

Town of Willington

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BOARD OF FINANCE

**Combined Regular & Budget Meeting Minutes
Lower Level Conference Room**

**February 20, 2020
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
Stephanie Summers
Christina Mailhos – Alternate
Mike Perry – Alternate

Members Absent:

Also Present:

First Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski
Business Manager Donna Latincsics
Superintendent Phil Stevens
Christine Psathas & Suzanne G. Chapman - Registrars of Voters
Peter Andersen - Conservation Commission
Michael D'Amato - Land Use Agent
Rich Mindek - Economic Development Commission Chair
Clevell Roseboro II - Library Director
Members of the Public

Chairman Mike Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:02pm.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES

Peter Tanaka made a motion to seat Mike Perry for Barry Wallett.

Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Vote: 4 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers), 0 No

Peter Tanaka made a motion to seat Christina Mailhos for Randy Belair.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

Discussion was held on whether Christina needed to be seated as an alternate, as the vote at the directly previous meeting to seat her in the full seat previously held by Randy Belair passed. Although she was already sworn as an alternate member of the board, out of an abundance of caution to conduct the meeting properly, the vote was held.

Vote: 5 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers, M. Perry), 0 No

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Peter Tanaka made a motion to table the approval of minutes.

Stef Summers seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers, M. Perry, C. Mailhos), 0 No

PRESENT TO SPEAK

No-one present to speak.

NEW BUSINESS

1) Elected Officials and Commissions

a. 0121 Tolland-Mansfield Probate District

Peter Tanaka clarified that this is just a bill that comes in. Stef Summers inquired how much it fluctuates. Business Manager Donna Latincsics stated that it fluctuates a little; for example, the amount is down from last year because last year they made security enhancements to the office, the costs of which were split between the 4 district towns, Tolland, Mansfield, Willington, and Coventry. Christina Mailhos inquired whether they send an annual report of what they do, how many townspeople they help each year, etc. Selectwoman Wiecenski agreed that they should come before the town to present what they do so there is an understanding. Donna offered to ask for a detailed report from them for the Board.

b. 0126 Registrars of Voters

Registrars of Voters Christine Psathas and Suzanne G. Chapman offered to answer any questions the board had on their submitted materials. Board members expressed appreciation for the organization and included information and thanked the registrars for their efforts to offset the increase of payroll.

Christine Psathas stated that on the 4-year cycle, the budget fluctuates depending on how many voting events they anticipate in a given year. They always budget for primaries; the upcoming year will have both Democratic and Republican primaries. They do not budget for additional town budget referendums because they haven't been necessary in recent years; if a situation called for it, it would have to be held whether there was money in the budget or not. She noted that there is some guesswork involved in putting together the budget because the number of voting events is undetermined. Peter Tanaka inquired whether 2 primaries are separate expenses. Suzanne clarified that you can use one moderator for both but need separate check-in lines, ballots, hard programming, etc. Christine clarified that the April primaries are in the budget but that there could be Republican and Democratic state and federal primaries in August, but it is yet unclear.

Mike Makuch noted that there is a 24.1% increase in the salary line and inquired whether that is a continuation of the conversation held 2 years ago about working the salaries up to a more appropriate level. Christine confirmed.

c. 0131 Board of Finance

Completed by Donna; \$4,118 with no changes. Chairman Makuch thanked Donna.

d. 0132 Treasurer

Chairman Makuch noted that Diane Bulick's resignation is effective next Friday, February 28, and she completed the Treasurer's budget prior to her resignation. Donna adjusted it, as the 2% salary increase was budgeted for but not awarded in FY 19-20, so no increase is necessary as the 2% will be awarded in FY 20-21. The budget is flat. Chairman Makuch noted that there may be a balance remaining at the end of the current year due to the overstated salary and salary not being paid during any vacancy in the position.

e. 0135 Board of Assessment Appeals

Not present; nothing submitted. Donna speculated that it is most likely flat except for a 2% salary increase, but said that she would reach out for a submission.

