

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Regular Meeting
Hybrid — In Person and Online

November 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 Summers Chair	Geoffrey Prusak Vice Chairman	Christina Mailhos	Joseph Sherrell	James Marshall	Jim Gilligan (ALT)	Elisabeth Woolf (ALT)	Vacant
In person	In person	In person	In person	In person	Via Zoom	In person	

Donna Latincsics, Business Manager – In person
Laurie Semprebbon, Treasurer – In person
Erika Wicewski, First Selectwoman – In person
Residents in person and via Zoom

Chair Stephanie Summers called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES:

*James Marshall motioned to seat Elisabeth Woolf.
James Marshall withdrew the motion.*

Geoffrey Prusak nominated Jim Gilligan for the vacant seat.
James Marshall seconded the motion.
All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Christina Mailhos motioned to accept the October 19, 2023, minutes.
Stephanie Summers seconded the motion.
A roll call vote was taken:
In favor: Summers, Prusak, Mailhos, Sherrell, Gilligan
Opposed: none
Abstentions: Marshall
Motion passed. (5-0-1)

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

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Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, commented that he is appearing tonight as both a resident and Chair of the Willington Republican Town Committee. He noted that he is deeply distressed, disappointed, and outraged at the behavior of the Board of Finance this evening in what was called a special meeting. It was completely wrong for the Board to fill a vacancy in a scurrilous manner. There was no need to do so. Historically, Willington boards fill vacancies when a new board is in place. There was no need to rush it forward tonight. He added that worse, the Board chose to do this in a manner in which ignored him and the Committee, and while the applicant may be a wonderful addition to the Board, it would have been nice for the new Board to have had the opportunity as well as consider other nominations, but the Board elected not to do so. The Board went out of its way to utilize legal stratagems, the town attorney, and statutes creating a twisted knot to prevent those the townspeople elected to the Board to make the decision. Mr. Latincsics commented that it clearly shows the Board's disdain for the townspeople. It does not speak well for the Board and is unbecoming to the Town of Willington.

Laurie Semprebon commented in reply to Mr. Latincsics that Peter Tanaka wanted to be First Selectman. If they wanted to fill the position, he should have resigned before the election so the voters could have decided who would be in that seat. The seat is now vacated, and she believes that it is fine that the Board fill the seat. Ms. Semprebon commented that while Mr. Tanaka did not know if he would be elected, by resigning because he is now First Selectman, the voters did not have a chance either.

Pete Tanaka, 125 Mason Road, commented in response to Ms. Semprebon. He indeed did not resign from the Board of Finance prior to the election. He could have opted to resign from the Board next Monday and not provided this opportunity. Mr. Tanaka added that the expectation of underhandedness was beyond his comprehension. This is why he did what he did last Monday.

Michelle Doucette Cunningham, 41 Liska Road, commented that it is important that there be a full Board in order to move ahead with the upcoming budget season. There are a lot of new members on the Board of Education and the Board of Finance. It is going to take a while for everyone to get going. Any delay in making that happen would not serve the town well. A meeting was not held in the middle of the night, during an ice storm, in a closed facility as has been done by other parties at other times trying to subvert the will of the people. As a political stratagem, this is not a stratagem. This was acting according to law, what was able and right, and moving judiciously. She has heard people complain when they do not fill vacancies fast enough. They cannot have it both ways. Everything done today was entirely on the up and up. To have the Republican Party complain that a Republican was appointed to the Board is a slap in the face to people who are willing to step up. Other boards in town, other than the First Selectmen, do not get paid. They should encourage people to serve the town. People will never agree on everything, but it is time to get back to working together and not play games or say one thing and do something else.

Stephanie Summers commented that normally the Board does not engage during Present to Speak but wanted to clarify what was made available. She cited and read state statute §7-343 (Filling of Vacancies in Municipalities on Boards of Finance). Additionally, she noted that her reasoning was provided to the Board. A letter of interest was received from the candidate and Mr. Tanaka had resigned. Further, given the large number of new Board members without experience or much exposure to the Board, and the press of the budget season upon them, she was prompted to act. New members will be activated at the next regular meeting, and she believed this would be a late jump on the season.

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Pete Tanaka, 125 Mason Road, commented that there is no doubt in his mind that everything that Ms. Summers did was legal; however, he believes they may have set a bad precedent by filling a position that is required to be a minority representation position on the Board without consulting the RTC. It would not be applicable at this point for any board that had a majority of a party, that must fill a position, to pick their own person and have them go to the Registrar of Voters, change their affiliation, and be appointed under that affiliation. It is not unthinkable with this precedent; however, he hopes this would not happen.

Stephanie Summers asked if Mr. Tanaka is suggesting that someone did this.

