, Tyche Planning and Policy Group – Via Zoom
Bill Rankin, EDC member – In person
Walter Parcell, Planning and Zoning Chair – In person
Samantha Hills, EDC member – Via Zoom
Jennie Arpin, Human Services Director – Via Zoom
Alex Moore, Chief Fire Station #1 – In person
Donna Latincsics, Business Manager – In person
Erika Wicewski, First Selectwoman- In person
Members of the Public

Chair Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES:

None

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APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

None

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, asked if any contracts come to the BOF and, if there was a school land purchase and sales agreement, would it come from the SBC or the BOS.

NEW BUSINESS:

1) FY22 Audit Presentation- Michael VanDeventer, Mahoney Sabol & Co

Michael explained the scope of services they provide to the town and presented the town audit and reports from fiscal year 2022. In summary, our revenues received were higher than budgeted, by around \$587k, our expenditures were almost \$200k less than budgeted, as well as an increase of just over \$100k in the combined fund balances, resulting in favorable budgetary results. Stef and Michael discussed the debt limit of the town; right now we are at 1%. Michael said typically most towns he audits try not to exceed 10%. He said we are in a favorable position to incur debt, but keep in mind the amount of debt we incur affects our taxes. Christina asked what the annual percentage of debt is based on. Michael answered it would be 10% of the annual operating budget.

2) Budget Deliberations

Stef stated the school budgets make up 2/3 of our overall spending and this year their requests are either negative or increasing by less than a percent, which is great because it takes some pressure off the overall budget. Christina said if we do no adjustments to the budget requests, we would actually have a tax cut and the mil rate would go down to 31.15 from our current 31.27. Although that seems good, she is concerned because, if you look closely, some of the departments are asking for large percentage increases, or consecutive year large increases, which she says is unsustainable. Jim M. agreed and said there have been some increase trends he would like to see brought down. Stef brought up the single-time project for \$16k to update the senior center with Novus which is the town's contracted IT help/security. Erika agreed, she said she would like to see the project done, but if it has to be cut, it wouldn't affect the current services in place. Stef reminded everyone that tonight is just for discussion, they will be making changes and voting next week.

The board discussed the Parks and Recreation budget and fund balance with Joe Colangelo. Christina and Stef said if parks and rec does receive a cut from their fund balance and a program resumes, they can come to the board and make a request. Joe C. said he thinks that it is unlikely he will get the money back if it is taken from their unused fund balance. They have a laundry list of things to do and fix and there are plans for the fund balance, he said. The board told him he should be putting requests into the CIP for some of his projects. Joe C. thought the BOF had already taken \$10k from his budget, resulting in the negative request. Jennie Arpin from Human Services commented that she and Alan Humphrey, who recently resigned as Parks and Rec director, collaborate on summer camp and moved the money received for it from ARPA from an expenditure to a revenue, which is partially why the budget request came down. Electricity rates also declined. Before he left, Alan's most recent budget request reflected a decrease of 1.9%. Joe C. and Christina discussed how the parks and rec fund balance operates and what contributes to it.

The board discussed the library budget with library treasurer Rebecca Cartabiano and board member JoAnn Taraskiewicz. Stef asked for some clarification on the new Assistant 2 position and the need for it.

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Stef stated that at the time the library decided to go to two co-directors versus one, a selling point from the library for the change was that the two co-directors would absorb the programming role, which is what the new assistant 2 position is said to be needed for. Stef, Rebecca and JoAnn noted a large portion of the budget request increase is due to an increase in payroll. Stef said if she saw an increase in the library's public hours, she would expect there to be an increase in payroll, but the hours have not changed. Stef said the board was told a few meetings ago that one of the co-directors, although she held a salaried v. hourly position, was paid extra to do programming over the summer. Rebecca answered that the amount that employee was paid was not \$13k, but about \$3k, so that was a misrepresentation. JoAnn commented that just because you are salaried doesn't mean you shouldn't be compensated for additional work. Rebecca added the library has been struggling with theft problems, so they would like to add additional staff so one person can be at the front desk and at least one person can be walking around the library to keep an eye on things. Stef stated over the past few years the library has received double-digit budget increases that were significantly above the norm, and that the library's budget has gone up \$100k in the last 5 years, equating to 37% growth. JoAnn said that was due to inflation. Jim M. said they didn't have anything forecasted in the requested budget for revenue. JoAnn said it is too difficult to guess what their revenue will be, so they left it blank. Stef reminded the staff they have multiple off-budget accounts accruing interest and no other department has that resource.

