

Town of Willington

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BOARD OF FINANCE

Meeting Minutes
Lower Level Conference Room

November 21, 2019
7:00 PM

**Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

Members Present:

Mike Makuch – Chairman
Geoff Prusak – Vice Chairman
Randy Belair
Stephanie Summers
Barry Wallett
Peter Tanaka
Christina Mailhos – Alternate

Members Absent:

Mike Perry – Alternate

Also Present:

Selectwoman Wiecenski
Superintendent Phil Stevens
Donna Latincsics, Business Manager
Members of the Public

Selectwoman Erika Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 7:00pm due to term of previous Chairman ending prior to meeting.

SEATING OF ALTERNATES

All regular members in attendance, no need.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Peter Tanaka moved to accept the regular meeting minutes of October 17, 2019.

Mike Makuch seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, P. Tanaka), 0 No, 3 Abstain (B. Wallett, R. Belair, S. Summers)

PRESENT TO SPEAK

No-one present to speak.

NEW BUSINESS

1) Election of Officers

Randy Belair nominated Mike Makuch for the position of Chairman of the Board of Finance.

Steph Summers seconded the nomination.

R. Belair asked M. Makuch to speak to his feelings about the position going forward into a challenging couple of years. M. Makuch stated that the Board of Finance has worked hard for the taxpayers in the 2 years he's served and the fact that the town has had a pretty steady mil rate is a positive. He acknowledged the risks facing the town in the form of crumbling foundations, the cost of new building projects, and other expenses coming up which were referenced in previous meetings such as roads and trucks. He is encouraged by the fact that economic development is picking up more than in the past and thinks that will be critical. M. Makuch said that the Board of Finance has been careful about expenses, but cannot avoid the increase of the cost of necessary services, so they have to be aggressive about finding revenues. He understands that people don't want to pay more in taxes, and that the budget surplus is healthy right now, but that that can change with some of the risks. The Board can also be thinking about groups working together in town to coordinate efforts instead of operating within their own bubble.

Vote: 5 Yes (G. Prusak, M. Makuch, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka), 1 No (B. Wallett)

Barry Wallett nominated Geoff Prusak for the position of Vice Chairman of the Board of Finance.

Peter Tanaka seconded the nomination.

G. Prusak stated that he is a 39-year resident of the town and has previously been on the Board of Finance for a combined 8 years. He is willing to lend his experience toward the position of Vice Chair. M. Makuch also recognized that G. Prusak's experience working for a small local business will be a valuable perspective to have on the board. G. Prusak's different terms on the board were discussed.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Wallett), 0 No

Stephanie Summers nominated Randy Belair for the position of Secretary of the Board of Finance.

Mike Makuch seconded the nomination.

Randy Belair respectfully declined the nomination for personal reasons.

Randy Belair nominated Peter Tanaka for the position of Secretary of the Board of Finance.

Geoff Prusak seconded the nomination.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Wallett), 0 No

2) Request for funds to repair the roofs at Center and Hall schools

Superintendent P. Stevens stated that the Board of Education is trying to be thoughtful about the completion of any Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects. Originally, the full roof replacement project for both school buildings was approved to be done this year. However, with the creation of the school building committee, it doesn't make sense to go through with the projects right now because the state reimbursement is not available unless you continue to use the building as a school for 20 years.

Superintendent Stevens had roofing companies from the state bid list look at the two roofs and make recommendations. They found the 5th grade wing of Hall School, which was last replaced in 1997, to be by far the worst section of either of the two buildings, as there is a 20'x20' section that is spongy. The condition of the Center School roof, while there are still leaks, is not as concerning.

Based on the findings, the Board of Education would like to request \$12,250 for significant patching of the entire Hall School roof, which would come with a 1-year warranty only in the specific locations where they do the patching. The second request, for Center School, would be to apply a silicone roof coating on all sections except the upper section which was replaced in 2014, and for some brick repair work at the seams where leaks could be happening. The cost would be \$76,625 and would come with a 10-year guarantee.

