

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

MINUTES

Board of Finance Regular Meeting

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

7:30 PM

Community Room at 33 Route 37 (Downstairs)

<u>Board of Finance members present</u> Doug Jendras, Chairman Mark Beninson Wes Marsh Thora Perkins Cheryl Reedy Claudia Willard Eric Huff, Alternate Peggy Katkocin, Alternate Greg Williams, Alternate	<u>Other Town officials and Educators present:</u> Dr. Ken Craw, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kris Woleck, Ass't Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Maria Kennedy, Pupil Personnel Director Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman Pat Del Monaco, Selectman Tom Perkins, Selectman Olga Melnikov, Finance Director Terry Friedman, Town Treasurer Shareen Langdon, Tax Collector Holly Smith, Town Clerk Elisa Beckett-Flores, Registrar of Voters Paul Gouveia, Director of Technology Phil Ross, Director of Buildings and Grounds James D'Amico, High School Principal Karen Gruetzner, Middle School Principal Allyson Story, Elementary School Principal Rob Spino, Elementary School Ass't Principal Mark Ottusch, Athletic Director Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman Greg Flanagan, BOE member Sue Huwer, BOE member Kim LaTourette, BOE member Samantha Mannion, BOE member Ed Sbordone, BOE member/PBC member
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Call To Order Chairman Doug Jendras called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Appointments- None

Correspondence and Announcements

Doug Jendras noted that as of 12:00 noon today, the BOF received 24 emails from taxpayers regarding the budget. He read a statement about the challenges that the Town is facing with the budget and spoke of suggestions for bringing forth a responsible budget. He encouraged everyone to only give constructive comments and reminded everyone of the time limits for Public Comment.

Public Comment

Jeff Giuliano spoke in support of the BOE budget. He spoke of the challenges that many teachers in the district are facing and the increasing difficulty of the teaching profession.

Katie Williams encouraged the BOF to properly fund both the BOE operating and capital projects.

Some Middle School students spoke in support of the BOE budget and the positive experiences that they have received from extracurricular activities.

Terra Volpe spoke in support of the BOE budget and warned of problems that can occur in future years from under funding the schools. She further spoke in support of increasing the salaries for elected officials especially the Registrars of Voters.

Selectman Tom Perkins encouraged the BOF to gather as much information as possible before making any decisions regarding the budget. He noted that cuts can be made from the budget without affecting the quality of services.

Virginia Boffardi spoke in support of the BOE budget and all the needs of the schools.

John McCartney spoke in support of fully funding the budget and encouraged the BOF to be as transparent as possible.

Rachel Penny thanked all the teachers and educators in the district and spoke in support of the BOE budget. She thanked Superintendent of School Dr. Ken Craw for presenting a responsible budget.

Approval of Minutes

Mark Beninson made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 20, 2024 meeting as presented. Claudia Willard seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Discussion of Budget Proposals

Doug Jendras presented the Board with a proposal for the 2024/2025 fiscal year budget as follows:

OFFSETS		
Non-Tax Revenue	\$ 8,389,000	\$350,000 increase
Adjustment-Property Tax	\$ (860,000)	\$ 50,000 increase
Premium Usage	\$ 593,000	Leaves \$650 remaining
Unassigned General Fund Balance	\$ 320,000	Leaves \$0 remaining
Total	\$ 8,442,000	

EXPENDITURES		
Medical Insurance	\$ 6,900,000	\$350,000 reduction
Turf/Track and Field	\$50,000	Fund through ARPA Grants
Municipal Cap & Non	\$50,000	No change
Education Cap & Non	\$50,000	No change
Municipal Operating	\$ 12,913,662	\$100,000 reduction (approx 1%)
Education Operating	\$ 41,957,456	\$500,000 reduction (approx 1%)
Total	\$ 69,954,606	

The percentage increase for this proposal is 3.87% which is a Mill Rate Differential of 1.41. There was a discussion of the amount proposed for Medical Insurance and the suggestion of using the 2023-2024 surplus to reduce taxes. It was noted that increases to elected officials salaries would come from the Town operating budget.

Wes Marsh presented the Board with a proposal for the 2024/2025 fiscal year budget as follows:

BUDGET ITEM	REDUCTION AMOUNT	ADDITION TO THE BUDGET	
Bond Premium	\$725,000		Leaves \$518,000 for fiscal year 2025-2026
Non-taxpayer revenue	\$400,000		Interest income, Sherman tuition, building permits, real estate conveyance, motor vehicle supplement
Medical Insurance	\$175,000		Claims are trending downward and prescription rebates.
Fiscal year 2022-23 surplus	\$320,000		Surplus in the unassigned general fund over 16.67% to be used for capital projects
BOS Operations	\$125,000		Preferably non-payroll items
BOS Operations		\$47,000	Salary adjustment increase for elected officials
BOS Capital	\$50,000		Leftover money for completed Cap & Non projects
BOE Operations	\$250,000		Preferably non-payroll items
BOE Capital	\$0.00		Turf and track replacement included in BOE capital budget of \$794,577
Total	\$2,045,000	\$47,000	Total reduction of \$1,998,000

The percentage increase for this proposal is 5.845% which is a Mill Rate Differential of 2.04. There was a discussion of the suggestion of using previous year's surplus funds for the budget and the need

to buy a truck for the town with surplus funds. It was noted that ARPA funds go to the Town instead of the BOF and need to be voted on via a Town Meeting.

