

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Budget Meeting
Hybrid — In Person and Online

March 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 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	In person	Tardy (8:23)	In person	In person	In person	Via Zoom	Via Zoom

Also Present:

Tyler Millix, Vice President of Willington FD No. 1 – In person
Alex Moore, Chief Fire Station #1 – In person
Donna Latincsics, Business Manager – In person
Erika Wiczenski, First Selectwoman – In person
Members of the Public

Chairwoman Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES:

Jim M moved to seat Lisa for Christina
Stef seconded
All in favor
Motion passed

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Pete moved to approve the minutes from February 16, 2023 as written
Geoff seconded
All in favor
Motion passed

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Pete moved to approve the minutes from February 23, 2023 as written

Lisa seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Pete moved to approve the minutes from March 2, 2023 as written

Joe seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Laurie Semprebon, 271 Turnpike Road, thanked the BOF for the thoughtful discussion last week. She appreciated the balance of taxes and needs of the town. She hoped that requests for small increases if needed were considered.

Matt Clark, 42 Burt Latham Road, thanked the BOF members, he mentioned the debt limit that was discussed at the last meeting with the auditor. He asked what the debt limit would be if the new school passed at the referendum.

Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill Road, thanked the board for their efforts. He asked if the board was aware of the common 10% debt service limitation imposed by other municipalities, what the board estimated the mil rate to be in 2027, which is the first year of the bond payment if the new school passes. He asked about the debt limitation in 2027. He asked if we would have the ability to fund other projects if the new school passes.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, agreed with Ralph, he is concerned that the chair of the BOF is advocating for the school, which would put the town in a bad position debt wise.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, was glad to see a good report from the auditor at the last meeting. He mentioned the library bond that we are still paying for as well as the Siemens energy contract we are still responsible for. He is concerned about the cost coming up for either the new school or repairing the two current schools.

Donna Cook, 77 Common Road, is concerned about new accounting and auditing practices she is hearing about due to the banking crisis, where there are more stringent questions about the ability to acquire debt even if borrowers have not had previous issues. If the new school passes, she is concerned with our ability to fund other necessary projects.

Robin Campbell, 77 Spack Road, thanked the BOF and read a letter speaking highly about Mr. D'Amato, land use agent, and his contributions to the town.

Christine Psathas, 17 Jared Sparks Road, stated there is no new news regarding the early voting legislation they are still waiting to hear about.

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NEW BUSINESS:

1) Final Deliberations and Appropriations

Stef prefaced by saying we have a healthy fund balance, healthier grand list than before and a lot of things in our favor. We also have several budget requests in the double digits, and she stated they are planning on being mindful, especially with the future potential projects coming up.

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0121 Probate Court for \$3,976

Lisa seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0126 Election Officials for \$48,116

Lisa seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0131 Board of Finance for \$5,018

Lisa seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0132 Treasurer for \$11,474

Lisa seconded

Stef commented that she believes this is an adjustment to a newly transitioned position and its salary/stipend. Joe questioned if we should be putting the extra money requested in a separate fund because he is worried this may open the door to any other elected official to state they deserve more money as well. Stef reiterated that this was a newly defined position, so she thinks it's different than other positions. Erika added if this position hadn't been adjusted so drastically this wouldn't have been an option.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0133 Auditor for \$43,300

Lisa seconded

Geoff and Stef stated that it is contractual.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0135 Board of Assessment Appeals for \$1,442

Lisa seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0161 Conservation Commission for \$1,500

Lisa seconded

Stef noted this budget has remained the same for 10 – 13 years

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All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0171 Planning and Zoning for \$145,387

Lisa seconded

Jim M. proposed a \$24,387 drop, making the total \$121,000. He stated that as of Tuesday we no longer have an assistant land use agent and he thinks this is an opportunity to evaluate the mechanics of the entire budget. He said we can see if we can find a full-time land use agent or even a part-time land use agent to share with a neighboring town, and this adjustment to the budget would be able to afford that. His proposed a change that would include adding \$6,000 back to Tyche Planning's contract that they said they deducted to help fund the assistant's position and benefits. It adds \$15k to the budget for a full-time land use agent's salary. If it's not used for that purpose, it could be \$15k for the document retention that is needed. Erika commented that Mike D'Amato received a quote for the document retention earlier today and it was around \$100,000. She also stated that the land use assistant is a union position that they have begun soliciting for and is a non-negotiable salary. She doesn't believe what Jim M. has proposed would best suit the town. Jim M. stated that Ashford's P&Z has a budget of \$51k and said by comparison our budget of \$146k feels absurd.