Superintendent Stevens summarized that the total of the two projects would be \$88,875 and there is no state reimbursement available for either of those options. He recalled that the cost that the town was expecting to pay for a brand new 20-year guaranteed roof on Center School (\$400,000 less the 64% state reimbursement) would have been around \$140,000.

Superintendent Stevens said that these recommendations from the Board of Education would stop the leaking for the time being and buy time in both buildings while the school building committee does its research. If a new school is not built, both roofs will need to be replaced in the future – Hall School immediately and Center School after approximately 10 years. The full silicone roof treatment could be done to Hall School as well, but if the school building committee decides to move forward with building a new school, then the town has not paid for the roof treatment on a building that they do not own.

B. Walleth inquired why the Board of Education isn't going with the cheaper patch option at Center School as well. Superintendent Stevens explained that the thought was that Center School is owned by the town and would be used for other town functions in the future if not used as a school.

The location and process for the funding was discussed. Although the roof replacement project was approved in CIP last year, deciding to patch is a departure from that original plan. To use those funds, the recommendation has to go from the Board of Finance to the Board of Selectmen, who would approve it to go to a town meeting, at which the voters would approve the

expenditure. Whether the \$88,875 should come from the \$140,000 already allotted within CIP for the Center School roof replacement or from a different source of funding was discussed.

R. Belair inquired how long it might take to conduct the new school building research, secure a plot of land, design a school, build, and move out of the existing schools. He wondered if that would take closer to 10 years than 1 year. Superintendent Stevens replied that in a best-case scenario, if a new school building went forward, the town would apply to the state in June 2021, hear back in February 2022, break ground in July 2022, and allow two to three years for building and everything associated with that.

Superintendent Stevens made the point that using a fraction of the money for patching that was originally budgeted for roof replacements might help free up some funds for other town needs that have come before the Board of Finance recently.

B. Walleth replied that it sounds as though Hall School is in dire need, which was why the board approved a brand new roof project. He said that by neglecting the roof, especially over potentially 10 more years, the building will be very damaged. He opined that the Board of Education is waiting to fix this roof just for the promise of maybe building a new school down the road instead of maintaining the current school buildings. Superintendent Stevens reminded the board that the full cost of new roofs on Hall and Center schools is \$1 million and that the state will not reimburse the 64%, or the town will have to pay back the reimbursement, if those buildings cease being used as schools within the next 20 years.

B. Walleth said that between neglecting to fix Hall School's roof and the traffic speed lights outside Hall School not working, he feels Hall School is being represented negatively in order to push the necessity of building a new school. It was clarified that the lights do work, flashing for two hours per day while students are arriving and departing, and that the zone is a 35mph zone during the rest of the day based on Department of Transportation (DOT) permits.

B. Walleth continued that he does not like the idea of not maintaining a building for the chance of building a new school someday, which he is not in support of. He recalled approving money for a patch of the roof of Hall School two years ago. Superintendent Stevens replied that that money was approved for one section, but then they learned that the entire roof needed to be replaced. He said that the Board of Education would be fine with a \$78,000 project to apply the 10-year guaranteed silicone treatment to the roof of Hall School in addition to Center School if the Board of Finance wanted to spend that money. B. Walleth replied that that was not what had been approved; they had approved a new roof because they had questions about the wood supports beneath.

The Board recognized Derek Cameron, local high school student and graduate of Hall School, to ask a question regarding the conversation.

Stephanie Summers asked if there is an option that covers midway between one and ten years, as a 1-year patch isn't going to go very far, regardless of what the school building committee finds. Superintendent Stevens replied unfortunately not, the options range from the 1-year patch at \$12,000 to a 3-year guaranteed patch at \$70,000, at which point you might as well go for the 10-

year treatment. Chairman Makuch summarized that at the very minimum, the Hall School building will continue to be occupied as a school for the next 5 years.