Mr. Tanaka responded that he is not suggesting that someone did this only that it could be done with this precedent.

James Marshall commented that it is disrespectful to him and the new candidate. They need to do better.

Stephanie Summers clarified that they only got opinions and did due diligence when questions were raised by a Board member about Jim Marshall's term. It was not part of the nomination of Jason Ross.

Peter Latincsics, 97 Trask Road, requested a point of order. They are in a Present to Speak segment of the meeting. This is an opportunity for townspeople to speak to the Board. The Board is commenting on the comments.

Stephanie Summers commented that she is clarifying misrepresented information.

Mr. Latincsics commented that he objects to this because the Board should be hearing from people during Present to Speak and not be characterizing, editorializing, or commenting on what is said. The Board has an opportunity to do so during the meeting.

Stephanie Summers commented that this is duly noted.

Mike Makuch, Clover Springs Drive, commented on the point of order. While he understands the question raised, there is no rule on interacting with the public. There is no point of order or point of order that was violated because there is no rule that the Board is not allowed to speak. It is only a tradition. In regard to the nomination, fortunately or unfortunately, politics is like a chess game. In a chess game, if the other player makes a move that is within the rules that one does not anticipate, one should tip their hat and say well-played perhaps. The fact that one ended up in a position that was disadvantaged to another person or group, as long as it is within the rules, is simply how it is played. Mr. Makuch added that people followed the rules and they need to move forward. Two very good candidates were presented tonight. Jim Bulick is an excellent candidate with great Board of Finance experience, particularly as Chair, but by the rules, he was not eligible. Jason Ross is also an excellent candidate. Mr. Makuch commented that from his almost 6 years on the Board of Finance he knows that just finding a warm body is difficult never mind finding a warm body that is interested and cares about the community, about the job, and about the responsibility of the appointment as well as meets the minority representation rules. It is a trifecta. Either candidate would be good. Mr. Makuch congratulated Mr. Ross and believes he will be a great addition to the Board.

Pete Tanaka, 125 Mason Road, responded to Mr. Makuch and commented well-played – very nice move.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

Chair Stephanie Summers stated that this is the last official meeting of the Board of Finance as it is now seated. She thanked all of the members for their passion, energy, and fantastic research abilities. She

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also thanked the Business Manager for all of her help and upcoming help during budget season. Stephanie Summers thanked the First Selectwoman for her support.

OLD BUSINESS:

1) Budget Status — Donna Latincsics, Business Manager

a. Financial Report: October FY2023-24

Donna Latincsics provided a recap of the Financial Report. Revenues are tracking as last month. Investment income has exceeded the budget. Thus far, this year they have earned interest income of \$114K and \$50K was budgeted for the entire year. There are no concerns regarding expenditures at this time.

Laurie Semprebon spoke in regard to the interest income. The town puts the majority of its funds in state STIF accounts. The town is required to have STIF accounts whether they maintain a balance in them or not. The rates are currently 5.5%, which are significantly higher than during the pandemic during which time interest income was less than what was budgeted. In turn, they budgeted down but then the rates skyrocketed. Most of the town's operating money is kept in STIF accounts until the bills need to be paid. Ms. Latincsics explained that as they spend down tax funds, less money will be invested so the income may taper off.

2) Updates From BOF Representatives

a. CIP — Christina Mailhos, Chair

Christina Mailhos noted that the CIP has been taking tours. The last one on the schedule took place last night and was at Public Works. They are entering the season when people will be making submissions. Mike D'Amato is working on the system for people to submit requests to a single database. This should help streamline the submission process. She noted that meetings will most likely be on Wednesday evenings, likely starting toward the end of December.

In regard to the facilities, the CIP visited the library, both fire departments, the Town Office Building, and Public Works. If someone makes a submission, the CIP may take a tour.

b. ARPA — Christina Mailhos, Chair

Christina Mailhos explained that they are in a holding pattern waiting for some projects to close so funds can be freed up and reallocated. Only a couple of projects remain on the list but there are insufficient funds to fully fund them. Funds could potentially come back from other projects. She noted that the River Road Project is one of the larger questions marks. An estimate should be available soon.

It was noted that submissions are closed. All funds must be encumbered by December 31, 2024, and spent by December 31, 2026. The goal is to use all of the funds.

c. SBC — James Marshall, member

James Marshall noted that the SBC met 1 ½ weeks ago and the Committee voted to move the draft of the final report to the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen for a preview and their opinion. He understands that the Board of Education voted to take a week or so to review the report, assess it, and provide any comments to the Chair.