First Selectman Melissa Lindsey spoke of the budget and status of the capital projects. There was a discussion of closing out capital projects. There was a suggestion of a capital project committee and a five-year plan for capital projects.

Thora Perkins spoke of her proposal that would not use all the bond premium. She spoke of the second year of the debt service for the schools and the amount of capital needs for the town. Mark Beninson noted that he agreed with Doug Jendras' proposal but suggested \$35,000 for capital needs for the Board of Education.

The BOE and BOS were asked to come to the April 3rd BOF meeting with a report of how the respective cuts of \$500,000 and \$100,000 would affect their budget.

Discussion of Medical Appropriation for the Budget

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to table the vote on the Medical Appropriation until the total budget is determined. Thora Perkins seconded the motion.

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

Elected Officials Salaries

Thora Perkins presented a proposal for increases for some elected officials' salaries. She spoke of the inability to give increases to all elected officials this year due to the challenges in this year's budget. The total proposed increase for the elected officials is equal to \$12,000 which the BOS will need to find in their budget. She noted that salaries for elected officials will be reviewed again next year.

Thora Perkins made a motion to make the increases to the following elected officials in the amount of Town Clerk (\$3,000), Registrars of Voters (\$3,000 each) and Town Treasurer (\$3,000) for a total increase of \$12,000.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to amend the motion to revisit the salary increases at a later date except to increase the Registrar of Voters by \$10,000 each for a total of \$20,000. Wes Marsh seconded the motion.

There was a discussion of the roles of the elected officials and specifically the increase in hours and responsibilities for the Registrar of Voters due to early voting requirements and new State mandated requirements.

Thora Perkins made a motion to call the question on the previous motions. Claudia Willard seconded the motion. **Vote to call the question: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Vote on amendment to original motion: 2-4-0 (Motion denied, Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Mark Beninson, Doug Jendras, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed)

Vote on motion as originally presented: Vote: 4-2-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Doug Jendras, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor, Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy opposed)

Vote on Budget Proposals

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to table the vote on budget proposals until the April 3rd meeting. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Discussion of scheduling a second Public Hearing

Cheryl Reedy suggested that the BOF hold a second public hearing to listen to comments from the public about the 2024-2025 proposed budget. It was noted that the first public hearing for the 2024-2025 was held on March 2nd immediately prior to the budget presentations. There was a discussion as to whether a second public hearing was necessary.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion that the BOF hold a Public Hearing on Wednesday, April 3rd at 6:30 pm immediately preceding the regular BOF meeting of April 3rd at 7:30 pm. Wes Marsh seconded the motion.

After much discussion, Thora Perkins made a motion to call the question on the previous motion. Cheryl Reedy seconded the motion.

Vote to Call the Question: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)

Vote on motion after the question was called: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)

Public Comment

Terra Volpe asked for clarification about Chairman Doug Jendras' suggestion of bringing out of district students back in district. She particularly spoke of concerns regarding students that attend the Magnet School in Danbury. Mr. Jendras noted that he had no intention of suggesting that these students leave the Magnet School.

Tax Collector Shareen Langdon spoke of her frustration with the BOF's decision regarding the salary increases for elected officials. She spoke of her salary not being what was offered when she was hired.

Town Clerk Holly Smith spoke of the many extra hours required in her office due to absentee ballots and early voting requirements. She spoke of her concerns that it never seems to be the "right year" to give salary increases to elected officials.

Registrar of Voters Elisa Beckett-Flores spoke of the new Connecticut State mandated requirements for voting and the numerous extra hours required from her and Registrar of Voters Dan McDermott. She spoke of how early voting and same-day registration affect her workload and her frustration with the BOF's decision to raise the annual salary of the ROV's by only \$3,000. She broke down the number of elections required due to early voting and noted that even with the \$3,000 increase, the hourly salary does not equal the Connecticut State minimum wage.

Joshua Beckett-Flores spoke in support of the Registrar of Voters and noted the increase in the number of hours required due to Connecticut State mandates. He encouraged the BOF to pay them a "living wage".

Adjournment

Claudia Willard made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:44pm. Doug Jendras seconded the motion. **Vote: 4-2-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Doug Jendras, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor, Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy opposed)**

Received by email on 04/03/2024 @ 11:06 a.m.
by Chrystie M. Bontempo, Asst. Town Clerk, New Fairfield