Superintendent Stevens made the point that if the 1-year warranty is the major concern, there are other projects and equipment on the CIP list which have outlasted their recommended life. The roof at Hall School isn't failing out of the blue; it is failing at the seams and from damage specifically from snow blowers that had to be brought up to the roof in the winter of 2011 when there was so much snow that there was a structural threat.

G. Prusak clarified where the reimbursement for full roof repairs comes from and whether it would be cheaper to replace it ourselves than to go through the state process. Superintendent Stevens replied that the state bid list is supposed to be a negotiated rate for state municipalities and schools; once it passes town meeting and the town chooses a company from the received Requests for Proposals (RFP), then the town can apply to the state and once the project is done, the town is reimbursed. R. Belair recalled that the process for state reimbursement is particularly onerous. Selectwoman Wiecenski agreed and said that there are towns who say the process is not worth the reimbursement and just pay for projects like this themselves. It was clarified that G. Prusak was speaking more to road and bridge projects that, if done with federal money, have to be done to a different set of standards, but that there is no different standard for doing a 20-year roof with state versus town money.

B. Wallett said that the spongy area is the reason why a new roof should be done at Hall School. Sponginess is wet, which creates mold, which makes the building useless. He stated that if the town has to pay back the reimbursement of a new roof 10 years from now, so be it; if we get a new building, we get a new building, but right now kids need to be in a clean, dry, safe school.

Chairman Makuch clarified the costs of replacing the roof at Hall School (total of around \$600,000, less the state reimbursed \$360,000, for a net cost to the town of \$240,000) and that the risk to the town on using that state grant and not ending up in the school for 20 years, at which point the town would have to pay the money back, is \$360,000 for the Hall School project or \$640,000 for both Center and Hall School roof projects combined.

P. Tanaka summarized that the board can choose to do it the way it was planned and pay \$1 million to get new roofs and get no reimbursement because we can't guarantee we will use the buildings as schools for 20 years. B. Wallett clarified that the town can still apply for and use that state reimbursement, it just needs to be paid back if we stop using the buildings as schools. P. Tanaka continued his summary that the other option discussed would be to pay \$89,000 for the silicone treatment for 10 years on Center School and 1-year patches on Hall School, in contrast to a total roof replacement which is guaranteed for 20 years.

R. Belair inquired whether the full reimbursement amount has to be paid back to the state if the building is occupied for a number of the 20 required years. P. Stevens confirmed that based on the information he was given on the phone, towns are required to pay the full amount back for up to 10 years. After that, the amount required to be returned may decrease, but details of that are unclear.

B. Walleth expressed that in his mind, the risk isn't the money, the real risk is to staff and children working and learning in a building with water dripping down and a soggy roof. Superintendent Stevens acknowledged the point and detailed that they did testing around the building last year due to that concern and that the results were positive in our favor in that they did not identify any issues.

B. Walleth expressed another potential risk for legal ramifications if the roof on Hall School isn't replaced, the building gets contaminated, and then gets turned back over to the Hall Foundation.

Mike Makuch made a motion to recommend that the Board of Selectmen call a town meeting to authorize the appropriation of \$88,875 from Capital Reserve for a 1-year warranty patch project for the roof of Hall School and 10-year warranty silicone roof coating project for Center School.
Stephanie Summers seconded the motion.

B. Walleth expressed that he thinks this choice is irresponsible.

Discussion was held and D. Latinesics clarified the process required to appropriate funds when projects have been approved in CIP during the budget process, because the money comes from a reserve fund.

R. Belair brought up the optics of spending \$1 million to replace the roofs at the same time as launching a school building committee and that citizens will figure out that the reimbursement would need to be repaid. He recognized B. Walleth's point regarding safety and wondered where the town would move the students if an unfavorable mold report was found. Superintendent Stevens replied that the entire building wouldn't shut down unless mold was found throughout the entire building.

Chairman Makuch inquired whether the 10-year coating option is available for Hall School as well. Superintendent Stevens confirmed that they tentatively thought it was possible, and B. Walleth recalled that it could be structurally unsound and unsafe because it is spongy, even if a layer of silicone is laid over the top of it.

