

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

**MINUTES**

**Board of Finance Special Meeting  
Wednesday, April 3, 2024  
7:30 PM**

**Meeting House Hill School Multi Purpose Room**

<b><u>Board of Finance members present</u></b>	<b><u>Other Town officials and Educators present:</u></b>
Doug Jendras, Chairman Mark Beninson Wes Marsh Thora Perkins Cheryl Reedy Claudia Willard Eric Huff, Alternate Peggy Katkocin, Alternate Greg Williams, Alternate	Dr. Ken Crow, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kris Woleck, Ass't Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Melissa Lindsey, First Selectman Pat Del Monaco, Selectman Tom Perkins, Selectman Olga Melnikov, Finance Director Carrie DePuy, Director of Business and Operations Terry Friedman, Town Treasurer Elisa Beckett-Flores, Registrar of Voters Paul Gouveia, Director of Technology James D'Amico, High School Principal Michael Chapleau, High School Assistant Principal Scott Rohwedder, High School Assistant Principal Mark Ottusch, Athletic Director Karen Gruetzner, Middle School Principal Allyson Story, Elementary School Principal Rob Spino, Elementary School Assistant Principal Maria Kennedy, Director of Pupil Personnel Services Dominic Cipollone, BOE Chairman Kathy Baker, BOE member Greg Flanagan, BOE member Sue Huwer, BOE member Amy Johnson, BOE member Kim LaTourette, BOE member Samantha Mannion, BOE member Ed Sbordone, BOE member/PBC member

**Call To Order** Chairman Doug Jendras called the meeting to order at 7:49pm. This meeting immediately followed a special meeting of the BOF that gave taxpayers an opportunity to give comments and suggestions about the proposed budget for both the Town and the Board of Education for fiscal year 2024-2025.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Appointments-** None

### Correspondence and Announcements

Chairman Doug Jendras noted that 32 emails have been sent to the Board of Finance since the last meeting of March 27<sup>th</sup>. Most of the emails were regarding the budget and specifically capital projects such as the need to fix the intercom system at the Middle School, funding for teachers and counselors, special education expenses, lowering taxes and support for raises in salaries for elected officials.

Doug Jendras spoke of his tenure on the Board of Finance and his disappointment with the difficulty of getting information about BOE spending. He spoke of the \$6.2 million increase to the BOE operating budget over the last 3 years and noted that his is not sustainable. He thanked the First Selectman for her budget and work she has done to possibly reallocate ARPA funds and secure grant money. He encouraged all the town boards to work together for the good of New Fairfield and to pass a reasonable budget that is fair to all taxpayers.

### Public Comment

Over 25 taxpayers spoke of the proposed budget and encouraged the BOF to send the budget to a referendum without any further cuts.

### Approval of Minutes

Mark Beninson made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2024 regular meeting as presented. Thora Perkins seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

### Budget Proposals

Thora Perkins thanked all the residents that spoke during public comment. She spoke of her career background and noted that she is familiar with educational challenges. She spoke of the increase to the BOE budget from 2023-2024 and noted yearly increases cannot be sustained. She compared budgets and the per pupil expenditures with surrounding towns especially Brookfield.

Mark Beninson compared the BOE budget and the BOS budget and noted that the Town was able to make cuts that did not affect payroll and questioned why the BOE couldn't do the same. He spoke of the per pupil expenditures.

Cheryl Reedy spoke of her desire to find the right budget amount to avoid having more than one budget referendum this year. This plan would propose a cut of \$350,000 to the BOE operating instead of \$500,000. The Town operating budget would be reduced by \$87,700 but \$35,000 would be put back into the budget for increases to elected officials salaries. Contributions to Medical Insurance would be reduced by \$200,000 over the current year and \$600,00 would be taken out of the budget for the track and field with the promise that 2023-2024 surplus funds would be used for this purpose. This plan would yield a 4.8% increase over 2023-2024. She compared budget percentage increases for the last eight years and noted that the increases average 2.58% since 2016-2017. This was compared to Social Security increases of the same period that average 2.87% and CPI increases 2.90% in the Northeast during the same time frame.

Wes Marsh spoke of the five major parts of the budget which include Debt Service, Medical, BOE and BOS payroll and non payroll and capital. He spoke of how each section affects the overall budget. He suggested using \$1,025,000 of bond premium to reduce the overall budget, using \$175,000 to reduce what is paid to Medical and \$400,000 of non-taxpayer revenue. He suggested reducing the non-payroll portion

of the BOS budget by \$125,000 and adding \$47,000 to increase elected officials salaries. He suggested reducing BOE non-payroll by \$250,000 and to leave the BOE payroll and BOE capital as originally proposed. The proposed BOE capital budget is \$795,000 with \$600,000 put aside for the turf field and track. This would yield a tax increase of 5.85%. He noted that the median tax bill is \$7,715 so 1% would be \$77.00 per year for the median household.

Greg Williams spoke in support of Cheryl Reedy’s proposal and in favor of not zeroing out BOE capital.