Peter moved to table until Mike finished his meeting so he could speak on Jim's amendment

Geoff seconded

All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0172 Zoning Board of Appeals for \$5,147

Geoff seconded

All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0175 Economic Development for \$23,000

Lisa seconded

Jim M. mentioned he hopes it develops.

All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0176 Inland/ Wetlands for \$2,000

Lisa seconded

All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0231 Fire Marshal for \$27,168

Lisa seconded

Donna and Jim M. discussed the change in salary due to the union increase

All in favor
Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0232 Fire Protection (AED's & Dispatch) for \$36,017

Lisa seconded

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Stef stated the Tolland dispatch charges have gone from \$20k to \$30k in one year. Stef shared a letter stating they are changing the way they bill, going from population based to call based and the change will be phased in. Stef is concerned because although our population could be viewed as smaller, we are rather active with our calls, mutual aid and Primary Service Area. She would like to look further into this agreement and perhaps seek other alternatives. Tyler Millix, vice president of the Willington Fire Department No. 1 board, clarified it is strictly in-town calls only. Alex Moore added that the 11% increase was for animal control, which they didn't have before. Peter questioned the AEDs and Alex answered this year they are replacing pads and batteries along with 4 new machines and 2 new boxes to be able to store them outside.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0234 Emergency Management Director for \$7,047

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Ambulance Payroll for \$664,468

Geoff seconded

Stef stated it is not a good year to add money for a new position to an already large budget, especially because it wasn't included in their budget presentation. She suggested to remove the requested \$11,296, and, from the revenue side, to use 20k from Fund 17, 30k from the tower lease on the firehouse property, and project 30k in cost sharing from town of Union. Those offsets would bring the budget from a 26.4% original requested increase down to an 8.4% increase.

Stef offered an amendment to the motion of \$573,172 in spending

Geoff seconded

Chief Alex Moore stated they planned to talk about the requested administrative costs, but the conversation got so sidetracked during their budget presentation that they were unable to speak about it. The information was included in their budget packet and narrative prefacing the spreadsheets and was given to the board 2 weeks prior to their presentation as requested. Stef stated they (the fire department) are doing something now to handle it without the additional costs. Tyler questioned what the 25% increase is that the board keeps bringing up, He stated their requested increase is only 5.75% up from last year. Tyler cautioned using the 30k as a revenue placeholder for Union because it is a fictitious number that is not realistic. Lisa added she agrees with Stef and all the effort she has done to research this topic. Stef said the BOF has been very patient and due to the seemingly lackluster response about meeting with and negotiating with Union, she believes this 30k request will urge them to get some results. Stef reiterated that we are a small town, and we are, and have been, shouldering a lot of costs for another community that has not contributed its share.

Pete moved to call the question

Jim M. seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Jim M. yes, Joe no, Geoff no, Peter no, Lisa yes, Stef yes

Motion fails (Yes 3, No 3, Abstain 0)

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Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Ambulance PR for \$664,468

Geoff seconded

Joe thinks we should use a smaller placeholder for Union, \$12,000 instead of 30k. Stef stated this has been an ongoing discussion for a few years and the only gesture that Union has done was give us \$13k from their ARPA funds. She added this is not a Mutual Aid agreement, as Union does not provide Mutual Aid to us. They were added into our Primary Service Area 13 years ago without full town agreement. Stef's math was that their proportional calls are 10% of our total calls, and their population is 10% of ours, so they should cover 10% of our cost. Our cost this year is roughly \$700k, they should cover \$70k, so we are being quite reasonable to suggest we start with a \$30k placeholder. Joe said it is more likely they will give us what they have given us before, which is better than zero, and we can't deny them service. Lisa disagreed with Joe, saying, sure we can. Peter said it is illegal to do so. Stef offered a compromise of 25k or 20k as a placeholder. *Christina joined the meeting. Jim M. supports either 15k or 20k. Joe says 15k is realistic. Lisa disagrees.

