

TOWN OF WILLINGTON

Board of Selectmen
40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279
(860) 487-3100
(860) 487-3103 Fax
www.willingtonct.org

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Special Meeting Minutes
Via web interaction (GOTOMEETING)

April 20, 2020
6:30 PM

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

The link for the you tube video of this meeting can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC72QpRigw2hcsfHam4hGx_A

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM with the following in attendance: Selectmen Boritz, Selectman Blessington, Public Works' Director Troy Sposato, WFD#1 Chief Moore and Zoning Agent Mike D'Amato. Residents logged in via web and phone.

Approval of Minutes

Selectman Blessington moved to approve the minutes of April 6, 2020 as written.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

Present To Speak

Matt Clark stated that he believes that we are in the midst of a mini-crime wave and is curious to see if there has been any movement or further communication with the State police of late regarding crime in the area?

Superintendent Phil Stevens stated that both schools had participated in a parade through town last week. Over 50 staff members drove around town; lead by members of both Fire Departments. Superintendent Stevens stated he believes the parade was well received by the community and thanked both Departments for their help.

Peter Latincsics stated at the last meeting he asked if there has been any outreach to affected employers and residents in the community who might be affected by the Coronavirus. He added that he has reviewed the attachments for the budget discussion. While he sees the attachment for the 0% budget he does not see the budget which should reflect a -3%. He then stated that he would like to reserve his time during the budget discussion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski reminded everyone that present to speak is reserved to residents who would like to speak; unless so invited during a particular discussion.

Correspondence

A list of correspondence was distributed to the Selectmen.

First Selectman's Status Report

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that we have secured funding and have signed a contract with KROPP Environmental to replace the fuel tank at Public Works.

The new financial software is moving forward. Formal training will be held in the beginning of May.

Selectman Blessington noted that a letter from Peter Latincics was sent to the Selectmen and Mr. Latincics asked for the letter to be included with the minutes. Selectman Blessington then read the letter.

**The letter is attached to the minutes.*

Public Works

Troy Sposato was present. He reported the crew has been busy doing the following:

- Grading dirt roads around town weather permitting
- Started brush trimming around RRRC fence line in back of fields
- Removed Basketball hoops at park
- Trash pick-up at River Road Athletic Complex
- Storm cleanup from wind/rain storm
- Checked section/ cleaned waterways
- Jeff serviced the roller, paver, lawnmower and the generator
- Cleaned shop

First Selectwoman Wiecenski reiterated that they are moving forward with the fuel tank replacement project.

New Business

A. Re-Appointment - Tree Warden

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to re-appoint George Andrew Marco as Willington Tree Warden effective May 1, 2020; expiring April 30, 2022.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Mr. Marco for his continued service as Tree Warden.

Old Business

A. COVID-19 Update

First Selectwoman Wiecenski gave an update of where we are so far. Willington has 4 positive cases and 1 hospitalization and now have 2 Emergency Services employees who have also tested positive. In addition; we have 2 other responders who are under quarantine for 2 weeks.

Executive Order 7BB takes effect tonight at 8PM; requires a cloth mask covering whenever close contact is unavoidable. The Executive Order can be found at [CT.gov/coronavirus](https://www.ct.gov/coronavirus).

An Employee Pandemic Procedure guide has been implemented at the Town Office Building in accordance with Executive Order 7B. We will continue to update the guide as things progress. In addition, all departments in the TOB and Public Works are open and staffed. Residents are encouraged to call or email the department needed. Employees will meet regularly via a virtual format.

The food pantry is running by appointment through Human Services on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Food Share is every other Wednesday (next Wednesday; April 29th) from 11-11:30 at the Senior Center.

Department Heads have been asked to prepare a plan of continuity of operation (which was part of the pandemic procedure guide) to run each office in the event any of the Department Heads become ill.

Flags were ordered at ½ staff by Executive Order until further notice. This is to honor those who have lost their lives or are affected by COVID-19.

