

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

MINUTES
(REVISED)

Board of Finance Special Meeting
Wednesday, April 22, 2020
7:30 PM
Virtual meeting via Zoom

Members present via Zoom

Wes Marsh, Chairman
Michael Cammarota
Tom Garben
Jane Landers
Cheryl Reedy
Anthony Yorio
Brian Shea, Alternate
Mark Werner, Alternate
Greg Williams, Alternate

Other Town Officials Present via Zoom

Ed Sbordone, Finance Director and Town Treasurer
Pat Del Monaco, First Selectman
Khris Hall, Selectman
Kim Hanson, Selectman
Dr. Pat Cosentino, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Rich Sanzo, Director of Business and Operations
Peggy Katkocin, BOE Chairman
Greg Flanagan, BOE member
Kimberly LaTourette, BOE member
Rick Regan, BOE member
Stephanie Strazza, BOE member
James D'Amico, High School Principal
Christine Baldelli, Middle School Principal

BOE Network Administrator Paul Gouveia gave a brief overview of the rules and procedures for having 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

Chairman Wes Marsh noted that he mentioned at the April 20 joint BOS/BOF that nine emails have been received regarding the purchase of the property at 78 Gillotti Road. Of these emails, two were against the purchase and seven were in favor. Since then, two more emails were received concerning this purchase. Matt Wolowitz spoke against the purchase and Phil Frobey spoke of his concerns regarding the lack of discussion concerning the purchase.

Public Comment-None

Approval of Minutes

Jane Landers made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 15, 2020 regular meeting as presented. Michael Cammarota seconded the motion.

Wes Marsh made a motion to amend the minutes of the April 15, 2020 meeting to include that there was commentary by First Selectman Pat Del Monaco and Selectman Kim Hanson regarding code of conduct and fraud policies in the audit recommendations that will be discussed in the future.

Vote to amend: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)

Vote on motion as amended: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)

Budget Transfers- None

Discussion of Medical Plan for 2020-2021

Tom Kowalchik from USI spoke of the town's medical plan and specifically risk for COVID 19 and how it would affect insurance costs. He noted that Anthem will be tracking COVID 19 expenses separately. He spoke of the postponement of elective procedures and regular checkups and how it affects costs.

Mr. Kowalchick will check with Anthem about getting an estimate of the prescription drug cost rebate.

Discussion - BOS and BOE requested 2020/21 budgets and reductions

Wes Marsh spoke of budget reductions and what would need to happen in order to obtain a 0% tax increase over last year's budget. The BOF had noted at their March 18th meeting that they would like to see the budget increase to be less than 3%. They had previously cut the BOE and BOS budgets by \$437,600 and \$384,400 respectively to get to a 2.94% budget increase. In order to get to a 0% increase, additional cuts of \$1,453,000 would have to be made. He further spoke of the increases of \$200,000 made to the medical fund and \$354,255 made for debt service. As a result, the cuts of \$1,453,000 would need to come from payroll, nonpayroll and cap & non from the BOE and BOS budgets. He compared the annual and monthly dollar difference for tax increases for homes that have assessments between \$300,000 and \$500,000. He noted that the difference would be approximately \$200 per year for houses assessed between \$300,000 and \$325,000.

There was a discussion among the members of the BOF as to whether or not cuts of approximately \$1.4 million would be worth it to save taxpayers approximately \$200 per year. There was a discussion of the various tax relief programs available to taxpayers under the governor's order due to COVID 19. It was noted that anything cut would most likely have to be made up next year. Many members of the BOF spoke of budgets for both the BOE and BOS and noted that a 0% increase would give the same as last year and the respective boards could be able to operate with last year's budget numbers. The board also discussed the potential unemployment rate in New Fairfield and how the budgets were set during periods with high unemployment rates in the past.

The BOF decided that additional cuts may be necessary and will ask both the BOE and BOS to see what would be cut in order to reach an additional reduction of \$375,000 per board. The BOF will encourage as much public comment as possible and decided to give a timeline to the public in order to come up with an optimal increase. There was a suggestion of putting an advertisement in the *Town Tribune* to let the public know the time line and information for the budget.

BOE Chairman Peggy Katkocin spoke of three scenarios that have been discussed by the BOE in order to reach a previous reduction of \$437,600. The BOE had a discussion of cutting \$337,600 from the operating budget and \$100,000 from the capital and nonrecurring budget. In order to reach these

reductions, there have been some RIFs (reduction in force) for staff members, incentives for retirement and some small grants that have been awarded to the district. It is possible that staff members that are retiring may not be replaced. She spoke of her concerns with distance learning and the potential need to catch up in the fall which may be even more difficult if more cuts are made to staff members. A spreadsheet of the \$437,600 worth of cuts will be sent to the BOF for their review.

Wes Marsh spoke of the timeline for the adoption of the budget.

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to ask both the BOE and BOS to each come back with \$375,000 in additional cuts by Monday, May 4th to be published in time to be discussed at the May 6, 2020 BOF meeting. Anthony Yorio seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Cheryl Reedy made a motion to schedule the budget mark up for Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Michael Cammarota seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Discuss - Board of Finance article for the Town Tribune

It was decided that BOF Chairman Wes Marsh along with BOE Chairman Peggy Katkocin and First Selectman Pat Del Monaco will write a joint article to be published in the *Town Tribune* to give information about the purchase of 78 Gillotti Road and the budget mark up. Brian Shea will write a separate article about the budget process and timeline and to encourage public participation.

Jane Landers made a motion that the BOF spend up to \$600 at the Chairman's discretion to take an ad in the *Town Tribune* to encourage taxpayer participation in the budget process. Cheryl Reedy seconded the motion. **Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)**

Public Comment

Selectman Kim Hanson corrected a previous comment and noted that the BOS did not unanimously vote to appropriate funds to purchase the property at 78 Gillotti Road. He also cautioned the boards that they should remain unbiased with their article in the paper since they are spending town funds to put the advertisement in the paper. He spoke of his concerns that the 8-24 referral by the Planning Commission was improper and that the BOS did not follow the Executive Order by the Governor with regard to the appropriation of funds for 78 Gillotti Road.

Nancy Fairchild thanked the BOF for looking at budget cuts and recognizing that many taxpayers are out of work and will struggle to pay taxes this year. She noted that many young families cannot log on at 7:30pm. She suggested that they send emails to the BOF instead.

BOE member Greg Flanagan noted that additional cuts to the BOE budget will be difficult and will negatively impact the school system. He thanked the teachers and staff for their hard work with distance learning but noted that there will be significant catching up in the fall and now is not the time to make more cuts.

BOE member Stephanie Strazza spoke of her concerns about how additional cuts will affect needs of staff and students in the fall.

Jennifer Sbarra spoke of the effects of the economy from COVID 19 and asked the board to consider future debt service when adopting the budget.

There was a discussion among all three selectmen regarding the procedure for the 8-24 referral for the purchase of 78 Gillotti Road.

Future Agenda items

Budget discussion
Medical discussion

Board Member Comments

Members of the BOF thanked Chairman Wes Marsh for his hard work with the budget figures. They encouraged members of the public to give their comments via the many avenues available and noted that it is hopeful that a reasonable budget can be adopted.

Adjournment

Jane Landers made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:23 pm. Michael Cammarota seconded the motion.

Vote: 6-0-0 (Motion approved)