Joe moved to amend the budget request to \$588,172

Jim M. seconds

Jim M. yes, Joe yes, Geoff no, Peter no, Lisa yes, Stef yes,

Motion passed (Yes 4, No 2, Abstain 0)

Stef moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Ambulance PR for \$588,172

Joe seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out to WFD1 for \$166,150

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for WHFD for \$146,750

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

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****Back to discussion for 0171 Planning and Zoning because Mike D'Amato joined the room. Jim M. repeated his reasoning for cutting the P&Z budget as stated above.**

Jim M. moved to amend the P&Z request to \$121,000 from \$145,387, a \$24,387 reduction.

Stef seconded

Mike spoke to some of the differences between Willington's budget and other towns that Jim had referred to. At first glance, he said, it may seem they have lower budgets than us, but they are combined in different ways that actually make them higher. Mike said it is not in the charge of the BOF to decide how departments spend their budgets. Mike made a case for all the benefits he and his firm have brought to the town.

Pete moved to move the question

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Jim. M yes, Joe no, Geoff no, Peter no, Christina no, Stef no

Motion failed (Yes 1, No 5, Abstain 0)

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0717 Planning and Zoning for \$145,387

Geoff seconded

Jim M. no, Joe yes, Geoff yes, Peter yes, Christina yes, Stef yes

Motion passed (Yes 5, No 1, Abstain 0)

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Parks & Rec for \$94,672

Geoff seconded

Stef talked about the fund balance. She said Joe C. from the parks and rec commission sent an email requesting the 10k the board had originally spoke about applying from the fund balance should instead be added to the Parks and Rec director's salary because we no longer have one and would like to get someone who will stay. The board and Donna discussed the logistics of that. Christina mentioned, now that the position is open, they may accrue more in their fund balance for those unspent funds.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Library for \$297,006

Stef seconded

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Peter wants to reduce it to a 5% increase, \$254,000. Jim M. wants to see it lower; the board decided to let Pete finish his reasoning. Pete said the library seems confused and forgetful about who they have doing what on their payroll and why they need additional positions when they previously stated a main reason for switching from one director to two co-directors was to encompass the programmer's role and yet now they have come to us requesting an increase partially due to funding a programmer's salary. He thinks they have confusion because they are giving overtime pay to a salaried position and his math is as simple as lowering it to a 5% increase, based on grand list growth as well as inflation, instead of a 22.8% requested increase. Pete said he is willing to accept a friendly amendment from Jim M. Joe mentioned he thinks Pete is being too generous and it should be a larger cut. Geoff stated that the library budget has been a "mess for years" and he agreed their presentation was unorganized. He would like to see if changing from one director to two co-directors has improved anything, like the library board claimed it would. Christina stated that although the BOF cannot tell the library how to spend their funds, she hopes this cut from their overall budget will not impact their maintenance budget because the library does need some repairs.

Geoff moved the question

Stef seconded

All in favor

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Library for \$254,000

Stef seconded

Jim M. abstain, Joe abstain, Geoff yes, Peter yes, Christina yes, Stef yes

Motion passed (Yes 4, No 0, Abstain 2)

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0111 Selectmen for \$163,860

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0130 Accounting Services for \$289,916

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0134 Assessor for \$134,639

Geoff seconded

All in favor

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Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0137 Revenue Collector for \$95,760

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0141 Town Counsel for \$32,000

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0151 Town Clerk for \$119,020

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0181 Town Office Operations for \$273,098

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0182 Town Hall Operations for \$7,958

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0183 Consulting Engineers for \$15,000

Geoff seconded

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All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0185 Senior Center Operations for \$49,508

Joe seconded

Stef suggested an amendment to reduce their maintenance by \$2,500 bringing their total to \$47,008, based on an earlier cut recommended by the selectman's office. Erika said that increase in their maintenance budget was due to known repairs and she noted the townspeople have mentioned many times that we should be taking better care of our buildings.