Willington Fire Department #1 Chief, Alex Moore was present. He stated that both Departments are working together to ensure their policies and procedures for responding to calls are in accordance with the guidance given by the State. Also as of right now, WFD#1 has 4 members who are out for at least a period of 2 weeks. They are working with Mutual aid and Willington Hill Fire Department to make sure they have adequate staffing to calls around town.

B. Budget Discussion

First Selectwoman Wiecenski presented an updated budget; as the Board of Finance has asked all budgets be re-submitted with a 0% as well as a -3% reduction. She noted that the Selectmen had already approved a budget with a decreased request. The newly proposed budget comes in at 0%.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she has not gone in great detail with a -3% and asked the Selectmen if they wanted to look at as a board. She then noted that a 3% cut from the current fiscal year budget is an additional \$104,670. A total 3% cut; which includes the schools will equal \$531,138; and she warned, due to MBR that is in place, (and avoiding penalties) the town side would have to absorb the majority; and cut a total of \$308,000 in order to get what the BOF is asking for. She noted that it would be a significant cut to the town over all.

She then asked the Selectmen for suggestions on where they would like to cut. First Selectwoman Wiecenski warned that she would not like to see drastic cuts – at staff level. To take drastic cuts without being able to hold a referendum and without all voters being able to weigh in would be significant.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the Department of Labor has said they are unable to give town specific numbers for unemployment related to COVID-19 at this time. They have offered to try to give regional numbers but do not have a timeline as to when those numbers would be available either.

The updated budget with detail was discussed. The first cut was reducing the CIP Plan from \$599,571 to \$500,000; thus removing some projects such as the septic system at the Old Town Hall for this year. While she believes that project was important; we need to cut somewhere. In addition; the Public Works Admin Assistant's hours were brought back down to 15 hours per week; the Revenue Collector's Salary was adjusted. The Social Security & Simple IRA for the Mechanic position (that was removed) and for the PW Admin were decreased as well. The overall budget still shows 2% increases for employees with the exception of the First Selectman's salary. There is also a decrease in road salt.

Selectman Blessington said it looks like most of this was cut out of the CIP; and she is volunteering to forego her increase; but there is our problem..... Personnel cost. The personnel cost makes it impossible

to cut anything. He said we can cut programs or personnel. If we cut personnel, he would love to do that; but we have contractual obligations. He then asked if we can reach out to the Governor to see if he can freeze Governmental salaries or override unions – he has already overridden everything else – continue with all Governmental salaries for the next year. Any increases begin July 1st of next year. He noted that could be the solutions to many of our problems.

Selectwoman Boritz stated that she does not disagree with the concept of deferring salary increases. She then said at the last Board of Finance meeting; the BOF asked for two budget requests; a 0% and a negative 3% with an explanation of what the reduction means. She is in favor of giving them that number with an explanation of what that means. If that means \$104,670 from the Selectmen's budget would be an estimate of how many staff members would be reduced. In addition the BOF clarified that they wanted a justification of how the decrease would negatively impact town services. We should give them that justification. She then noted if we are cutting essential services and staff; we would be adding to the potential recession. She would like to protect staff and services at all costs.

First Selectwoman Wicinski noted that not all budgets are under the Selectmen's budget; so the Selectmen would be very limited on what programs could be cut; if any. She then added when she cut back to zero, she looked to preserve the already limited staff; noting there are not a lot of places to cut from. – All departments have very limited staff. She went over the various Departments who mostly have part time personnel with some very part time positions and very few departments have full time personnel. First Selectwoman Wicinski told the Selectmen if they have any suggestions on how they can get to zero; she would like to hear them. We should make any changes now before we send to the Board of Finance; which needs to be submitted by April 30th.

Selectman Blessington said we do not have any solid numbers of how many unemployed we have in town; so he is going to go by his observation that there are a lot of them. Many people have lost their jobs; have taken pay cuts and have had hours cut back. The one thing we are saying here is that the people who are still employed are having to work harder but our people are over worked; we can't cut hours and we can't not do a pay increase for them. This is the same argument we always get. He added he does not know what to say. His idea of the best way to do this is to freeze salaries. It would be done by having the First Selectman draft a letter to the Governor and let the Governor respond on his own regarding that.

