

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

**MINUTES**

**Board of Finance Special Meeting**

**Wednesday, June 12, 2024**

**7:30 PM**

**Via Zoom**

<b><u>Board of Finance members present</u></b>	<b><u>Other Town officials and Educators present:</u></b>
Mark Beninson	Dr. Ken Craw, Superintendent of Schools
Wes Marsh	Dr. Kristine Woleck, Ass't Superintendent of Schools
Thora Perkins	Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman
Cheryl Reedy	Pat Del Monaco, Selectman
Claudia Willard	Tom Perkins, Selectman
Patrick Hearty, Alternate	Olga Melnikov, Finance Director
Peggy Katkocin, Alternate	Carrie DePuy, Director of Business and Operations
Greg Williams, Alternate	Director of Technology, Paul Gouveia
	Scott Rohwedder, High School Assistant Principal
	Allyson Story, Elementary Principal
	Rob Spino, Elementary Ass't Principal
	Jennifer Hilderbrand, Elementary Ass't Principal
	Holly Smith, Town Clerk
	Shareen Langdon, Tax Collector
	Elisa Beckett-Flores, Registrar of Voters
	Dan McDermott, Registrar of Voters
	Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman
	Tim Blair, BOE member
	Greg Flanagan, BOE member
	Amy Johnson, BOE member
	Kim LaTourette, BOE member
	Samantha Mannion, BOE member

**Call To Order**- Clerk Thora Perkins called the meeting to order at 7:32pm.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Appointments**- Cheryl Reedy made a motion to elevate alternate member Patrick Hearty to a full member for the purposes of this meeting. Wes Marsh seconded the motion.

**Vote: 4-0-1 (Mark Beninson, Wes Marsh, Cheryl Reedy and Claudia Willard in favor, Thora Perkins abstained)**

### **Discuss and vote to fill vacancy**

Members of the BOF asked questions of Gary Reetz regarding his qualifications and desire to serve on the Board of Finance.

Mark Beninson made a motion to appoint Gary Reetz to serve on the Board of Finance to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Doug Jendras. Patrick Hearty seconded the motion.

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

Cheryl Reedy stressed that the reason she voted against the appointment of Mr. Reetz was due to her concerns with the process and not Mr. Reetz's qualifications.

### **Vote to appoint Chairman of the Board of Finance**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to nominate Thora Perkins to serve as chairman of the Board of Finance. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 5-0-1 (Motion approved- Thora Perkins abstained)**

### **Public Comment**

Fifteen members of the public spoke in support of adding more money back to the BOE Operating budget. Two members of the spoke against adding any money to the BOE Operating budget.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Craw spoke of the loss of federal funds and explained how it affects the operating budget. He noted that a large percentage of the increase in the budget for this fiscal year is due to the loss of federal funding.

### **Correspondence and Announcements**

Thora Perkins announced that Chairman Doug Jendras resigned from the BOF effective June 11, 2024.

Thora Perkins spoke of emails sent to the BOF since June 4, 2024. Approximately four emails asked the BOF to keep the budget affordable. Approximately 37 emails asked that the taxpayers be given the chance to vote on the budget as originally presented by the BOE. Wes Marsh clarified that the overwhelming majority of the emails spoke of concerns of teacher and school program reductions. He also noted that a lot of the emails asked that the Town budget also be fully funded.

Cheryl Reedy announced that former Town Clerk Diana Peck passed away recently and thanked her for all her work and 43 years of service and dedication to the Town of New Fairfield. Peggy Katkocin thanked Diana Peck for all her dedication to New Fairfield.

### **Suspense list**

Tax Collector Shareen Langdon gave a brief description of the Suspense List.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to approve the Suspense List as presented by the Tax Collector. Thora Perkins seconded the motion.

**Vote: 5-0-0 (Motion approved- Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

### **Vote on revised Town and Education 2024/2025 budget to recommend to a Town Meeting**

Cheryl Reedy spoke of the budget that was defeated on June 8<sup>th</sup> and presented the board with a new proposal. Thora Perkins spoke of the affordability of the operating budget and the capital needs of the Town. There was a brief discussion of the number of administrators that were recently hired in the district. Dr. Craw clarified that the name of the Instructional Coaches was changed to Curriculum Instructional Leaders but no additional administrators have been hired in the district.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion add 400,000 to the BOE Operating budget and to use \$100,000 less of the bond premium to the BOF approved budget of May 22<sup>nd</sup> which will yield a tax increase of 4.93%. Wes Marsh seconded the motion.