Stef moved to amend the budget request for 0185 Senior Center Operations to \$4,008

Peter seconded

Jim M. no, Joe no, Geoff no, Peter no, Christina no, Stef yes

Motion failed (Yes 1, No 5, Abstain 0)

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0185 Senior Center Operations for \$49,508

Joe seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0233 Health District for \$32,450

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0235 Fire Main & Hydrants for \$8,626

Geoff second

Joe yes, Geoff no, Peter no, Christina yes, Stef yes, Jim M. yes

Motion passed (Yes 4, No 2, Abstain 0)

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0241 Building Official for \$52,607

Geoff seconded

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All in favor

Motioned passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0311 Public Works for \$1,415,145

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0342 Cemetery for \$2,000

Geoff seconded

All in favor, (Joe was not present)

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0351 Transfer Station for \$297,590

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Capital Reserve for \$460,000

Stef seconded

Christina mentioned this is a potential place to increase the "shock absorber" they are planning on starting if they wanted to. Pete said he thinks the shock absorber fund should all be in one place, so it is more transparent.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Handicap Van Fund for \$1,000

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

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Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Housing Authority for \$2,182

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Dog Fund for \$26,835

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Human Services for \$68,404

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for Open Space for \$25,000

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0811 Social Security for \$94,603

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0821 Unemployment for \$1,000

Geoff seconded

All in favor

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Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0831 Employee Insurances for \$253,163

Joe seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0841 Pension for \$57,924

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0851 Insurances for \$104,382

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0871 Miscellaneous for \$2,000

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0910 Debt Services for \$188,008

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for 0861 BOF Contingency for \$15,000

Stef seconded

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Jim M. suggested adding some money here for hiring a Facilities Director. He suggested up to \$100,000 for a salary. Pete said he doesn't think the contingency fund is the place to put payroll expenses. Stef stated she doesn't think such a large position should be added to the discussion this late in the game.

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for the Board of Education for \$9,151,473

Stef seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Peter moved to accept the budget request for O-004 Transfer Out for CP School Project for \$1,000,000

Stef seconded

The board discussed that this is the shock absorber idea. Erika questioned the process of protecting the money they are planning on setting aside so it can be used only for its intended purpose. Donna said this is a CIP item. Erika cautioned the board about deciding on this transfer without researching the procedural steps so that it is protected. The board discussed the differences between putting the money in the contingency fund versus Fund 03.

Peter withdrew the motion.

Stef seconded

The board and Donna calculated various scenarios of the fund balance impact on the mil rate. Geoff reminded the board of the state-assigned cap on the motor vehicle mil rate.

CORRESPONDENCE:

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, is concerned about the rising costs of the ambulance services. He encouraged the board to conduct a point of order during the times where everyone is getting too rowdy.

Nick Tella, 49 Mirtl Road, suggested having all board members present in person because it is hard to communicate over Zoom and not have overstepping or speaking over one another. He is concerned with members rushing through the meetings without allowing proper dialog. He questioned whether the BOF has oversight on the lease agreements, and wonders why we are making payments on a lease when we don't have the vehicle. He stated the board has requested a lot of background information from the library, but didn't hold the same standard for Mike D'Amato's consultant company.

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Ralph Tulis, 47 Village Hill, agreed with Nick and said it is really hard to follow and hear and understand when everyone is speaking over each other and they should practice more restraint. He mentioned Donna needs to split the Grand List because of the differing mil rates and they should start figuring out how to do that in their spreadsheets.

Michelle Cunningham, 41 Liska Road, reminded everyone that they are volunteers for this board and contrary to what others are saying, she didn't think there was that much tension and has witnessed worse meetings. She thanked the board for hanging through and getting the deliberations done.

Erika Wiczenski thanked Donna for all the hard work she does.

GOOD AND WELFARE:

Stef thanked everyone for their hard work.

Peter moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:27 pm.

Geoff seconded

All in favor

Motion passed

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Sperry

Samantha Sperry

Recording Secretary

RECEIVED
WILLINGTON, CT.

2023 JUN 14 A 9:35


TOWN CLERK