Peter Tanaka made a motion to table 0135 Board of Assessment Appeals to a later date.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers, M. Perry, C. Mailhos), 0 No

f. 0161 Conservation Commission

Peter Andersen noted that the Conservation Commission have spent some money on professional expertise and monitoring town property boundaries and marking pins. In the current year the Conservation Commission hired a professional forester for an assessment of Fenton Ruby Park for an active management plan, which will continue into FY 20-21. That accounts for the increase of \$200 or 13.3%. Peter Andersen noted that in the past 20 years the Conservation Commission budget has totaled \$30,000 – 40,000 but they brought in \$400,000 in state grants, so conservation is net good for the town.

Peter Tanaka inquired whether there will be costs from insect kills on trees or whether that's paid for through grant money. Peter Andersen replied that there are not a lot of ash trees in the park and the damage hasn't been bad, nor have there been enough gypsy moths to damage oaks in the park.

g. 0171, 0172, 0176 Planning and Zoning (PZC); Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA); Inland, Wetlands, and Watercourses (IWC)

Land Use Agent Mike D'Amato presented the proposed budget and corresponding memo. He noted that there are line items that have been unspent but are requested to be kept the same. The Love's Truck Stop project has essentially taken all of the attention for a year and didn't allow for some of the other projects that were pending, which are just starting now.

Regarding dues/membership, there is a new Assistant Land-Use Agent who will need to go through trainings, so that money will be used when the trainings become available. The only other increase outside of salaries is in advertising. Advertising is non-negotiable when an application comes in; it has to be posted in the newspaper twice before and once after a meeting. Mike detailed that he tried to offset that rising cost and that ZBA has very few applications. He continued that both Chairs of those committees are in full support of this budget.

Chairman Makuch inquired whether a process like Love's Truck Stop changes PZC budgetary needs or just takes up time. Mike D'Amato replied that because the public hearing process was so extensive, there were a lot more advertising costs. When someone submits an application, they submit a fee, but because the process took so long to deliberate, it kept having to be re-advertised and ended up being a burden on the town. They plan to transition advertising costs to applicants in the future. Chairman Makuch suggested that if the responsibility of notification is required of applicants, guidance in a possible form letter be provided with directions. Mike D'Amato replied that they have now developed that and it is being provided to applicants.

Stef Summers inquired about the Land Use Attorney and Consulting Engineer and whether those numbers are underspent for this time of year. Selectwoman Wiecenski replied that they were moved into the Selectmen's budget, though the payment still comes out of the PZC office. The costs of those services change as needed depending on projects happening at a given time.

h. 0175 Economic Development Commission (EDC)

Rich Mindek presented the proposed budget and attached memo. He detailed that it has been slow going and they have had to build from the ground up due to the state terminating municipal contracts at the end of 2019 due to rebranding municipal services. This led the EDC to come up with a plan with CME Engineering because they work closely with local zoning. In order to complete desired projects in town, some regulations will have to be changed. CME has signed a contract to take on many of the projects that the CERC (Connecticut Economic Resource Center) office was going to do and the EDC would like to maintain that contract with CME for the next fiscal year. While there isn't a lot to show right now, development should take off soon.

Chairman Makuch inquired what is changing for the increase of 32.2% or \$6220. Rich replied that last year's number was an estimate provided by CERC based off the services they were going to render and that the numbers had to be readjusted based off what CME is going to provide. Chairman Makuch inquired whether EDC is already committed to a contract with CME for next year. Rich replied that they are committed for the rest of this year with the remainder of their budget.

Mike D'Amato stated that the EDC had signed with CERC and developed a plan before the office stepped back, so CME is picking up that plan and carrying through to the end of the fiscal year. Short term, they are looking to build something around the businesses that are here with the goal of retention. Longer term projects are to look at capitalizing on marketing opportunities that Willington has. He stated that there is a sweet spot for the amount of time for money. They tried not to present an increase that was going to be astronomical and would fit within budget constraints but would allow them to afford people with additional areas of focus in order to execute long-term plans.

Chairman Makuch stated that this committee has potential to bring revenue that can help the town and asked if there was anything they could share regarding their progress so far. Mike D'Amato stated that the EDC's first priority is to figure out what's going on with the existing businesses; that they're happy and have knowledge and correct zoning regulations to stay and expand. He mentioned that there are more sites in town that would be appropriate for development so the next steps there are to figure out what development should go there,

familiarize with the industry to know what is needed from the EDC, and align the zoning regulations so that businesses know the town has already approved that usage. Businesses need that dependability to make a commitment. Chairman Makuch agreed that small businesses struggle with startup costs and that streamlining and assisting that process from the town end could be helpful.