Selectman Blessington moved to have the First Selectman draft a letter to the Governor asking him to defer all pay increases and override the union contracts for the course of the next year until such time as the current crisis is over.

Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

Selectwoman Boritz asked if that is the most practical step or would it make more sense to initiate a letter and work directly with the union instead? First Selectwoman Wicinski stated that she has engaged with the union; noting that we are supposed to begin negotiations; however it is very difficult to move forward during this time. When she approached our union looking to see if they would compromise with a one year MOU; (like many other municipalities have settled with); but they are not interested in freezing the contract and going in with a zero at this time. She added what she doesn't want to see is the handful of employees who are not part of the union not get an increase while their co-workers do. She added that therefore she found other places to cut. In the meantime, she and the union are having a difficult time to adequately open a negotiation in this mess. She then asked Selectman Blessington; if the board votes in favor to send a letter to the Governor; are we just asking for Willington, or every union across the state?

Selectman Blessington said we can't ask him (the Governor) to make a decision just for Willington; so it would have to be for all municipal unions throughout the state. Selectwoman Boritz said right now we have a zero based budget but what we are talking about is getting to negative 3. First Selectwoman

Wiecenski clarified that we are looking at two things; a zero budget; and a negative 3 and what that impact would be.

Selectwoman Boritz suggested looking at the total number of hard cost increases (such as electricity; phone and the vast majority of increases that we don't have an option otherwise we default. We can nickel and dime; but can't nickel and dime programs to equal this \$100,000 budget. At that point we are talking about staff and what certain number we are talking about. Possibly 2 positions or 2 ½ positions. We would only be able to reduce staff in departments that have redundancy. She said it becomes an exercise in us being backed into a corner to make a budget decision. If we have to come up with a negative 3% then we are looking at reduction – there is no way to get around it.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said she is in agreement; the only place in order to preserve our staff is in CIP and she also thinks it is important to put money into capital even if it is not in projects; but rather in the amount of dollars in the capital reserve for capital needs later. CIP had originally decided to increase from \$550,000 to \$599,000; but her new proposal decreases to a \$50,000 reduction. This is another area that is available under the Selectmen's budget. She added that putting money into capital is as important as putting into staff; but the only department she sees that has more staff would be Public Works and cutting an already small staff could be disastrous. Previous boards have cut staff in the past and that is how we are here having limited part time staff in each department and limited hours when we are open.

Selectwoman Boritz requested holding a budget workshop to discuss the -3% in more depth as she would like to review the budget and full CIP plan.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then reminded the board that there is an open motion on the table and should address that.

Vote: 1 Yes (Blessington) 1 No (Wiecenski & Boritz) *motion fails.*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she will send the draft version of the new revised budget and what was agreed upon at CIP. She noted that the entire five year plan has not been finalized and there is no way to pass it because there will be no Town Meeting to do so. She just made changes to year 1; which will default those projects (that were removed) pushed out to year 2. They will be discussed and reviewed at future CIP meetings.

The Selectmen will meet sometime during the week to discuss the budget further. Selectwoman Boritz noted that she would like to hold a budget workshop first before sending a letter to the Governor. She feels the Board has not done due diligence to figure out what they have control over and what they should do until they have had a chance to meet. She added she might reconsider Selectman Blessington's motion if they find there is no way for the Selectmen to propose a negative 3% budget. At this point we need to do the work with the sole intention to look at every line item and the CIP before we make any decisions. Selectman Blessington is in agreement. A budget workshop will be scheduled for later this week.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then noted that she has taken the budget from 11% to 4.5% to now zero. She asked the Selectmen if they are comfortable with it as is or work on it. Selectman Blessington and Selectwoman Boritz stated they would like to review both during the workshop. Selectwoman Boritz thanked First Selectwoman Wiecenski for the work she put into this. First Selectwoman Wiecenski suggested that both Selectmen look at the budget carefully, and bring some suggestions to the workshop.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then stated if by chance we get some Economic numbers, by that time she will share them. She stated that the question was asked by many town leaders at Friday's press conference; April 17th; but the Department of Labor is overwhelmed and cannot give any numbers per town or even regionally at this time. Selectwoman Boritz then asked if we can ask our EDC to do an informal survey of

our current local small businesses to get a general idea of the economic impact. First Selectwoman Wiecenski said she can reach out to EDC.

