

Town of New Fairfield
Board of Finance
4 Brush Hill Road
New Fairfield, CT 06812

MINUTES
Board of Finance Regular Meeting
Wednesday, March 22, 2023
7:30 PM
via Zoom

Members present

Wes Marsh, Chairman
Mark Beninson
Kim Hanson
Thora Perkins
Cheryl Reedy
Claudia Willard
Dave Coleman, Alternate
Greg Williams, Alternate
Members not present
Chris D'Esposito, Alternate

Other Town Officials Present

Pat Del Monaco, First Selectman
Lori-Ann Beninson, Selectman
Khris Hall, Selectman
Olga Melnikov, Finance Director
Terry Friedman, Town Treasurer
Dr. Ken Crow, Superintendent of Schools
Carrie DePuy, Director of Business and Operations
Julie Luby, Ass't Superintendent of Schools
Melissa Busnel, Special Education Supervisor
Katherine Matz, Pupil Personnel Director
Melissa Busnel, Special Education Supervisor
Paul Gouveia, Director of Technology
Phil Ross, Director of Buildings and Grounds
Holly Smith, Town Clerk
Mark Ottusch, Athletic Director
Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman
Tim Blair, BOE member
Greg Flanagan, BOE member
Amy Johnson, BOE member
Kimberly LaTourette, BOE member
Samantha Mannion, BOE member
Ed Sbordone, BOE/PBC member
Stephanie Strazza, BOE member
Jane Landers, Zoning Commission member
Cynthia Ross-Zweig, Planning Commission Chairman

Call To Order Chairman Wes Marsh called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Appointments- None

Correspondence and Announcements

Wes Marsh noted that the BOF received twelve emails since the last meeting. Most of the emails encouraged the Board to find alternate ways of reducing the increase without cutting the operations. One of the emails encouraged the BOF to keep the increase lower than the rate of inflation. The BOF also received three emails from Bud Koral regarding high spending and tax increases from government and including videos regarding this.

Public Comment

Some residents spoke of the proposed budget and encouraged the Board to find tools to reduce the increase before cutting the operating budgets. Residents also encouraged the BOF to hold future meetings on Zoom in order to allow for more public comment. Resident encouraged the BOF to give the BOS and BOE hard numbers of how much they plan to cut from the respective budgets.

Approval of Minutes

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 15, 2023 regular meeting as presented. Thora Perkins seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Budget Transfers- None

Discussion of long-term capital plan for the Board of Education

Carrie DePuy and Phil Ross noted that the majority of the capital needs pertain to the Middle School. Other requests include new vehicles and air conditioning for three classrooms at MHHS. Phil Ross spoke of the challenge of long term capital planning and getting reasonable numbers for ten years in the future. There was a discussion of planning for capital projects in order to decide if certain projects can be paid for with the operating budget or will need to be bonded.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Crow suggested that the BOE and BOF meet to discuss the long term planning for the Middle School. He noted that the total capital requests for this year's budget is \$543,575 with \$95,000 being funded from the surplus funds and \$200,000 being funded from the BOE Capital and Nonrecurring Fund for a balance of \$248,575. This request includes the following: Middle School Oil Tank, Middle School Capital and Lobby Flooring, Dump Truck, Replacement of Van for student transportation, MHHS A/C units, and the Middle School exterior masonry updates. There was a brief discussion of the sewer study.

Discussion of fiscal year 2023/2024 Budget planning

Wes Marsh spoke of aspects of the budget including debt service, medical expense, payroll, non-payroll and capital and ways to get the increase below 13%. Possible ways to reduce the increase included using some of the bond premium for the debt service, increasing the stop loss and prescription rebates and contributions from OPEB to reduce medical expense, and using interest income. There was a discussion of how much to put in the Medical Reserve for this budget year.

Members of the BOF gave opinions on the optimal percentage increase. There was a discussion of the budget increases for past few years and keeping budgets low due to the building of the new schools. It was decided to have the BOF look at the medical numbers and compare what was budgeted last year, the numbers given by the consultant and the projections. It was decided that the BOF will decide how much to put in the medical fund by the March 29th meeting. There was

a suggestion of creating a policy for future boards regarding commitments to long-term financial planning.

There was a discussion of staffing plans and positions that are no longer funded with ARPA funds. Assistant Superintendent of Schools Julie Luby spoke of the staffing plans for the schools.

Olga Melnikov spoke of the following scenario. Cutting \$400,000 from the BOE operating, \$100,000 from the BOS operating, cutting \$1 million from the medical fund contribution and using \$1.5 million of the bond premium. This would bring the Mil Rate increase to 7.6%. There was a discussion of this scenario. Members of the Board spoke of the maximum increase that they would accept.

Discussion of In-person vs. Zoom meetings.

The March 29th meeting will be held via Zoom. The Board will decide about future meetings at the March 29th meeting.

Public Comment

Residents spoke in support of the budget and noted that the capital planning discussion was very productive. There was a comment reminding the Board about the many factors that could have made taxes a lot higher but instead increases have been pretty low. Residents thanked the Board for their decision of having the March 29th meeting via Zoom and encouraged them to hold all future meetings virtually.

Future Agenda items

- Medical Planning
- Discussion of the 2023/2024 budget
- Discussion of bonding

Board Member Comments

Wes Marsh encouraged Board members to come to the March 29th meeting.

Cheryl Reedy noted that tonight's discussion was productive. She congratulated Olga Melnikov, Terry Friedman, Wes Marsh, Pat Del Monaco and their predecessors for the AAA Bond rating.

Kim Hanson spoke of the possibility of a recession.

Claudia Willard spoke of attrition. Thanked everyone for a good meeting.

Adjournment

Mark Beninson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:44 pm. Claudia Willard seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**