

**Town of New Hartford  
Board of Finance Special Meeting  
Public Hearing: 2021-2022 Budgets  
Tuesday, April 6, 2021 - 7 pm via ZOOM**

**Present:** Chairman Regina Wexler, members: Dan Charest, Kerry Guilfoyle, Paul LeClair, Steve Tuxbury, Ben Witte, Alternates: Lou Helt, Bart Baxter, Ryan Bingham and Recording Secretary Penny Miller

**Also Present:** New Hartford Supt. of Schools Brian Murphy, New Hartford BOE Chairman Tim Goff, Region 7 Superintendent of Schools Dr. Judith Palmer, Region 7 BOE Chairman Molly Sexton Read, Director of Finance Jim Gaskins, Kathryn Boughton and several members of the public.

Chairman Wexler opened the meeting at 7:04 pm with the reading of the following legal notice - *Notice is hereby given that the electors and those entitled to vote in Town Meetings in the Town of New Hartford, CT are hereby notified and warned that a Budget Hearing for the 2021-2022 Annual Budget for the Town of New Hartford, CT will be held on Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 7:00 PM VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM (check [www.newhartfordct.gov](http://www.newhartfordct.gov) or call 860-379-3389 for access link) at which meeting the proposed budget, including General Government, New Hartford Board of Education, Capital Expenditures and Regional School District No. 7 for the fiscal year commencing July 1, 2021, will be presented. Any person may recommend the inclusion or deletion of expenditures at such meeting via public comment at the time of the meeting or via correspondence which must be received by Monday, April 5, 2021 at noon. Dated at New Hartford, Connecticut, this 16th day of March, 2021.*

Any correspondence received is posted with these minutes and available for viewing in the Town Clerk's office. Links to the budget files are as follows: [Town of New Hartford Proposed Budget as of March 17, 2021](#); [New Hartford Board of Education Proposed Budget Updated March 31, 2021](#); [Regional 7 Proposed Budget](#)

**Presentation: 2021-2022 NWR#7 Board of Education Budget: Molly Sexton Read, Chair; Judith Palmer, Superintendent, and James Gaskins, Director of Finance**

Region 7 BOE Chairman Ms. Read started the Region 7 budget by showing the historical expenditure increase overview. They are requesting a 1.5% increase overall in their budget. The Middle School teams will be reduced from 3.6 to 3 teams because of a drop in enrollment in that part of the school. The school plans to expand the STEP Program. This program is an after-school alternate program for those high school students who for a variety of reasons the day program isn't a successful place for them to be. Some of the Middle School teachers have been moved to the High School. There has been a reduction in force with a retirement in Special Education. That teaching position was removed and, in its place, a 10-month Supervisor of Special Education was added. Additional electives have been added to meet the state requirements for graduation.

The per pupil expenditure for the school in the Berkshire League is \$20,437 which is slightly above the state average (\$19,295). There are only two other schools below Region 7. The current enrollment is 999 - this includes students paying tuition from the towns of Winsted, Hartland, Torrington, Canton and Granby. The total also includes those attending Magnet schools and out-placements. HTA on the list is Highlander Transition Academy. This is a group of 16 students who have aged out of the high school but still need to be educated until they reach the age of 21.

Sixty-five percent of the budget is salaries. Some are contractual raises of 2-3%. Other purchased services - outplaced students - they captured some big savings in that area. The health insurance renewal is capped at 6.95%. In the Professional/Technical Services section, the use of \$25,000 in excess

cost grant was used to offset special education expenditures through Shared Services. There also was the use of \$35,000 in Excess Cost Grant to offset special education professional and technical services. The Excess Cost Grant comes from the state for every student whose tuitions cost 4x the per pupil cost. Ms. Sexton Read continued by saying that there hasn't been any new borrowing since 2012. In June 2022 the final bond will be paid off. Region 7 is developing plans for future capital plans. Based on the October 1<sup>st</sup> enrollment New Hartford saw a drop in students from 484 to 450. The overall net assessment increase is 0.57%.