Selectman Blessington noted that it is not only the local businesses who are impacted; many of our residents could be affected too by losing their jobs.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said we will post an agenda for the budget workshop soon

C. Executive Order 7S – Property Tax Deferral Options (recap and decision)

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we have to send our final decision on this to OPM by April 25, 2020. The Executive Order 7S requires municipalities to participate in at least one of the options: a deferral program (deferring late payments for 3 months) or a low interest rate on late taxes.

Revenue Collector, Janice Clauson was present. She stated the programs are to defer the grace period. She clarified that taxes will still be due July 1st however the deferment will be to October 1st before any late fees or interest is charged. This option is available to businesses, non-profits and residents who have been affected by COVID-19. They would have to fill out an application stating the information they are stating is true. The other option will offer a .25% per month as opposed to the 1 ½% interest per month until October 1st. After that date anything not paid will revert back to the 1 ½ % per month.

Ms. Clauson noted that the town has an option to extend the option to all residents and waive the application process. The one thing that is not available in any of the options is for landlords. Residential landlords would have to provide paperwork showing that they are deferring rent payments in order to be eligible. Also, any escrowed properties are not eligible.

After much review and discussions with other Revenue Collectors; Ms. Clauson is recommending to defer everyone for the 3 month period / no interest until October 2, 2020. If they haven't paid in full by October 2, 2020; everything reverts back to August 3rd at 1 ½% per month in interest.

Selectwoman Boritz asked why we wouldn't want to participate in both options. Ms. Clauson stated that you defer everyone for the three months; the low interest rate program won't come into effect because it is during the same timeframe (August 3 – October 1st). The low interest rate program is more for those towns who do quarterly payment plans.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that our neighboring Towns are participating in the deferment program (for all taxpayers) as well. It doesn't make the taxes not due; it just extends the grace period for the interest.

Selectman Blessington moved to have the Town of Willington participate in the deferment program as presented by Janice Clauson; Revenue Collector.
Selectwoman Boritz seconded the motion.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski said part of the motion should be decided if it should be for all taxpayers or only those who have applied by July 1st.

Selectman Blessington amended his motion; to participate in the deferment program for all taxpayers as presented.

Selectwoman Boritz accepted the amendment.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted the motion on the table is to participate in the deferment program and open it to all residents. She clarified that taxes will still be due on July 1st and the grace period will be for 3

months instead of 1. Commercial landlords will have to fill out an application. Residential landlords will just have to send an email to the Revenue Collector; notifying her that they are deferring their tenants of monthly rent; which will be used as confirmation. The deferment will extend to all businesses, residents and non-profits.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wieczenski, Boritz & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Ms. Clauson for her work on this. The paperwork will be forwarded to OPM.

Present to Speak

Matt Clark noted at the beginning of this meeting, comments were made that the unemployment rate is unknown. He noted at this point, it is safe to assume that the rate in Willington is over 10% as it is over 18% nationally. He noted that we most likely will not be able to get any further info from the Department of Labor so we will have to make an assumption. He added characterizing the negative 3% as drastic is not prudent. We don't know how much money we are going to collect in taxes and we don't know how much will get from the State. Both of those variables are up in the air right now. It is prudent to have options on how to approach getting 0 or a slight decrease in the budget. No one wants to cut staff. He stated that he presented to the Board of Finance and the first item was "no layoffs". He added that maybe there is no other way about it; but he does know that we are going to have financial issues moving forward. We need to come up with some kind of options that will allow us flexibility. Mr. Clark then clarified that the entire Board of Finance voted unanimously on this. We don't know what is going to happen. We had a virus that completely shut down America. What if something else happens? What if we have another disaster? It is prudent to come ahead with a budget that reflects the financial situation that we are in.