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NEW BUSINESS:

- 1) **Treasurer proposal for funds to train incoming officeholders – Laurie Semprebon, Treasurer**
Laurie Semprebon commented that there is nothing specifically in the budget for transitioning new treasurers and there is a lot to learn. In the past, they paid the previous treasurer as a consultant – it would essentially be a consultant fee. She explained that she would like to pay Doug Roberts before he starts in part due to a personal situation in which she will be unavailable for a couple of weeks. This would allow her to get Mr. Roberts up to speed. She would like to offer him a consulting fee for hours prior to receiving his stipend. Given the software and the need to get started with different banks and work with accounts, there is a lot to learn. She worked it out at an hourly rate and believes a timecard should be submitted. Laurie Semprebon explained that she believes it would be fair to Doug Roberts to pay him for his time.

Joseph Sherrell asked Laurie Semprebon if she is asking that they pay Doug Roberts to learn how to do the job that he volunteered and displayed that he knows how to do. Laurie Semprebon explained that the job has a steep learning curve, and it leaves the town and Finance Office in a bad position if he is expected to wing it on day 1. Joseph Sherrell commented that it is not winging it if he volunteered and said he qualified to be the Treasurer. The townspeople agreed and voted him in. He will receive compensation once he takes over the position. Any learning required should be on him and not the town to pay him to do the job he volunteered to do. Laurie Semprebon explained that she believes it would be easier on the department so staff is not spending time teaching him when he comes in. Joseph Sherrell commented that he is not compensated and had to take it upon himself to learn what was going on with the town.

James Marshall asked if there has been precedent for this. Donna Latincsics responded that there is not a precedent. In the past, the old Treasurer was paid after their term was over to train the new Treasurer. It was a consulting fee. James Marshall commented that he has a problem with putting this forward as an hourly service for an elected position. He understands there is a stipend but does not know that hourly is the best approach. That said, he is not fully against the idea of training.

Geoffrey Prusak asked if it was done the other way if others would be comfortable. He noted that Donna Latincsics did this with Carol Jordan. There needs to be continuity. It is not learning municipal finance but the nuances of the office. He has no issue with the request.

Elisabeth Woolf commented that she knows what it takes to transition such a role. The budget is large enough where having some organization for the transition is best for the townspeople. She does not find it to be an upcharge to the town. Laurie Semprebon noted that this will take more of her time, and she will not receive any additional compensation. She is offering to do this because she knows she will be unavailable for a period of time.

Christina Mailhos expressed concern about the precedent. When she stepped in as First Selectwoman, she had no one to train her. It is an elected position as is the Treasurer position. If they do not want the Treasurer position to be an elected position, that is a different conversation, but this is not the current situation. She compared this situation to one when someone gives 2 weeks' notice, and a new person is hired 4 weeks later.

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Stephanie Summers noted that this item is not budgeted. Her concern is if it can be administered evenly across town.

Laurie Semprebon noted that the new Treasurer needs to have their name on bank accounts, know how to move money, and use the software. She is recommending this because while they have a very competent Finance Office, it is not fair to the staff to step in and do all the work. Some items cannot be done by staff because they are not signers on the accounts.

Stephanie Summers asked if they see the Treasurer position as unique in this way. She is asking in terms of how this would affect other positions. Joseph Sherrell commented that it is not. Elisabeth Woolf commented that what she is hearing as a taxpayer is that it is not ok to say that one had to learn on their own, so the next person needs to as well. This will not move the town forward. They have the money.

Erika Wicewski commented that the Board needs to think of the work the Board did, along with discussions by the Board of Selectmen about separating the Treasure from the Finance Department and the roles and responsibilities. Either way, in the absence of formalized training, there will be work that will need to be done and it will fall most likely to the Business Manager. Erika Wicewski asked that the Board ask the Business Manager's opinion on the process. It is very different than learning the work of a board member. The individual is responsible for investing the town's money.

Stephanie Summers asked Donna Latincsics where she stands on this item. Donna Latincsics responded that a professional will be coming to the Finance Office. The individual is retiring and has work experience so she believes it will be good. The idea of paying 2 people a stipend to do 1 job is a slippery slope and she does not believe it is a good idea.

Joseph Sherrell commented that he does not believe the individual should be compensated to learn how to do the job.

Christina Mailhos commented that it would behoove the individual to come in to learn the job. If one wants to do a good job, this is what they would do. If help is needed later, and they need to ask Ms. Semprebon to work with him, that is a different conversation. Christina Mailhos would not have a problem with this.

Elisabeth Woolf asked if Willington would stop or slow down without the signatures in place. Donna Latincsics explained that the signatures will be in place on Tuesday, the 21st. Laurie Semprebon is in place until January 1st.

Joseph Sherrell asked if the individual is refusing to take over the position without compensation. Laurie Semprebon responded that he is not. Joseph Sherrell commented that paid or unpaid, the person will still need to learn the nuances. He does not see why they need to compensate him.