At a previous meeting information regarding federal Covid grants was requested. These grants came with specific guidelines as to how they were to be used. A budget was built to reach the requirements and then submitted to the federal government for reimbursement. They are as follows for 2020/2021 - ESSER I Cares Act \$24,123 (covered Language Art Support MS), Coronavirus Relief Fund I \$301,108 (covered duct cleaning, PPE, signage, plexiglass barriers, etc.), Coronavirus Relief Fund II \$247,962 (covered Chromebooks, laptops, technology). For 2021/2022 ESSER II Cares Act \$106,949.00 (planning stages, waiting for assessment data) and American Rescue Plan Act \$198,000.00 (estimated - waiting for more information). It is the district's intention that the priority is to start with the students and those funds will be used to help with any learning gaps that may have happened due to remote learning. It will involve mental health, social and emotional learning.

Ms. Sexton Read concluded by saying that Regional School District 7 provides a rigorous and comprehensive education program for all learners. They employ exceptional teachers, support staff and strong administrators. The absentee rate is extremely low at 3% during the hybrid model and 100% high school graduation rate.

The entire power point presentation can be found on the Region 7 website under Board of Education. As there were no questions from the Board of Finance or the public, Chairman Wexler thanked Region 7 for their presentation.

**Presentation: 2021-2022 New Hartford Board of Education Budget: Tim Goff, Chair and Brian Murphy, Superintendent**

Chairman Wexler welcomed Tim Goff & Brian Murphy and asked them to present their 2021/2022 New Hartford Board of Education budget.

BOE Chairman Goff said the New Hartford Board of Education budget was initially approved on February 16, 2021 and revised on March 31, 2021. Though changes were made between those two dates the requested increase of 3.89% did not change. Mr. Goff read the BOE's Mission Statement and Theory of Action. Some of the high points in Assumptions are the district's enrollment continues to increase, Special Education Costs will continue to increase significantly, overall certified and non-certified staffing levels will be adjusted based on enrollment/programming/facility considerations. Individual Health insurance costs will increase due to contracted costs with Anthem. The RISE program will continue to be funded. The special education tuition account reflects costs for New Hartford students currently receiving services outside the school. There are two out-placed students that are the main driver in this account increase. Oak Hill School will continue to be supported at Antolini School. This is the final year of the DATTCO bus contract. Bids have been received and will be reviewed by the Transportation Committee.

Some of the priorities are: ensure that safety and health standards are maintained and enhanced to improve student achievement. The New Hartford Public Schools have been fully open since the beginning of this year except for a couple of exceptions. Panic buttons were installed in all the classrooms and major common areas. The Illustrative Math program will continue to be implemented in grades K-6. Funding will continue for the Advanced Manufacturing Program for 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> graders. This program is done in partnership with Goodwin University. Electronic devices will continue to be replaced in the district. They will continue to partner with Project Playground.

Mr. Goff said last year the Capital plan was cut in half. This was done because of the Covid pandemic and to show an effort of good faith with the taxpayers of New Hartford.

The increase to the budget is \$331,964 or 3.89%. This includes increases of \$272,065 in Special Education Costs which includes SPED pupil transportation. Contractual salary increases of \$90,068. The remaining increase of \$96,835 is due to an increase in Health Insurance costs of \$55,146 and the Regular Education Bus lease of \$17,934. Decreases amount to \$127,004 with the major decreases being: Interventionist \$24,198, Tutor \$24,198 and Heating Oil \$16,225. Previously the board was going to eliminate a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teaching section. But after numerous letters were received by the board in opposition to this, the board listened to the public and added that section back in. In order to find the money to put that teaching section back an interventionist will be eliminated. The board also realized savings in the health insurance line and a slight decrease in the maintenance line.

The total school budget is \$8,869,070. An increase of \$331,964 or 3.89%. Similar to the Region 7 budget, half of the local school budget is in salaries & benefits. The personnel changes for next year are a decrease of a Full-Time Tutor and a Full-Time Interventionist. The contractual increases are Administrators 2.0%, Teachers 2.9%, Tutors 2.0%, Custodians 2.0%, and Secretaries 2.0%. Currently negotiations have been started for the non-certified staff.

