

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

**MINUTES**

**Board of Finance Budget Workshop  
Saturday, March 2, 2024  
9:00 AM  
Community Room at 33 Route 37**

<p><b><u>Board of Finance members present</u></b> Doug Jendras, Chairman Mark Beninson Wes Marsh Thora Perkins Cheryl Reedy Claudia Willard Eric Huff, Alternate Peggy Katkocin, Alternate</p> <p><b><u>Board of Finance members absent</u></b> Greg Williams, Alternate</p>	<p><b><u>Other Town officials present (First Session)</u></b> Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman Tom Perkins, Selectman Pat Del Monaco, Selectman Carrie DePuy, BOE Director of Business and Operations Olga Melnikov, Finance Director Dr. Ken. Craw, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kristine Woleck, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Maria Kennedy, Pupil Personnel Services Paul Gouveia, Director of Technology Phil Ross, Director of Buildings and Grounds Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman Tim Blair, BOE member Greg Flanagan, BOE member Sue Huwer, BOE member Amy Johnson, BOE member Kimberly LaTourette, BOE member Samantha Mannion, BOE member Ed Sbordone, BOE member/PBC member</p> <p><b><u>Other Town officials present (Second Session)</u></b> Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman Tom Perkins, Selectman Pat Del Monaco, Selectman Olga Melnikov, Finance Director Elisa Beckett-Flores, Registrar of Voters Ed Sbordone, BOE/PBC member Bruce Taylor, Fire Chief</p>
--	--

**Call To Order** Chairman Doug Jendras called the meeting to order at 9:02am. He read a statement regarding the role and expectations of the Board of Finance during the budget process.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Appointments**- None

**Presentation of the Board of Education Requested Budget 2024/2025**

Board of Education Chairman Dominic Cipollone spoke of the many accolades and achievements of New Fairfield students in academics, athletics, arts and clubs. He spoke of a strategic plan that focuses on setting priorities, building capacity and harnessing resources and noted necessary support services including school counselors, psychologists, social workers and special education services. The importance of programs such as Art and Music, World Languages, Talented and Gifted, STEAM, and Physical Education was also mentioned.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Craw spoke of the budget for 2023-2024 and noted that there is currently a budget freeze due to expenses for special education. He spoke of positions that were eliminated in the 2023-2024 school year which yielded a reduction of of approximately \$504,000.

Dr. Craw spoke of the 2024-2025 budget and factors that guide the compilation of the budget. These factors include maintaining health and safety standards, meeting state and federal mandates and investing in mental health needs of students. He spoke of staffing adjustments including the need for a media specialist in the Middle School. Environmental Factors that affect the budget include the expiration of ARP ESSER funds that were available during the pandemic, the reduction of the Entitlement Grants for the district and the inability to sustain the savings from attrition. It was noted that there are some non tax revenue sources including Sherman tuition, SPED Excess Cost Sharing and Educational Cost Sharing that are accounted for as Town revenue and are not incorporated in the BOE budget.

The total requested operating BOE budget for 2024-2025 equals \$48,695,091 which is a \$2,297,053 increase from the 2023-2024 budget which represents a 4.95% increase.

The capital budget request consists of \$794,577 which includes the replacement of the Student Transportation van, replacement of the stadium turf and track, creation of the Middle School outdoor recess space, replacement of four classroom carpets, a district storage garage, creation of a STEAM classroom in the previous SOC location and the replacement of the intercom system in the Middle School. The cost to replace Rebel Stadium and Track is approximately \$1,300,000. Of this amount, \$630,000 will be offset from Field Fees and \$600,000 will come from the Capital budget.

Dr. Ken Craw, Dr. Dr. Kristine Woleck and Carrie DePuy answered questions that were given to the Board by the BOF. It was noted that all information regarding this budget is available on the district website. It was decided that any questions from members of the BOF will be sent to Chairman Doug Jendras for forwarding to the BOE.

### **Public Comment**

Teacher Association President Jeff Giuliano spoke in support of the budget

Ann Marie McMenamin spoke in support of the budget and encouraged everyone not to underestimate the increasing needs to support mental illness.

### **Review of BOE Budget by Board of Finance members**

Members of the Board of Finance asked questions of the BOE regarding the proposed budget. Thora Perkins thanked the BOE and administrators for their presentation. Cheryl Reedy thanked the administration for making capital projects and infrastructure a priority and for giving metrics for student performance. Wes Marsh thanked the administrators for their hard work in finding ways to save money with special education. There was a brief discussion of the increase in the number of paraprofessionals. Peggy Katkocin spoke in support of the new schools and recreation facilities.

### **Recess**

Doug Jendras made a motion to take a ten-minute recess at 10:26 am. Thora Perkins seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Doug Jendras made a motion to come out of recess at 10:40 am. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

### **Presentation of Board of Selectman Requested Budget 2024/2025**

First Selectman Melissa Lindsey presented the BOS budget for 2024-2025 fiscal year. She noted that the requested budget from department heads totaled a requested increase of \$2,044,403 or 14.95%. This budget was reviewed by the BOS and was ultimately reduced to a requested increase of 3.88%. Factors that affect the budget include catch up for salary increases that were approved after last year's budget approval, the increase in the part-time assistant town clerk's office hours to become full-time and increase in the hours and materials and supplies for the Registrar of Voters. It was noted that the Tax collection rate is currently 97.99%.

The total requested municipal budget for 2024-2025 is \$14,206,407 which represents an increase of \$530,907 or 3.88% over the 2023-2024 budget.

### **Public Comment**

Selectman Pat Del Monaco noted that she did not support the BOS budget for 2024-2025 since it did not include money to hire and assistant for the Animal Control officer. She further spoke of concerns of capital needs.

Keith Landa spoke in agreement with Selectman Del Monaco regarding the need to hire an assistant for the Animal Control Officer and noted that the current situation with the Animal Control Officer is not sustainable.

John McCartney spoke in support of hiring an assistant for the Animal Control Officer.

Laurie Landa spoke in support of hiring an assistant for the Animal Control Officer.

Fire Chief Bruce Taylor spoke of concerns with cuts to Fire Department equipment.

Registrar of Voters Elisa Beckett-Flores spoke of how early voting rules affect both her budget and the budget of the Town Clerk. She spoke in support of increasing the Ass't Town Clerk's hours from part-time to full-time.

### **Review of the BOS Budget by Board of Finance members**

Members of the BOF asked questions regarding the proposed budget. Cheryl Reedy spoke in support of putting money in the capital line for the Fire Department. There was a request for more information regarding metrics and data for the Animal Control officer.

There was a brief discussion of money received by the State for early voting.

There was a discussion of the optimal amount to budget for interest income. Finance Director Olga Melnikov spoke of interest rates and budgeting for interest.

### **Future Meetings**

The Board of Finance will have budget meetings every Wednesday in the month at 7:30pm. The March 6<sup>th</sup> will be held in-person. The Board will determine if the future meetings will be in person or virtual at a later date. Cheryl Reedy suggested having one more public hearing further on in the budget process. The Medical representative will be available at the March 20<sup>th</sup> regular meeting. The medical subcommittee will meet on Tuesday, March 19<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 pm.

### **Adjournment**

Doug Jendras made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:32 am. Claudia Willard seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**