

**Town of New Hartford
Board of Finance Meeting
October 12, 2021 @ 7:00 pm**

Present Chairman Regina Wexler, Member: Kerry Guilfoyle, Ben Witte, Paul LeClair Alternates: Bart Baxter, Lou Helt and Recording Secretary Penny Miller

Others Present First Selectman Dan Jerram, Superintendent of Schools Brian Murphy, BOE Chairman Tim Goff, Town Treasurer Gordon Ross, Bookkeeper Annie Witte, Members of the public: Aulay Carlson, Allen Voghel, Krish Dasgupta and Kathryn Boughton (reporter Republican American).

Absent Ryan Bingham and Dan Charest

Chairman Wexler opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Seating of Alternates Lou Helt was seated for Steve Tuxbury and Bart Baxter was seated for Dan Charest.

Adoption and/or Revision of Agenda

Chairman Wexler said there was a typo in #9. It should read approval of the August 31, 2021 Special Meeting. There being no other changes Chairman Wexler adopted the revised agenda.

Discussion and possible action on vacancies

Chairman Wexler said that Greg O'Brien, chair of the Republican Town Committee, wrote it is their suggestion that Lou Helt take Steve Tuxbury's spot as a regular member and that Allen Voghel take Lou Helt's place. Historically the Board of Finance has deferred to the party whose member has resigned to take their suggestion for a replacement. Chairman Wexler then opened nominations to fill Steve Tuxbury's spot.

MOTION

Mr. Witte nominated Lou Helt to fill the vacancy. Seconded by Ms. Guilfoyle. As there were no other nominations Chairman Wexler deemed them to be closed.

Discussion followed with Ms. Wexler saying that Ms. Helt has done a great job as an alternate. She is always prepared, detail oriented and with her experience in the financial field is really an important and productive member of this board.

Aye: Wexler, Guilfoyle, Witte, Baxter, LeClair; abstentions: Helt

Motion passes

MOTION

Mr. Witte nominated Allen Voghel to fill the alternate spot. Seconded by Ms. Helt. There being no other nominations, Chairman Wexler deemed them to be closed.

Mr. Voghel said he moved to New Hartford from Wolcott about 9 years ago. He worked the last 35 years for Aetna Insurance Company. He volunteered and was active with the Local Emergency Planning Commission for 10 years (still a member). He was the Civil Preparedness/ Emergency Management Director for 20 years before retiring. He has two children that also live in New Hartford along with 4 grandchildren plus one on the way.

Unanimous

Chairman Wexler seated Mr. Voghel at the table. Ms. Helt and Mr. Voghel will need to be sworn in by the Town Clerk.

Education Report: Tim Goff, Chair, Brian Murphy, Superintendent

Mr. Goff said last year in October they came to the Board of Finance to make them aware of the BOE exceeding special education costs by \$190,000. With cost savings and mitigation efforts, the Administrative Team was able to minimize those costs and they ended the year with a surplus of \$2,800. They also did not need to use the non-lapsing fund that has \$100,000 in it. Otherwise, things are going well. The school year started off a little rough with a few Covid cases. Since then, it is now under control. Chairman Wexler asked Supt. Murphy where he found the \$190,000. Supt. Murphy said they saved some money after working with a couple of families and the outplacement of their special education children. Some money was saved on the DATTCO bus contract. Also, there is a one-on-one nurse who works with a special needs student in the district. They were able to save about \$50,000 with that. Other services such as Occupational Therapy & Physical Therapy realized some cost savings. Chairman Wexler asked if the whole \$190,000 was saved in the Special Education budget. He replied that most of it was saved in the Special Education budget line. Mr. Murphy said they did receive an additional \$100,000 from the State of Connecticut in Covid relief funds. More than what was anticipated. That money helped to defray some line items as far as maintenance and Covid-19 mitigation efforts. One bus route has been consolidated due to a shortage of bus drivers and substitutes.

Chairman Wexler thanked BOE Chairman Tim Goff for his years of service on the Board of Education. That he has been open and honest with the Board of Finance along with a cupcake from Cake Gypsy when he dropped off an advance copy of the budget. Mr. Goff said thank you and he feels that although the past 4 years have been difficult, the two boards have worked well together better than in previous years. This is because of open communication and mutual respect between the two boards. We worked hard together to do what was best for our town, our children and school district. Chairman Wexler said it was a matter of mutual trust and respect which had to be rebuilt from some relationships that had been damaged in the past. We have managed to do that and to move forward in the best interest of our school children and taxpayers. Mr. Goff said that all the BOE Capital Projects have been completed except for the boiler at the New Hartford Elementary School. This delay was because of Covid, supply constraints, labor issues and a fire at the boiler plant. The boiler is on back-order probably until the Spring of 2022.

Mr. Witte asked about current year projects with the Covid relief funds. Supt. Murphy said that \$119,000 was received. An additional tutor was hired for this year, then 2 tutors will be hired for next year with an additional tutor the following year – 2023-2024. Chairman Wexler where do you see the most loss? Supt. Murphy said Math is the big issue in grades 3 – 6. The tutors will be starting a new program next week working with identified students that need extra help in all 3 schools from 8:00 – 8:30 am.