Peter Latincsics echoes Matt's comments regarding the state of the economy. He added that he welcomes Selectwoman Boritz's sentiment to reach out to the businesses and residents in town. He then suggested reaching out to the Economic Development Commission who should have a list of businesses. He added his frustration continues to be that the discussions seem to be a "business as usual" approach towards the budget. The Selectmen are saying the only thing we can do is eliminate positions. He noted he is looking at the budget document that shows non-position increases such as \$7,000 in legal, \$26,000 in town office operations and a 13% increase in Public Works and \$18,000 in Transfer Station Operations; \$18,000 in capital reserve. He does not understand why he did not hear any discussion on any of these items. Yes, the capital reserve was reduced by \$50,000; but there is still \$550,000 in the spending level. He understands the importance of capital spending; but this is not the time. Mr. Latincsics believes the Selectmen can review areas that are non-personnel and encourages them to do so in the budget workshop.

Sarah Smith stated that when we talk about cutting positions; it seems like there might be 3 positions possible; and when you take into account and perhaps eliminating Willington residents; they are people that need a job. What decrease in our tax rate would that look like?? Would it be a drop in the bucket? She suggested maybe taking a look at the reserve fund would be a possibility. When we talk about cutting things down to -3%; what is that going to look like when you need services to the town? She appreciates the effort of the three of the Selectmen while trying to work through this budget as it is very difficult.

Good & Welfare

Selectwoman Boritz thanked the public schools for doing the drive by last week. It was a great morale booster. We need to find other ways to do more things like that.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski apologized that she forgot to share a letter under Good & Welfare at the last meeting. We received from the Willington Scholarship Foundation Dollars for Scholars; who wanted to acknowledge the Community and Spirit of the Willington Girl Scouts Troop # 67079. This year the Girl Scouts helped the Scholarship Foundation seal their 2020 appeal mailing and got ready to post.

This is a huge undertaking for the WSF each year; they usually stay very late after a meeting to accomplish the task. This year the Scouts came before their regular meeting and assisted them with swift hands and smiles on their faces. It was much appreciated by the WSF.

The Troop #67079 Scouts are:

Molly Bedan
Helena Prytko
Maren Farrar
Bella Medeiros
Isla Lord
Isabelle Jean
Iris Fahey
Elena Kuronya
Sophia Kuronya
Lexi Norman
Keala Ingle

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked the young ladies and their parents for assisting the town.

**A copy of the letter is attached to the minutes.*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she received the latest report from Troop C for the month of March, 2020. She also responded to the questions posed earlier in the meeting; she has had numerous conversations with Troop C in regards to issues around town as well as conversations among social media.

Troop C is aware of many things going on around town; but she found that there are some things that have been posted on Facebook that they are not aware of. She recommends if anyone has any thefts or break-ins in their home; they should contact Troop C immediately; instead of posting on social media. They cannot help us with things that they are not aware of.

The monthly report for March 2020 is as follows:

Total Calls for service:	474	Traffic Stops:	98
Accidents:	5	Onsite DUI's	1
Criminal Investigations:	5	Arrests:	2
Burglaries:	0	Infractions:	52
Larcenies:	0	Written warnings:	11
Non-reportable matters:	285	Verbal warnings:	29

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then reminded everyone to lock their vehicles and personal items; be aware of your surroundings.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski gave a shout out to Willington Public Schools for the parade they did last week. It was definitely a morale booster for the entire town. It benefited our town as a whole. The skeleton crew who were working at the TOB very much appreciated it. The staff was touched to see everyone; and see a sense of normalcy. She thanked Superintendent Stevens.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski then gave a shout out to Superintendent Stevens, who goes and gives shout outs to all the kids in Willington who are celebrating a birthday. He is doing his part to boost morale around town.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked Nan King and Colleen Peck who made cloth masks for TOB employees and our Public work's crew. The masks are much appreciated

The BOAA meeting will be on Wednesday; April 22nd. Agenda is forthcoming

PZC will be meeting tomorrow at 7:30 PM.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked the many residents who have reached out for volunteer efforts. Many of them are working through our Human Services Department.