Total class enrollment projected for next year is at 436 up from 421. The per pupil expenditure is \$19,268 putting New Hartford as the lowest compared to Barkhamsted, Region 7, Colebrook, Winchester, Hartland and Norfolk.

At this point Supt. Murphy continued with the presentation. He highlighted some of the line item changes. He said they have been able to hire new staff members at a lower rate. Many of the items are flat-lined or reduced. CREC tuition has gone down 6.3%. Special education is up 6.4%. A social worker was hired at a higher rate than anticipated. Special education tutors are down because of one position being eliminated. Outplacement tuition went up because of 2 unanticipated students being outplaced. There has been a decrease in electricity costs with the lights being changed to LEDs. The school district as part of a consortium for the purchase of heating oil and they were able to save \$16,225.00.

BOE Chairman Goff said the school's Capital budget includes the purchase of 80 Chromebooks & 4 Promethean Boards at \$40,000. Other Capital items include: replacement of floor tile in one of the rooms at Antolini School and security upgrades (doors), at Bakerville School - sidewalk repair, along with foyer/gym/classroom painting, and at New Hartford Elementary boiler replacement, painting/classroom and playground equipment at both Bakerville & New Hartford Elementary for a total Capital request of \$163,000.00

Finally, Mr. Goff said that the district successfully navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. They implemented 1:1 student device for the entire district. Expanded the Advanced Manufacturing Program to 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Thousands of free meals are being given to the students during the Pandemic because of a federal reimbursement program. Free breakfast is available at Antolini School along with free lunch at all 3 schools.

Chairman Wexler said Sue Lundin in an email brought up the point of the \$100,000 in the non-lapsing fund. Mr. Goff said last year with savings realized from busing reductions and COVID restrictions, \$100,000 was placed in a non-lapsing account. It can be applied year after year to the BOE budget. Because of the 2 outplaced students coming into the school district this current year a deficit of \$190,000 was realized. The district has been able to mitigate \$90,000 of that. It is hopeful that they can mitigate most of the remaining \$100,000. If they can't it would be up to the BOF to apply it to the deficit from last year. If they can then it would be up to the BOF as to what they would do with the \$100,000 in that account. Superintendent Murphy is looking to mitigate significantly lower the \$100,000. They are realizing some savings with DATTCO with one less bus and fuel costs. Also, some extra money from the state for COVID costs.

Aulay Carlson wrote about the Pre-K program. Supt. Murphy said he thanks the Board of Finance for their support in this Pre-K program. Usually there are 17-18 students in that class. These students are part of the New Hartford Public Schools and included in the October 1<sup>st</sup> census sent to the state. Mr. Tuxbury said the lack of capital in the Board of Education budget last year was their choice. The maintenance is being deferred and you will see it in next year's budget. Supt. Murphy said we had to make some tough choices. We will have to follow through in the capital with the maintenance and keep our buildings maintained.

First Selectman Jerram said the majority of the 18 letters received were about the class size and the elimination of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teaching section. He went on to say thanks to the members of the Board of Finance, Board of Education, Supt. Murphy and Board of Selectmen who all work to put together a good budget to meet the needs of the town.

Chairman Wexler said she wanted to reiterate for the members of the public on this call who haven't attended all the budget meetings, that the Board of Finance, when it comes to the Education budget, doesn't have any line-item authority to add or subtract anything to that budget. The Board of Finance either gives a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down to the BOE proposed budget to either cut or add to their budget. The school board has the discretion to spend within their general operating & CAPEX budget.

Jessica Chicoski, 207 Stub Hollow Road – said she one of those who had written about not eliminating the 4th grade teacher. She feels they did the right thing. Many parents including herself wants to keep the interventionist. No one wants to see an increase in the budget but she feels the education of the children is worth it. Her worry is that you will request further cuts and anymore cuts will be detrimental to our children and their education. Her specific worry is money allocated to the playgrounds will be cut. The Playground Committee has raised \$130,000. With a couple more fundraisers they are sure they will have enough money to purchase and install the playgrounds at Bakerville, New Hartford Elementary and the Pre-K at New Hartford Elementary. The \$20,000 in the BOE Capital is for the cost of the engineered wood fiber surfacing and fencing. Without the funding the playgrounds cannot be utilized without those safety items in place.