Municipal Reports

Bookkeeper: Revenue & Expenditures Fiscal YTD and 2020-2021 Fiscal Year Wrap up

Ms. Witte said that we are just starting the current fiscal year so there isn't a lot to report on. First Selectman Jerram said we had Hurricane Ida which resulted in an unusual amount of overtime and outsourced repairs for a total of \$10,000. Ms. Witte said that the winter drives the budget. The Board of Education was under expended by \$2,774.20 and the town by \$246,537.24. We only had to take in \$22,838 from Surplus to make it even. The tax collection rate for the current fiscal year is 56.66%. There are no concerns at this time.

In general, and with the impact of Covid, Mr. Jerram said that a lot of things didn't get done and there were activities that didn't run. The Selectmen may be presenting a proposal for spending. With the server issues, the cameras for the Police Department and all the software associated with it, it could be a borderline 6 figure expense for maintaining video from the dash cams. It needs to be in place by the end of this fiscal year.

Mr. Jerram said that fees have been received in the Town Clerk's office for sales. In the last year Marandino's Plaza was sold for in excess of \$5 million along with the Waring Plaza which sold in excess of \$8 million.

When asked about the Senior Housing, Mr. Jerram replied that the developer of the proposal will be presenting a modification to the zoning regulations at the next Zoning Meeting. The housing will be similar to Canterbury Village.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Ross said we have let the STIF account be drawn down. Currently it is only paying 0.09% in interest. Municipal Money Market is paying 0.14% interest. Most of our funds are making 0.3% interest. The total amount in Northwest Community Bank of all of our accounts is almost \$10.3 million. In the Capital Reserve account there is about \$800,000.

First Selectman's Report

First Selectman Jerram said the auditors had a question about what was in the \$105,000 educational savings. He feels it wasn't clear in the minutes and should be documented. Since the Water & Sewer referendum they are down to the last easement – Pine Meadow Farms. They are getting very close to getting a contract.

All the contractor expenses have been paid for the fire at New Hartford House. All the remediation and tank removal have been paid for. The billing for the public utilities is still pending. A bill hasn't been submitted to the owner for the tenant relocation.

In the adjacent building, two tenants have found housing with relatives and the 3rd tenant went into an assisted living facility. None of the 3 tenants have asked for assistance.

Chairman Wexler asked when the Neighbor-to-Neighbor information will be on the town website. Ms. Helt said that Debbie Ventre does the updates. This group will require a new page be added to the website. As Ms. Ventre is moving out of state, she has been training and working with her assistant to get this done. Ms. Wexler asked who will be adding minutes, agendas, etc. to the website with Ms. Ventre leaving? Mr. Jerram said that an offer has been extended and accepted. The new town clerk is experienced and New Hartford will be well served when they come on-board. Ms. Helt said that numerous requests have been received from the tenants affected by the fire.

First Selectmen said it is very difficult to get paving done. High Street has been done. The sidewalks in the downtown area are being repaired.

Mr. Jerram said that the town has received \$985,000 in Covid Funds and they are starting the process to get ideas from the public on how to disburse these funds for those affected by Covid. The local school district and Region 7 have also made some requests. The discussion has been started but the

parameters will need to be done. Water, sewer and broadband are free. Everything else needs to be documented and related to Covid. We need to do what is right for New Hartford. Ms. Wexler said we work better if we are all part of the process. She wondered if having a Board of Finance liaison to be part of the workshops on how the money is being spent would be best. Mr. Witte said that the liaison upfront would be best right now. This way you hear at least once a month what is happening. Mr. Baxter said he would be willing to be one of the liaisons. Ms. Wexler will ask Ryan Bingham if he is willing to help out. Ms. Witte said this money is in a separate fund and not comingled with other funds.

Communications and other items presented to the Board

Mr. Voghel's email with his background is available in the Town Clerk's Office.

Opportunity for Public Comment

Aulay Carlson, 455 West Hill Rd – said he had one comment about the federal money. The Feds don't care when you are spending it but they will check after you have spent it. You want to have everything documented. He read a letter which is available in the Town Clerk's Office.

Approval of Minutes: August 31, 2021 Special Meeting

Chairman Wexler said as there were no comments, questions or changes to the minutes, she deemed them to be approved.

Other Business

Chairman Wexler said the next meeting is November 9th. As she will not be back in time for the meeting should it be canceled or rescheduled. Ms. Wexler will reschedule it for November 16th.

Chairman Wexler said there was a meeting at Region 7 which Ms. Guilfoyle attended for Ms. Wexler. It was billed as a Workshop of the Future. Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen and Board of Education chairs from the 4 towns were invited to attend. Ms. Guilfoyle said it started with random thoughts from all the four towns of what problems they were having. Ms. Sexton-Read took notes of everything that was mentioned but those notes were never shared with the attendees. The meeting ended up being guided toward regionalization of our entire education system. This subject had been looked at 7-10 years ago. Regionalization makes sense for purchasing insurance, oil and curriculum development. Ms. Wexler feels that two board members should be on this committee so if one can't make the meeting the other person can. Mr. Witte said he will be on the committee. There is no date as to when the next meeting will be held.

Adjournment

Chairman Wexler deemed the meeting to be over at 8:32 pm

Respectfully submitted, *Penny Miller, Recording Secretary*

Attachments available from the Town Clerk

Allen Voghel's information

Aulay Carlson's letter