A brief discussion regarding funding took place. Donna Latincsics noted that they would transfer from 0930 (capital expenditures) to 0132 (treasurer). Up to \$1,300 could be transferred.

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Geoffrey Prusak motioned to transfer up to \$1,055.20 from 0930 Capital Expenditures to 0132 Treasurer.

Jim Gilligan seconded the motion.

Discussion: Donna Latincsics noted that it needs to be an exact amount for a transfer.

Geoffrey Prusak amended the motion to the following: to transfer \$1,000 from 0930 Capital Expenditures to 0132 Treasurer.

Christina Mailhos confirmed that the funds for the transition could be used on the front end or the back end.

Geoffrey Prusak amended the motion to the following: to transfer \$1,000 from 0930 Capital Expenditures to 0132 Treasurer for the purpose of the Treasurer transition.

Geoffrey Prusak withdrew the motion.

Christina Mailhos motioned to transfer \$1,000 for the Treasurer transition from account 0930 to 0132 to be used after the new Treasurer starts for consultant training.

Stephanie Summers seconded the motion.

Discussion: Erika Wieceński noted that the Board of Finance has department level control. It is not the Board's directive to determine how the funds are spent. A brief discussion took place regarding how the funds could be spent i.e., software training and regarding waiting to see what is needed.

A roll call vote was taken:

In favor: Mailhos, Prusak, Summers

Opposed: Gilligan, Marshall, Sherrell,

Abstentions: none

Motion failed due to lack of majority.

2) Public Works request for used street sweeper purchase

Erika Wieceński explained that the request before the Board is for funding for a used street sweeper which is a CIP project in the current fiscal year. The proposal approved at the Board of Selectmen meeting on November 6th was to award the purchase to Chadwick-Barrow in the amount of \$80,000. It is a 2012 ELGIN "Pelican" Three-Wheeled Street Sweeper. The town currently has a 28-year-old street sweeper that was purchased 4 years ago for \$5,000. She is asking that the Board consider recommending that the Board of Selectmen call a Town Meeting for the appropriation.

Stephanie Summers motioned that the Board of Finance recommends that the Board of Selectmen call a Town Meeting to appropriate \$80,000 from Capital Reserve Fund to 04-4051 for a used 2012 ELGIN Street Sweeper from Chadwick-Barrow.

Joseph Sherrell seconded the motion.

Discussion: James Marshall asked about the hours and mileage on the street sweeper and the expectation for its service life. Erika Wieceński noted that she did not have the information in front of her, but it is a more efficient piece of equipment, and the expectation is that it would last at least 10 years. A new sweeper costs in the range of \$280K-\$320K. This ELGIN Pelican Street Sweeper would bring the project \$20,000 under budget. Such an item is put into a 10-year cycle.

A roll call vote was taken.

In favor: Gilligan, Sherrell, Mailhos, Summers, Prusak, Marshall

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Opposed: none

Abstentions: none

Motion passed unanimously.

3) **Review of draft FY2024-25 budget season calendar and regular meetings calendar**

Stephanie Summers reviewed the draft FY2024-2025 calendar.

A brief discussion took place regarding the date of the referendum. Donna Latincsics noted that she believes the date is correct. It was noted that it will be double-checked.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Stephanie Summers noted that she has shared all correspondence as it was received.

PRESENT TO SPEAK:

First Selectwoman Erika Wiczenski thanked the Board members for their work. It takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to manage the finances for the town. She appreciates all that they do. She thanked Joseph Sherrell, James Marshall, Elisabeth Woolf, and Jim Gilligan for their work over the years and congratulated those who are new to the Board. The successes of the successors are the Board's success. Everyone lives in town and how they conduct themselves is important. She asked that they think about this as they move forward.

GOOD AND WELFARE:

Stephanie Summers wished everyone well. She has enjoyed working with them on the Board and will be moving forward to the new Board. Individually she will miss Joseph Sherrell's knowledge of auto financing and vehicles, and James Marshall's expertise with facilities and willingness to volunteer on multiple boards. Ms. Summers has known Elisabeth Woolf for many years, and she has served on multiple boards of finance. She has a remarkable passion and grip on the issues as well as the history of the town. Ms. Summers noted that she will miss their participation as a group but knows they will all find ways to be involved.

James Marshall thanked everyone. It has been a pleasure serving with them and he wished the best of luck to the incoming Board. He thanked Jason Ross for stepping up. The Board worked together openly and honestly. He noted that he hopes they can seriously address the infrastructure needs in town together before it gets worse. The cheapest option is not always the best.

ADJOURNMENT:

Geoffrey Prusak motioned to adjourn at 8:22pm.

Elisabeth Woolf seconded the motion.

Motion passed (6-0).

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Pascuzzi

Lisa Pascuzzi

Recording Secretary