**Vote: 2-3-0 (Motion denied- Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed, Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

Claudia Willard made a motion that the New Fairfield Town budget remain the same and the Board of Education budget be decreased by an additional \$250,000 from the BOF approved budget of May 22<sup>nd</sup>. Thora Perkins seconded the motion.

**Vote: 3-2-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor. Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy opposed, Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

Thora Perkins made a motion to recommend to a Town Meeting the following expenditures for the Board of Selectmen: Town government expenditures totaling \$14,105,707 from the General Fund and \$539,455 from the capital and nonrecurring funds and \$2,499,112 from other governmental funds for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025. Claudia Willard seconded the motion. **Vote: 3-2-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor. Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy opposed, Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

Thora Perkins made a motion to recommend to a Town Meeting Education expenditures for the Board of Education: Education expenditures totaling \$54,671,776 from the General Fund and \$119,577 from the capital and nonrecurring fund for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2024 and ending June 30, 2025. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 3-2-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard in favor. Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy opposed, Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to add advisory questions to the budget referendum. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 2-3-0 (Motion denied- Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed, Patrick Hearty did not vote on this motion.)**

### **Public Comment**

Town Clerk Holly Smith noted that she is unable to open Town Hall on a Saturday for voting because there is not enough time to put notice in the Town Tribune. She asked both the BOF and BOS to file an agenda for a special meeting for immediately after the budget vote to set the Mil

Rate. In the event that the budget passes, the BOF will set the Mil Rate. If the budget fails, the BOS will set the Mil Rate to be effective until the budget eventually passes.

Tax Collector Shareen Langdon spoke of the process of sending supplemental bills and the additional cost associated with sending these bills.

Chairman of the Board of Education Dominic Cipollone spoke of his concerns with the BOF's decision to recommend cutting an additional \$250,000 from the BOE Operating budget. He further spoke of his disappointment with the BOF's choice of new board member Gary Reetz. He referred to an email that Mr. Reetz wrote to the BOF suggesting that the entire BOE resign. Mr. Cipollone noted that the next regular BOE meeting will be held on August 15<sup>th</sup> and expects Mr. Reetz to issue a formal apology to the entire BOE.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Craw spoke of impact of a cut of \$750,000 from the BOE approved budget. He spoke of the cumulative effect of cuts from last year.

Recording Secretary Suzanne Kloos spoke of the increasing difficulty of following the BOF meetings and typing the minutes.

Registrar of Voters Elisa Beckett-Flores spoke of the large number of elections in the near future and the difficulty of getting poll workers.

Board of Education member Kimberly LaTourette spoke of disappointment with the BOF's choice of Gary Reetz to replace Doug Jendras. She further requested that Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard come up with a list of \$750,000 worth of suggestions for non-payroll cuts for the BOE Operating budget. She asked that this list be provided within 48 hours.

Over twenty members of the public spoke of their frustration with the boards decision to further cut the operating budget. They spoke of concerns with the Education budget and the cumulative effect of cuts to the schools.

### **Board member comments**

Greg Williams spoke of the number of Town employees that have resigned recently. He spoke of consequences of the decisions made by Thora Perkins, Mark Beninson and Claudia Willard and how they negatively affect the Town.

Cheryl Reedy spoke of the embarrassment of the decision made by the BOF at tonight's meeting and her concerns with the BOF not being able to work together. She offered to go back and vote again at this meeting in order to find a compromise.

Wes Marsh spoke with concerns with the future of the town if the BOF members are not willing compromise.

Peggy Katkocin spoke of the shift of how BOF meetings have been run as of late. She spoke of concerns with the appointment of Mr. Reetz. She encouraged BOF members to go back and rethink decisions that were made tonight.

Thora Perkins noted that members of each party have a right to caucus and decide things ahead of time and noted that there was nothing done in secret. She spoke of her faith that the next budget referendum will pass.

**Adjournment**

Wes Marsh made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:58 pm. Claudia Willard seconded the motion.

**Vote: 5-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Received by email on 06/17/2024 @ 8:30 a.m.  
by Chrystie M. Bontempo, Asst. Town Clerk, New Fairfield