Jane Allyn, 101 South Road, asked about out-placement tuition costs. She remembered seeing that some portions of that cost are reimbursed. She isn't seeing it in the BOE budget. If the reimbursement isn't included does that increase the bottom line for the BOE budget? Chairman Wexler said the ECS is a wash. Mr. Jerram said those reimbursements aren't in the BOE budget but in the back page of the Municipal budget under Excess Cost for Special Education. They are counted for but in a different place. Mr. Witte explained how the excess costs are calculated. We know we have this coming and we budget for it. We know we have some revenue to cover that expenditure. Ms. Allyn asked is that decision made by the Board of Finance or by the town as to how it is reflected. Mr. Murphy said the Excess Cost reimbursement goes directly to the town. It isn't part of the BOE budgeting. Mr. Jerram said that this year there is \$50,000 in the municipal budget.

Marissa Klepps, 94 Shafer Road, said she has been following the BOE meetings. As a taxpayer and a parent, she expresses her support of the BOE budget.

**Presentation: 2021-2022 New Hartford Municipal Budget: Dan Jerram, First Selectman**

First Selectman Jerram started his presentation by saying that pay raises for town hall employees, police & public works were deferred until this year and next. As proposed, there is a \$419,944.45 in spending or a 1.98% increase in taxes. The items that caused the increase are: General Gov. Operations up \$164,728.45, General Gov. Capital up \$56,000, Local BOE Operations up \$329,964, Local BOE Capital up \$82,500, Region 7 Operations down \$128,118, Debt Service down \$10,351 and Revenue Estimates down \$213,127. The town took part of the Covid savings last year from Region 7.

The increase this year is a result of town employees not receiving raises last year, restoration of a part time position in the tax collector's office and modification in the funding & staffing of the assessor's

office. A certified assessor is being brought in who will provide training to the new employee in that office. General Government insurance is up \$21,620, Paving is up \$20,000, Legal is up \$17,000. This is due to the owner transfer of the Sewer & Water assets to Aquarion. Labor, insurance, paving and legal make up the majority of the increase in the budget. Of the 148 lines in this budget 101 were either held steady or reduced.

The Grand List is up \$7,687,275 from new construction. At 30.63 mills, that equates to \$235,461.20 in new tax dollars.

The Fund Balance is up to \$4,412,138. Last year there was \$389,873 in operating surplus which includes the \$100,000 from the local BOE. The remaining came out of the General Government budget.

The bond for New Hartford Elementary and some Open Space will be paid off in 2027 and the approved sale of assets will retire the WWTP bond.

The cause of the size of the total tax increase can be attributed to Special Ed needs in the local BOE budget. Collections remain strong even during the pandemic and the Collection Rates remains at 96.5%. A sizeable decrease in revenue last year funded operations with \$850,000 from savings. The Regional 7 reduction is helping but some of the savings have already been realized.

First Selectman Jerram went through the New Hartford General Government draft copy dated March 8, 2021. The increase in the General Government Budget is \$164,728.45. With Debt Service, Capital Expenditures, Education and the BOE Pass through Grants/REAP the total budget including Education is \$460,781.45.

Health insurance is forecasted to go up to \$446,000. The total Education increase is 1.1%. The detail for the Education budgets is in each individual budget. There have been recent state mandates for body & car cameras for the troopers. There hasn't been a lot of guidance from the state on this yet. The town has been working with State Trooper Figueral and they will be in compliance to have all the equipment that is needed.

RRDD#1 has an increase of \$3,819. All of our trash goes from RRDD#1 to MIRA (Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority) in Hartford. MIRA is scheduled for decommissioning and at this time the state doesn't have an answer as to what will be done when it closes. While there is a slight increase here, First Selectman Jerram believes that residents will see a rise in sticker prices this coming year.

