

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

MINUTES

Board of Finance Regular Meeting

Wednesday, April 12, 2023

7:30 PM

via Zoom

<u>Board of Finance members present:</u>	<u>Other Town officials and Educators present:</u>
Wes Marsh, Chairman Mark Beninson Kim Hanson Thora Perkins Cheryl Reedy Claudia Willard Dave Coleman, Alternate Chris D'Esposito, Alternate Greg Williams, Alternate	Pat Del Monaco, First Selectman Khris Hall, Selectman Olga Melnikov, Finance Director Terry Friedman, Town Treasurer Dr. Ken Craw, Superintendent of Schools Julie Luby, Ass't Superintendent of Schools Carrie DePuy, Director of Business and Operations James D'Amico, High School Principal Scott Rohwedder, High School Ass't Principal Karen Gruetzner, Middle School Principal Cheryl Milo, Middle School Assistant Principal Allyson Story, Elementary School Principal Jennifer Hilderbrand, Elementary School Ass't Principal Steven Groccia, Elementary School Ass't Principal Katherine Matz, Pupil Personnel Director Alyce Misuraca, Director of Curriculum Melissa Busnel, Special Education Supervisor Holly Smith, Town Clerk Paul Gouveia, Director of Technology Bruce Taylor, Fire Chief Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman Kathy Baker, BOE member Greg Flanagan, BOE member Amy Johnson, BOE member Kimberly LaTourette, BOE member Ed Sbordone, BOE/PBC member Stephanie Strazza, BOE member

Quintin Flower gave a brief overview of the rules and procedures for a virtual meeting.

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 49 emails since the last meeting which were all forwarded to the BOF members. These emails were broken down into the following categories:

- Please do not cut the BOE budget- 27 emails.
- Please do not cut either the BOE or the Town budget- 9 emails
- Please consider only looking at reducing the debt service and medical if cuts are necessary-7 emails
- Please consider lowering the budget below a 13% increase- 3 emails
- Asked the BOF members to be more transparent regarding the budget- 2 emails.
- Asked that budget ballots be mailed to residents- 1 email.

Wes Marsh noted that in addition to these emails, the BOF received a letter from Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kenneth Craw which included his presentation to the BOE from April 6th showing the effects of cuts to the BOE budget.

Public Comment

Approximately 35 members of the public spoke in favor of the proposed budget and encouraged the BOF to send the budget to the taxpayers without any further cuts.

Two members of the public expressed concerns regarding the proposed budget and potential tax increases. One member of the public referred to legislation regarding not being required to give a name and address before speaking.

Approval of Minutes

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 29, 2023 regular meeting as presented. Kim Hanson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Budget Transfers- None

Town Tribune Policy for Board member opinions

Wes Marsh spoke of current policy for board members putting opinions in the Town Tribune in response to an editorial in the April 6th edition of the Town Tribune. He noted that he spoke with the staff at the Town Tribune, and they will allow any elected member to put an opinion in the paper as long as they identify themselves as a member of the board. Total board approval is not necessary for this.

There was a discussion of past practices with the Town Tribune, and it was noted that editorials that say from the BOF should be from the entire BOF. There was a suggestion of establishing some bylaws regarding newspaper policies, but it was noted that the board is bound by State Statute and thus bylaws would be unnecessary.

Public Comment policy

There was a discussion of whether people need to state their names before speaking. It was decided that the Board encourages people to give their names before speaking but will not require it.

Discussion of fiscal year 2023/2024 Budget planning

Wes Marsh noted that the March medical numbers will not be available until at least next week.

Cheryl Reedy gave a proposal regarding the budget which includes the positive aspects of the budget and holes that need to be filled. She suggested that multiple budget years be reviewed. Main topics of this proposal include tools available for use:

- Lower Medical Estimate- \$470,000
- Total Bond premium available- approximately \$3,043,000
- Revenue surplus- \$970,000
- BOE cut- \$360,000
- BOS cut- \$100,000
- Possible add to non-tax revenue- \$250,000

Cheryl Reedy spoke of holes in the budget that need to be made up in the near future and changes in policies for the future. The presentation included a request for more information and burden of proof for items that affect the budget.

Cheryl Reedy presented the BOF with the following proposal which would bring the projected mil rate increase below 7% for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This plan would lower the projected tax increase from 13.2% to 6.94%. She spoke of budgets for years in the near future.

Appropriate \$970,000 from current year excess revenues to the Medical Insurance Fund- \$500,000 to be used to offset next year's increase and \$470,000 to be used to rebuild the Medical Reserve Fund.
Use Anthem/ASI's revised medical contribution recommendation- \$6.608M (\$7.108M - \$500k)
Use the self-imposed cuts from the BOE (\$360,000) and BOS (\$100,000)
Use \$1.5 million in bond premium for Fiscal year 2023-24 and \$1.543 million for Fiscal year 2024-25 to help smooth out the budget increase.
Add \$250,000 to estimated non-tax revenue
Additional cut of \$225,000 to the BOE Operating budget and additional cut of \$75,000 to the BOS budget.

There was a lengthy discussion of the budget proposals which included medical fund funding at \$7.4M (reducing OPEB funds used by \$200k), cuts to the BOE operating of \$2M, cuts to the BOS operating of \$375k, using \$1.3M of bond premium, adding \$150k of additional non-tax revenue, adding \$25k to Firemen's fund, and using \$900k of current year excess revenues to add to the medical reserve fund and offset cuts to the BOE and BOS operating budgets. The resulting tax increase would be approximately 6.65%.

Kim Hanson made a motion to request that the BOS and the BOE come back to the BOF with proposals of what the following cuts would look like: BOS \$300,000 and BOE \$1,775,000. Thora Perkins seconded the motion.

Vote: 4-2-0 (Mark Beninson, Kim Hanson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor, Cheryl Reedy and Wes Marsh opposed- Motion approved)

Discussion of upcoming meetings

The April 19th meeting will be cancelled. A special meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 26th at 7:30pm via Zoom for the final budget mark up.

Public Comment

Over a dozen members of the public including First Selectman Pat Del Monaco spoke in favor of the proposed budget without reductions and spoke of their concerns with the BOF making the cuts despite the overwhelming support against reductions.

One member of the public spoke against budget increases and suggested that correspondence encouraging members of the public to speak out at BOF meetings be available to all members of the community.

Future Agenda items- Budget planning will be discussed at the April 26th meeting. Salaries for elected officials and the audit report will be discussed at the May BOF meeting.

Board Member Comments

Kim Hanson spoke of the difference between the proposed budget and the proposal given by Cheryl Reedy and spoke of financial responsibilities that need to be addressed. He noted that the motion to cut the BOS and BOE budgets did not specify that it must come from the operating budgets.

Thora Perkins noted that she supports the new schools but noted that the tax increases are not sustainable. She thanked everyone that participated in public comment.

Cheryl Reedy spoke of her proposal that was presented at tonight's meeting. She thanked everyone for public comments and wished that there were more options regarding the budget. She further spoke of concerns of members of the public that did not give their name.

Mark Beninson thanked Cheryl Reedy for her hard work. He spoke in defense of the BOF in regard to a comment that the BOF does not cooperate with the other boards.

Thora Perkins thanked all the BOF members.

Wes Marsh noted that the results of tonight's were not what he expected but hoped that the Medical Fund numbers will be favorable.

Adjournment

Kim Hanson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:07 am. Mark Beninson seconded the motion.

Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)