Peter stated he would like to add a large sum to the Board of Finance contingency fund to address a newly discovered mold issue at Willington Fire Dept No. 1. Chief Alex Moore commented that it began as an odd odor. Service Master's came in to perform an air quality test and they discovered mold. They do not know the source of the problem but expect it is coming up from the slab-on-grade foundation. They are waiting to hear from the insurance adjuster after his site visit. All the sheetrock will need to be removed. They have moved equipment that could be affected to Willington Hill Fire Department grounds. Erika is providing office space as needed at the Town Office Building and the staff is staying at the Willington FD substation at 143 River Road. The trucks are all undercover for protection. Tyler Millix, vice president of WFD1, stated there is no way to assume how much this will cost and he doesn't think anything should be added to the contingency fund for them for now as they aren't sure of the timeline for remediation. Christina asked if the work that will need to be done to fix this is part of the addition that is planned for a few years hence. They replied no, that is a different section of the firehouse. Jim M. stated the fire departments have an \$11.5 million ask over the next few years for new facilities and wonders if it has been investigated that they combine into one establishment for the sake of efficiency. Alex said that has been investigated multiple times with generated reports showing why it wouldn't be a good choice for our town, saying those reports are available online. Stef, Willington Hill Chief Tom Snyder, and Tyler discussed the \$100k in Year 1 of the CIP plan for engineering services and what that encompasses.

Jim M. stated we are a small town with a large planning and zoning budget, over \$136k. He mentioned our neighbors in Ashford have a budget for \$51k. He said he doesn't think the level of our need is reflected in the budget. He would like to see the same arrangement for a Planning and Zoning Officer as we have with Bolton for a Building Official. When it comes to Economic Development, he questioned the need for a \$23k budget when they have cancelled the last 6 months' worth of meetings and we are paying for a consultation service to help grow the results from that commission. He recognized the town needs to grow economically in a smart way, and again referenced Ashford, which has a \$2k economic

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development budget. Our budget used to be a lot less as well prior to expanding and hiring Tyche for \$18k a year, he said. He stated if we cannot complete a simple sign project that we have been funding for \$5k for a few years, he's not sure we are using the consultation services to their capacity. He said we should take a step back and expand the EDC with more members and then consider hiring outside resources to help elevate that foundation. EDC interim chair Matt Clark introduced himself and presented a list of what the EDC has been doing behind the scenes. He agreed with Jim M. about their size and said they currently only have four members and if they lose anyone, they will no longer have a quorum, he stated they are actively trying to recruit members. John Guskowski from Tyche introduced himself and expanded on what Matt said and explained his role on the EDC and what they have accomplished. Bill Rankin from the EDC introduced himself and spoke about his role on the commission and what they have been achieving. Bill explained that the stall in meetings was due to losing their chair, not being able to form a quorum due to low membership, and some meetings being canceled because they conflicted with other large meetings in town. Walter Parsell, Planning and Zoning Commission chair, reviewed their budget and stated some of the increases are payroll adjustments and can't be changed, but the \$5k for document retention is something they could drop if they had to. Walter, who has served 13 years on the commission, said that, with Mike D'Amato's involvement, it is the best it has ever been. Jim M. said he never questioned Mike's professionalism or work ethic; the intent was to consider if it was in the best interest of the town to continue that relationship. We could set something up similarly to the other two positions we share with other towns (Building Official and Auditor) that create equivalent results for a more affordable price for a town of our size, Jim argued.