S. Summers inquired whether the 1-year patch at \$12,000 would need to be done multiple years, as it adds up quickly to get close to the cost of the 10-year solution. Superintendent Stevens replied that no, a new roof would need to be done on the building eventually, the 1-year guaranteed patch serves the purpose of buying time. B. Walleth brought up the point that sometimes drips can manifest in a different location than the actual leak and that can make patching very tricky.

R. Belair stated that without knowing the extent of the damage to the spongy area on the Hall School roof, the cost to repair or replace can be very difficult to estimate and could grow. Chairman Makuch clarified that the 5th grade wing of Hall School is the addition, which is a deck over steel frame, compared to the older sections of Hall School which are wood frame. There is probably insulation that is full of water, but likely not a high cost to replace.

P. Tanaka inquired whether it was worth discussing an option to fix Hall School and patch Center School. Superintendent Stevens said that in order for state reimbursement, the state requires a full tear off. If the wood decking is rotted and you have to replace it, that is an added cost. At this time, there is more testing that could be done, at a cost. He clarified that his intention was to bring the full range of the options to the board's attention based on what roofing specialists said. He continued that nothing has to be decided tonight, but that the longer you wait, the more moisture gets in.

R. Belair said that no project will move forward until the spring anyway. Superintendent Stevens clarified that as long as the roof is dry, the silicone or patching can be done any time, even in the winter. A full roof replacement wouldn't happen until next year.

P. Tanaka said that he thinks this issue should be split into multiple motions.

Vote: 0 Yes, 6 No (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Walleth)

P. Tanaka expressed that he would like to see the roof at Hall School fixed, even if it has to be turned back over to the Hall Foundation in the future. The 20x20 spongy section concerns him a great deal and he doesn't think a patch is going to fix that. As the town doesn't know yet what will become of Center School in the future, he is in favor of applying the silicone there. R. Belair agreed and said that he doesn't want to approve a certain number of dollars just to find out it will cost more to replace the roof. He inquired what the cost would be to do additional testing in the interest of risk management, and whether the estimates referenced tonight for work on the roofs were over a year old and might be more expensive now.

Chairman Makuch inquired what methods were used when the roof evaluations were done. Superintendent Stevens confirmed that the companies came out to do a visual quote rather than using any thermal imaging or infrared technology. B. Walleth argued that the cost of a new informed quote is insignificant in the face of how much we're already spending. Superintendent Stevens replied that he doesn't have the numbers on how much a more detailed quote would cost, as he did not anticipate the request, but he can find out. He said the thermal imaging for the section at Center School, if he recalls correctly, was in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range.

R. Belair inquired whether it would be reasonable to ask for that information for the next Board of Finance meeting. Superintendent Stevens replied that the timeline wouldn't need to move that quickly, as a new roof wouldn't be going on until the summer. B. Walleth inquired what the cost would be to do the 1-year patches on both buildings to stop the leaks while the quote is obtained and until the replacement can be done. Superintendent Stevens said that to patch both buildings with 1-year warranties on the spots patched, it would cost around \$17,000.

B. Walleth asked if Superintendent Stevens could get a copy of the regulations surrounding the state reimbursement for roofing projects in regards to staying in the buildings as it would be helpful for the board to reference.

Barry Wallett made a motion to recommend the Board of Selectmen call a town meeting to authorize \$16,900 be taken from Capital Reserve for the patching of both Hall and Center School roofs.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

G. Prusak inquired whether the quotes received were itemized, because there may be some things that are already known and don't need to be re-inspected. It was concluded that that information might be in the CIP paperwork.