Mike D'Amato also mentioned that while the mill is an asset to that part of town, the regulatory framework for getting businesses in and out of the mill needs to be fixed. Finding common ground between economic development and zoning regulations will get more businesses into town. Rich Mindek recognized that while the increase is a lot of money, it has taken time to learn the local process and develop relationships with each other and they are ready to move forward. He continued that there are great businesses in town which can bring the townspeople together and the EDC can let businesses know that the department is here for them. The increase should be seen as an investment back into the town and that ideally, the generated proceeds should help to run the EDC in the future.

Christina Mailhos inquired whether the Planning and Zoning Board (PZC) and Inland Wetlands & Watercourses (IWW) are up to speed with these plans and in agreement with them. Mike D'Amato stated that he has discussed the concept that there are regulatory changes that will need to be made and PZC have agreed to it in premise. They are looking at South Willington as the best opportunity to get a village feel going. Now that the focus can be shifted from Love's truck stop, there is money in the PZC budget available to cover the costs of publishing and reviewing zoning regulations. He will be cognizant of the IWW perspective and role in the process and will make sure they feel that anything done is appropriate. He stated that they have the idea of holding a joint land-use meeting to talk it out and make sure everyone is aligned. Christina recommended also involving the Conservation Commission.

Bob Shabot of 17 Jared Sparks was recognized by the Chairman and mentioned that 4 years ago a preliminary study was done of South Willington that put most of the buildings there on the national register. That was a precursor to changes in zoning for South Willington with the idea of developing that as "Main Street". He strongly recommends going along with the presented plan as the process has started and just needs implementation to put things in place so things can start happening in the village.

2) Surplus and fund balance discussion

Chairman Makuch stated that the Board had asked Business Manager Donna Latincsics to bring information regarding revenue and expenditure from last year and how it relates to the recommended municipal 12-13% General Fund bubble. Donna referred to a document provided to the board which stated that the information shows that last year Willington added \$685,925 to the fund balance. The fund balance at the beginning of the year was \$2,560,044. When you add the \$685,925, the fund balance at the end of the fiscal year, June 30, is \$3,245,969. The list under those figures subtracts appropriations that the town made from the fund balance. The first one was \$410,000 when the Board of Finance applied that to the budget. Next, \$20,000 for payroll support. Third, the referendum for \$60,000 to the Willington Hill Fire Department. Finally, \$160,252 for the plow truck. After deducting those 4 items, the estimated fund balance is

\$2,595,716, which is 14.66% of this year's budgeted expenditures. She continued that if the Board wants to be in the recommended 8-12% General Fund range, it could apply \$471,164 to the budget to get down to 12%, similar to what was done last year. Donna stated that she will do this analysis again for the May meeting before the Board is ready to make that decision.

OLD BUSINESS

1) 0517 Library Board

Library director Clevell Roseboro II introduced himself as the representative for the Library Board and stated how joyful he is to serve the town of Willington. He reminded the Board that library business operations such as payroll were turned over to the town as of October 1, 2019. Donna Latincsics stated that it is similar to the agreement with other organizations like the fire department. Clevell noted that the expenditures included in the presentation to the board do not reflect monies spent in the first quarter as those have not been encumbered and the real numbers haven't been quantified yet.

Clevell spoke to the fact that in order to be more relevant, the library needs to grow, but in cost-effective and profitable ways so as to not be a financial burden. The main issue facing the library is pay equity. The Connecticut Library Association in conjunction with the American Library Association created guidelines relating to each state. They are not statutory and the library doesn't risk losing accreditation if it doesn't meet the median, but Willington's library falls out of compliance in terms of staffing for a population of roughly 6,000 people. He presented and reviewed the Best Practices handout and noted that Willington's annual library budget and salaries for all positions are lower than recommended. As a result, the library is not listed on the Connecticut Library Association index for compliance.

Clevell continued that the Willington library has never been endowed with a federal grant, though it has received state grants. One of the prerequisites for receiving a federal grant is that the library has to be in compliance regarding staffing. As a result, the library is asking for a \$23,000 increase in the salary line of their budget in order to meet the recommended standards and be eligible to apply for federal grants.