Bands have been booked and the concert series will continue this summer at Brodie Park. There is a slight increase in fees for the beach because the state raised the minimum wage. New canoe & kayak racks have been built.

Under Debt Service there hasn't been new bonds in a couple of years. The older bonds that were refinanced - 2016 Gen OBL Bond retires in 2026, the 2017 Gen OBL Bond which was renovations & ADL at Antolini School & the Carpenter Road Bridge retires in 2037. The WWTP bond which upon completion of the sale will be paid off.

The Senior Bus is being used constantly. It's a twelve-passenger bus but because of Covid restrictions you can only allow one or two people at a time on the bus.

The Capital Budget request is \$441,000 for the General Government. With the BOE Capital of \$154,000 the total Capital budget is \$595,000. Included in the town's capital request is: Charging Station, DPW Pick-up Truck, the 2<sup>nd</sup> payment for the Large Plow Truck, Technology at the Town Hall, Recreation Capital, Rails to Trails, Town Hall Equip. Replacement (core infrastructure), DPW Skid Steer (currently renting one & used daily), DPW Mini Excavator, Downtown Improvements (maintaining sidewalks, infrastructure, lighting) and Bridge Improvements (includes repair of the Cedar Lane Bridge).

There has been a decrease in short-term interest because interest rates from the banks have fallen. The Pass-through grants do not impact the bottom line.

When it's all put together you get into the calculation of revenues and expenses and the mill rate required to tax our residents. After the adjustments made at the last meeting (a decrease from Region 7 and increasing the surplus allocation to \$789,873) it brought the tax increase down from 4% to just under 2%.

Mr. Jerram said for the record he has read all the letters received and public comment. He said it was great that the BOE addressed the needs of the majority of the letters received. The last couple of letters dealt with town government issue. One addressed salary increases. He said that last year Town Hall employees did not receive any raises. The other one had a different perspective. Last year was a huge challenge but we made it work. The same level of concern from all the volunteers on the Board of Finance was exhibited whether they were in person or not and did the best that they could. They rose to the challenge. To say they were not trying to do their best is not representative of what happens around here.

**Motion:** by Witte to close the public hearing. Seconded by Guilfoyle.

*Unanimous*

Chairman Wexler thanked everyone for participating. The Board of Finance, as a whole, felt very uncomfortable with the lack of a referendum last year. It wasn't a responsibility that they wanted. It was the most uncertain budget season. She hopes our economy continues to improve and our grand list continues to increase. She said she appreciates all the public input. All letters received can't be read out loud but that tonight they addressed questions that hadn't been answered by the Board of Ed or the Board of Finance. She encourages the public to send in their input more than 24 hours before the meeting so it becomes part of the minutes.

Chairman Wexler asked for any objections to adjourning at 9:33 pm. There were none.

*Respectfully submitted, Penny Miller, Recording Secretary*

#### Handouts

Region 7 budget – available on the Region 7 website

New Hartford Board of Education – available at [www.newhrtfd.org](http://www.newhrtfd.org) & at the Supt. Of Schools Office

New Hartford Town Government – available at [newhartfordct.gov](http://newhartfordct.gov) & the First Selectman's Office

The following are available for viewing at the Town Clerk's Office

Stephanie Genao-Reyes, dated March 8, 2021

Jane Allyn – dated March 8, 2021

Marissa Klepps – dated March 8, 2021

Donna LaPlante – dated March 9, 2021

Megan Rogers – dated March 11, 2021

Heather Morin – dated March 11, 2021

Erin Kenney – dated March 11, 2021

Erika Pratt – dated March 13, 2021

Hillary Schibi – dated March 13, 2021

Melissa Ferrucci – dated March 11, 2021

Brooke Harris – dated March 12, 2021

John Tavano – dated March 12, 2021

Lauren Lyn – dated March 12, 2021

Leah Drouin – dated March 12, 2021

Michelle LeClair – dated March 12, 2021

Julie Albert – dated March 29, 2021

Sue Lundin – dated April 5, 2021

Aulay Carlson – emailed 4/5/2021 (dated March 26, 2021)