Superintendent Stevens said that \$16,900 sounds like such a small amount of money and wondered whether that amount could be pulled from somewhere else in the budget so that it doesn't have to come out of Capital Reserve and therefore wouldn't have to go to town meeting, meaning it could be done faster. Discussion was held on the logistics of changing the funding source, and D. Latinsics stressed that it would be hard to find anywhere else in the budget.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Wallett), 0 No

3) Request for funds from the Non-Lapsing Education Fund

Superintendent Stevens reminded the board that at the October meeting, he requested \$5,559 to be put into the non-lapsing fund with the intention of coming back after meeting with the Board of Education to request that money back to pay for a special education resource audit. Willington Public Schools (WPS) is, for the second year in a row, in a significant deficit in the special education account, and he wants to make sure that every dollar spent in special education is being spent to provide appropriate services for students who are identified. More comprehensive audits can be done for significantly more money, but the exact wording is "the purpose of the audit would be to determine if the Special Education Department at Willington Public Schools offers sufficient programming (personnel, service hours, resources including programs, and professional development) to provide appropriate and effective services to meet the needs of students with disabilities."

Superintendent Stevens continued that WPS have a significant number of paraprofessionals and have had to add more this year and last year, for an increase of nine employees in three years. They would like to bring in the retired Woodstock Public Schools Pupil Services Director to do an external audit looking at Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), dollars we spend, outplacements, and see if there are efficiencies that can be identified to better to save money? The Board of Education would like to request the full \$5,559 back for the audit. The auditor will be charging the town hourly and anticipates around \$5,000, but if she uncovers something that requires more information and more time, Superintendent Stevens would like to have that flexibility. He stated that a report will come out of this audit which will be public information.

R. Belair inquired as to what is driving the increase for special education year over year. Superintendent Stevens replied that the number of students identified with special education needs within the district is above the state average and that the significance of those needs is high. He detailed information gathered from a meeting with other administrators and said he would like to get more information on a program that Ashford is taking advantage of. It is an on-

site community health program which encompasses free services provided through a federal grant. They offer dental and health, but he is mainly looking at the behavioral aspect. The number of students who are identified to have a one-on-one paraprofessional with them is high, but often that person is what keeps them in-district rather than outplaced. The town budgeted for two students outplaced but currently has four. The cost of tuition plus transportation for outplacement is around \$100k or more depending on level of services. An amount is received back from the state in the form of 70% reimbursement of the amount spent over \$90,000, which doesn't amount to much or help to offset costs. Towns are legally required to provide those services to residents.

R. Belair inquired whether school systems around Willington are experiencing the same jump in special education needs. Superintendent Stevens confirmed that they are and that some are starting to look at whether they are over-identifying. He believes that Willington is not over-identifying, because students would then be getting services and moving out of special education, but they are not, regardless of the high level of services students are receiving. He said that this goes back to the reason for the resource audit, because they want to know if there's something that they can do better.

Superintendent Stevens said that they have looked at the scheduling of courses to see if paraprofessionals can be shared between students, and that that in turn impacts the function of the whole building and has been challenging. He wants someone from the outside to evaluate what Willington has in terms of resources. Special education is a difficult part of the budget to discuss because, although it is 25% of the budget, a lot of the specific information about student needs can't legally be shared due to confidentiality. All that can be shared is what is needed; if it's identified in a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting, it has to be provided.

S. Summers added that the professional they are looking to hire worked with E.O. Smith on a sensitive and challenging case last year and has a very good track record. R. Belair contributed that with spending for special education so high, for a \$5,000 audit, even if just one suggestion comes from it, it could save an amount of money. Superintendent Stevens agreed and said that that is his hope, although there is no guarantee of recouping the \$5,000, but that this can help the school system verify that it is doing things right.

Stephanie Summers made a motion to appropriate \$5,559 out of the non-lapsing fund to pay for a special education resource audit.
Randy Belair seconded the motion.