There was a discussion of taking the turf field out of the budget with the promise that the 2023-2024 will be earmarked for this project.

The Board members discussed different scenarios and how changes would affect the budget. There was a discussion of the difference between a cut of \$250,000 vs. a cut of \$350,000 for the BOE operating. Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ken Crow thanked the BOF for their hard work with the budget and explained that a \$250,000 cut instead of a \$350,000 cut would make a huge difference to the quality of education to the district.

**Vote on Elected Officials Salaries**

Thora Perkins made a motion to rescind the increases to elected salaries that were approved at the March 27, 2024 BOF meeting. Cheryl Reedy seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to increase the elected officials salaries as followed: First Selectman (\$5,000 per year), Town Clerk (\$5,000 per year), Registrars of Voters (\$8,000 per year for each registrar), Town Treasurer (\$3,000 per year) and Tax Collector (\$7,000 per year) for a total increase of \$36,000 per year. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

**Vote on Medical Appropriation**

Doug Jendras made a motion to reduce the appropriation into Medical Fund from the General Fund by \$350,000. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

**Vote on Final Mark up for the recommended budget for fiscal year 2024-2025**

Thora Perkins made a motion to make the following reductions to the BOS proposed budget for fiscal year 2024-2025 for a total of \$87,700.00 Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

<u>Department</u>		<u>Amount</u>
Registrar of Voters	Salaries	(500)
Registrar of Voters	Materials and Supplies	(500)
Finance	Materials and Supplies	(500)
BOF	Town Audit	(700)
Assessor	Materials and Supplies	(2,000)
Unclassified Payroll and Benefits	Unemployment	(5,000)
Professional Services	Consulting	(2,500)
General Insurance	Property & Casualty	(2,000)
Business Machines	Technology	(5,000)
Business Machines	Postage	(2,000)

Planning Commission	Salaries	(1,000)
Zoning Commission	Materials and Supplies	(500)
Economic Development	Materials and Supplies	(500)
Permanent Building Committee	Salaries	(500)
Police	SRO Overtime	(5,000)
Police	Equipment and Maintenance	(1,000)
Police	Materials and Supplies	(1,000)
Police	Vehicle Maintenance	(1,000)
Communications Center	Part-Time salaries	(5,000)
Communications Center	Emergency Notification	1,000-increase
Fire Marshal	Materials and Supplies	(500)
Office of Emergency Management	Materials and Supplies	(1,000)
Animal Control	Materials and Supplies	(500)
Public Works	Seasonal Personnel	(5,000)
Public Works	Contracted Services	(30,000)
Public Works	Equipment Lease	(5,000)
Public Works	Highways & Streets Materials and Supplies	(10,000)
Inland/Wetlands	Salaries	(500)
Net decrease to the budget		<b>(87,700)</b>

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to increase non-tax revenue for fiscal year 2024-2025 by \$325,000 for a total of \$8,389,181. The increases from the proposed budget are \$50,000 extra in Sherman tuition, \$200,000 in interest income and \$75,000 in special education excess cost grant. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to reduce property tax adjustments by \$50,000 from \$910,000 to \$860,000 and to use \$1,045,000 of premium to offset debt service expenditures. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to reduce the BOE operating budget by \$250,000. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 2-4-0 (Motion denied- Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Mark Beninson, Doug Jendras, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to reduce the BOE operating budget by \$350,000. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 5-1-0 (Motion approved- Mark Beninson, Doug Jendras, Wes Marsh, Thora Perkins and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Claudia Willard opposed)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to budget \$119,577 for BOE capital and non-recurring expenditures. Mark Beninson seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to make a commitment to recommend using \$600,000 of the 2023-2024 surplus for the turf field and track replacement if not other funding sources become available. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 4-2-0 (Motion approved- Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed)**

Doug Jendras 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. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Doug Jendras made a motion to recommend to a Town Meeting Education expenditures for the Board of Education: Education expenditures totaling \$55,071,776 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: 5-1-0 (Motion approved- Claudia Willard opposed)**

### **Public Comment**

Many residents spoke of their disappointment with the cuts to the BOE budget and asked for more transparency in the future.

Many residents asked that an advisory question be added to the referendum for both the Town and the Board of Education. There was a discussion among the BOF members as to whether advisory questions are helpful.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to add advisory questions to the referendum for both the Town and BOE to ask if the budget is too high or too low with options of either yes or no. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 2-3-1 (Motion denied- Wes Marsh and Cheryl Reedy in favor, Mark Beninson, Thora Perkins and Claudia Willard opposed, Doug Jendras abstained)**

### **Future agenda items**

There was a brief discussion on the need to hold a special meeting to set the Mill Rate once the budget passes. This meeting can be scheduled once the date for the Budget referendum is set.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Finance will be held on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Board member comments**

Board members thanked everyone for coming to tonight's meeting and noted that they are glad that a budget mark up was completed.

### **Adjournment**

Doug Jendras made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:05 pm. Wes Marsh seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**