Stef and Christina noticed the ambulance budget has been trending at large increases over multiple years. Stef stated that last year they showed a 4% decrease, but that was due to the large transfer out of Fund 17 – \$60,000 versus the typical \$10,000 they have done in the past. The BOF upped it to do a short-term fix for the increase in payroll from more competitive wages post pandemic. Revenue of \$30k is also used from the tower lease to help offset the budget. Pete mentioned if it was falsely low last year, this year would look falsely high. Stef questioned the new administrator position. Tyler Millix, WFD1 vice president, gave a lot of background and in summary stated this was created to set aside some paid time for the volunteer fire chief, who is also a part-time ambulance staff member, to perform the necessary administrative duties needed to continue to run a successful department. The pay would be figured at 10 hours a week at \$21 an hour. Stef said she didn't recall hearing about this new position in their presentation. Chief Alex Moore stated it was included in the narrative they sent to the board prior to their presentation and they had every intent to speak about it, but the conversation kept getting off track. Peter said he sympathizes with whomever is in charge of creating the schedule, he knows it is difficult and recalls working with someone who did it as a 40-hour-per-week position. Stef and Tyler discussed their upcoming union negotiation and what to anticipate. Stef questioned the ability to have a representative from the town at the table during the negotiations since it is the taxpayers who will be paying the escalating costs. Tyler said Christina helped negotiate in the past and they absolutely would encourage a member of the BOF to help them negotiate and he has asked the BOF chair in the past to attend the negotiation. Stef stated the workers compensation budget could come down about \$2,500 because it is an exact number that is paid in full, and they know what that number is going to be. Stef said on the revenue side, she doesn't think we should repeat the \$60k out of Fund 17, she recommended \$20k, plus \$30k from the tower lease per usual, and add a placeholder of \$30k, based on a BOF estimated share of about \$45k last year, for Union's contribution to the ambulance service they

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receive from us. Stef said we have been providing ambulance services to Union for 15 years and it's not really mutual aid because they don't have an ambulance to reciprocate. Tyler said because we go to Union, we get around \$20k in revenue from the ambulance service. Peter said he thinks a more realistic placeholder would be \$6k and he recalled when we first entered this agreement with Union it was worth it because we were making more than it was costing us. Now, it has switched, and he agreed we should be collecting something from Union. Peter said that although a tenth of our EMS calls go to Union, a lot of our budget is paying for fire crew to be staffed 24 hours, and it is unfair to try and get Union to pay an EMS bill for our fire protection. Lisa and Tyler discussed the calls that the ambulance answers. Tyler offered to have a member of the BOF present during the negotiation with Union. The Willington Fire Dept. No. 1 budget, which includes all vehicle maintenance, is up 10.6% from last year. Christina questioned the maintenance budget for the second ambulance purchased with ARPA funds. Tyler and Alex explained it is regular maintenance, oil change, tires and brakes. Stef asked if they ever got a new ambulance if they could harvest the new equipment off the second ambulance and put it into the new one, they said yes. Alex said they could lower the second ambulance maintenance figure.

Christina introduced a revision of Donna's budget worksheet calculator that computes mil rate scenarios based off budgets and fund balances. Stef said that whichever way the school referendum goes on March 28, we are facing a good amount of money that has to go to our school facilities, so they are going to start putting money aside for these future needs, suggesting a minimum of a \$1million transfer into a capital reserve fund earmarked for the schools. It was discussed by the board that it needs to be made sure these specific funds go directly to the schools. The board also discussed CIP and lease payments versus the ability to purchase things outright. Stef questioned if the town would be able to invest in a CD or something to gain some interest on this money they are planning to set aside. Donna stated she didn't think the town would be able to participate in something like a CD. Christina questioned why the library could. It was left that they would investigate it. Christina reminded everyone we have an expense coming up with the fire department as well.

3) Appropriations – deferred to the next meeting

CORRESPONDENCE:

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, stated this was a good meeting and he liked Christina's calculator. He would like to get away from bond interest. He questioned if the BOF checks to make sure the appropriate people sign paperwork associated with any contracts for potential spending that comes before them.

Matt Clark, thanked the board for their good work and many hours spent on the budget and he also likes Christina's spreadsheet.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, said he was pleased with what he heard from the BOF tonight. He said it was good that the alarming increase for emergency services was addressed as it is concerning to many in town. He is pleased to see a good plan for the large expenditures for the school.

Ralph Tulis, stated the calculator they used tonight was great, but it only takes into consideration the current year and no other big-ticket items.

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GOOD AND WELFARE:

The meeting adjourned at 10:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Sperry

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Recording Secretary

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TOWN CLERK