Lastly, First Selectwoman Wiecenski reminded everyone to stay home and stay safe.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM

Attachments:

***Letter dated 4/6/20 from Peter Latincsics**

*** Letter dated 3/31/20 from Willington Scholarship Foundation**

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Campbell
Office Manager
Town of Willington

Robin Campbell

From: Latincsics, Peter <peter.latincsics@otis.com>
Sent: Monday, April 6, 2020 11:54 PM
To: Robin Campbell
Subject: 4/6/2020 BOS Meeting

To:
April 6, 2020

Willington Board of Selectmen:

Erik Wiecewski
Liza Bortiz
John Blessington

Dear Selectmen:

I wish to add to the board of selectmen meeting minutes a written summary of my remarks during present to speak at the beginning and end of the meeting.

The board's casual dismissal of the current economic crisis engulfing our town causing Willington residents to lose their jobs and shutter businesses is difficult to understand. The token reduction of the BOS budget from 11.8% to 4.5% percent clearly indicate our board and chief executive fail grasp the magnitude of hardship families in our community are experiencing. Numerous line items in the selectmen's budget approved by the selectmen reflect double digit percentage increases--that are indefensible at time when many folks cannot meet daily living expenses and may lose their homes and life savings. With the public meeting process severely restricted, it is very difficult for townspeople to voice their concerns. The concerns of those who were able to navigate the go-to virtual town meeting-- but struggled with the meeting password that was not released until 30 minutes before the meeting were curtly informed it was the equivalent of being late to a traditional meeting at the town office building. The board's enthusiastic embrace of the governor's order limiting public assembly and unwillingness to consider voting alternatives, reflect its disdain for public participation.

The absence of leadership by the board of selectmen this crucial time when the community should be pulling together is especially troubling. By protecting special interests and failing to take any meaningful action on their own budget, the selectmen have set a poor example for the other town budget groups and agencies to seek means to assist our community in a time of need. Deferring action on the budget to the Board of Finance instead of working with them by presenting a realistic budget, suggest the Board of Selectmen do not wish to participate in seeking solutions that help seniors and other vulnerable segments of our community.

I urge the board to reverse its present course and work with the Board of Finance and other town agencies to guide our town through these difficult times. Numerous past Willington boards of selectmen have persevered during times of war and other calamities and met those challenges head on as Americans always do. Surely this board can do the same.

Sincerely

Peter Latincsics
97 Trask Road
Willington, CT 06279



March 31, 2020

Board of Willington Selectmen
40 Old Farms Road
Willington, CT 06279



2020

Directors

Judy Andersen
Linda Cooper
David Gabree
Ron Growney
Jennifer Jeffreys
Robert Jellen
Paula King
Chopeta Lyons
Mary Pat
Maloney
Amy Page
Laura Rodriguez
Theresa Salisbury
Allison Welz
Jean Woods

Dear Board of Selectmen and Town of Willington,


We would like to acknowledge the community spirit of Willington Girl Scout Troop #67079. This year they helped us seal our 2020 Appeals mailing and get it ready for the post. This is a huge undertaking for our group each year and we usually stay very late after our meeting to get it accomplished.

The girls came before our regular meeting and helped us finish the job with swift hands and smiles on their faces. We are pleased to see a group helping others in this way. Well done Girl Scouts!

The Troup #67079 Scouts are:

- Molly Bedan
- Heather Prytko
- Maren Farrar
- Bella Medeiros
- Isla Lord
- Isabelle Jean
- Iris Fahey
- Elena Kuronya
- Sophia Kuronya
- Lexy Norman
- Keala Ingle

Sincerely, and on behalf of the Directors of the Willington Scholarship Foundation Dollars for Scholars,


Chopeta Lyons, Chair
860-429-9594


Laura Rodriguez, Vice-Chair
860-208-7686