Clevell spoke to his background of successful grant-writing and stated that he is currently looking into multiple grants that the library could be eligible for, including grants for facilities, personnel, and especially collaborations with other town departments. In a collaboration with Parks and Recreation, for example, the costs of working independently are reduced, expanded programming can be offered, and more grants become available if the library is designated a Learning Resource Center with recreation and health components. Last year, \$20 million in grants was unaccounted for. He mentioned the possibility of the budget reducing in the future due to grants received once they are eligible to apply for them.

Chairman Makuch thanked Clevell and stated that the Board would like all the financial information as soon as possible. He directed Clevell to work with Donna on putting it in the traditional format.

Chairman Makuch inquired whether it would be possible to use grant opportunities to finish the unfinished space in the basement of the library. Clevell stated that he hasn't been given permission from the Library Board to discuss specifics, but yes, and that there are opportunities for using the land surrounding the library as well. He mentioned one national sustainability grant, which would provide a 30% tax discount if solar panels are installed on the library, and other grants with returns on initial investment. Clevell also mentioned a voucher program available for before- & after- school programs for families who may not otherwise be able to afford specialized programming, and the fact that increased programming creates more jobs at no cost to the town.

Stef Summers referred to the Solutions page of the presentation and inquired how far off the current salaries for LTA 1, 2, and 3 are from the recommendations. Clevell replied that aside from the salaries, there are requirements for numbers of staff at each level as well. In addition to current staff, the library hired 2 part-time high-school students using money within the budget. That move shows the Connecticut Library Association that there is direction toward compliance with recommendations and allows for work toward a planning grant. There is currently a proposal for 2 members of the current staff to be promoted which will allow for two LTA Level 2s and one LTA Level 3. One staff is listed as professional but the standards state it requires a degree, so they are working on getting her training. The current titles will be changed because the job descriptions don't match. That proposal will be voted on tomorrow by the Library Board.

Christina Mailhos inquired about the current feeling of Library Board and if they agree with this plan. Clevell stated that there is no issue with the board; they are working on becoming informed as they were not before. He noted that he does not blame any of the library boards but that it was a failure of the State Library Board to nurture the Board on their role.

2) School Building Committee

Chairman Makuch summarized that last year, he was named as the Board of Finance representative on the previously formed School Building Committee. Since then, there have been new developments in the way the committee will be structured, so the topic is back on the table. Selectwoman Wiczenski added that there was a hitch in the process, but it was brought to the townspeople to approve so that any dollars spent toward the project would be reimbursable. As a result, they took everything that had been submitted to that board before and asked people to submit again. It will be an 11-member board and 1 of those seat would be a Board of Finance member. Although in October the Board voted for Mike and that may be the same outcome, the conversation just needs to happen again. Chairman Makuch stated that he submitted interest as a taxpayer in general as he has a lot of experience in the area. He is happy to represent the Board or would be open to others if they're interested as well.

Peter Tanaka nominated Mike Makuch to represent the Board of Finance on the School Building Committee.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

Vote: 5 Yes (P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers, M. Perry, C. Mailhos), 0 No, 1 Abstain (M. Makuch)

CORRESPONDENCE

No new correspondence.

GOOD & WELFARE

Chairman Makuch stated that the Board lost 2 good members to resignation and is moving forward expeditiously to correct that. It is tough at this time of year as it's budget season and many members are attending multiple meetings per week. However, the Board needs to re-fill positions and keep moving.

Peter Tanaka stated that Selectman Blessington should be returning home next Wednesday. Selectwoman Wiczenski added that he called for the first time today to ask about the status of things and that they will be happy to have him back at the table as soon as he's ready. She mentioned that they provided the option of calling in to meetings so he can participate remotely if necessary.

Christina Mailhos thanked everyone for having her on the Board and added that she wanted to say something about Randy Belair. She said that he did so much work between meetings. She has never seen anyone work harder to uncover numbers, understand things, and dive in. He hadn't been involved at all in local politics, but he got started and never looked back. He really dove in once he retired. He did a great job and we're all better for it and we will miss him. Chairman Makuch agreed. Stef Summers added that he brought a certain rigor from his experience in the business world.

Peter Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:07pm.

Mike Perry seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, P. Tanaka, G. Prusak, S. Summers, M. Perry, C. Mailhos), 0 No

Respectfully submitted,
Marysa Semprebon
Recording Secretary