It was clarified that there had been approximately \$30,000 in the non-lapsing fund before the \$5,559 was added to it last month. The use of that \$5,559 does not deplete the account, and Superintendent Stevens is hoping not to have to come back and use the rest of that to cover the shortfalls in this year's special education budget. B. Wallett inquired whether there was a bid process that needed to be completed for this project, to which Superintendent Stevens replied no, that a quote from CREC for a comprehensive audit was almost \$18,000, but that the person they've decided to use will be very specific in what they're reviewing.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Wallett), 0 No

P. Tanaka said that Pat Wilson Pheanious spoke at her office hours regarding special education and the fact that Connecticut is one of six states in which parents determine the level of special education services their child will get instead of the school system determining that. He inquired whether towns are working at all with legislative representatives to see if there is any relief to be had for towns for the expense of special education funding. Superintendent Stevens confirmed that the burden of proof is on the school district, and that an issue that superintendents are looking to address is the fact that the cost of outplacements is astronomical, because although they provide great services, they can charge what they want. He continued that placing a one-on-one paraprofessional with a student can help them to learn and keep them in-district.

Chairman Makuch recalled a brief mention at a previous meeting of a potential for saving hundreds of thousands of dollars by looking at the opportunity to bring back outplacements to host and provide services for those students within a new school if the building is designed right, or repurposing one of the former school buildings for that purpose. The concern was expressed that providing a service like that can then draw families of students with special needs to town. Superintendent Stevens spoke to that concern, saying that one of the things that's important is that a program like that wouldn't be part of Willington Public Schools. Rather, you bring in a company and contract for that to be an outplacement location. Other full time staff would be needed to run that type of program, so there would be a number of students served at which a project like that would break even, but it is something worth looking at in the future.

OLD BUSINESS

1) Annual Report for the period of July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 is due.

Delinquent reports:

- a) Board of Assessment Appeals
- b) Economic Development Commission
- c) Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission
- d) Library
- e) Planning and Zoning Commission
- f) Willington Fire Department Number 1
- g) Zoning Board of Appeals

2) Accounting Software Update – Waiting Town Meeting

Town meeting was rescheduled to Monday, December 2nd.

3) Encumbrance Policy – Waiting Business Manager Availability

No new news, and there won't be time to look at it until March, after budget season.

B. Walleth inquired why this continues to be a topic of discussion, and Selectwoman Wiecenski clarified that multiple auditors have recommended that the town have this policy. Chairman Makuch inquired how much work will be necessary to modify the sample policy provided by the

auditor; whether “Town of Willington” can be added into the policy or if it will require a lot of work to write. D. Latincsics reminded the board that a few years ago, she edited a policy for the board to approve, but it was not agreed upon and never adopted.

P. Tanaka clarified that an encumbrance policy deals with appropriating money during one fiscal year but spending it in another and that there were philosophical disagreements on wording and whether the town should have this policy the last time the board discussed this topic in-depth.

CORRESPONDENCE

Selectwoman Wiecenski told the board that employees came in to no heat in the Town Office Building today, and that it was turned on just before this 7:00pm meeting, but there is no guarantee it will continue to work through the weekend. She reminded the board that they heard about the issues with the boiler at a recent meeting. She continued that the best case scenario is to start with replacing motor, at a cost of \$989 from an undecided line item. The cost to have the company come out to restart the boiler and decide to replace the motor today was \$500. She stated that she was making the Board aware in the case that the motor replacement does not fix the problem and a new boiler needs to be purchased.

GOOD & WELFARE

Chairman Makuch stated that he thought it was appropriate at this point to thank the outgoing Board of Finance members and welcome new members. He stated that he is looking forward to productive year coming into budget season.

P. Tanaka agreed and wanted to point out Jim Bulick as an outstanding chair for the last 2 years and recognize that he did a great job. The Board agreed.

B. Wallett said that Laurie Semprebon was a levelheaded, smart person and that he will miss her.

R. Belair thanked Selectwoman Wiecenski and D. Latincsics for their preparedness in getting the handbook and other materials to everybody.

Selectwoman Wiecenski inquired whether all new board members have working town e-mail addresses, and discussion was held.

C. Mailhos recalled that there are lists of all the funds and policies and asked for those to be distributed to board.

Peter Tanaka made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:38pm.

Randy Belair seconded the motion.

Vote: 6 Yes (M. Makuch, G. Prusak, S. Summer, R. Belair, P. Tanaka, B. Wallett), 0 No

Respectfully submitted,
Marysa Semprebon
Recording Secretary