

**Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
March 9, 2021
VIRTUAL MEETING via ZOOM**

Present (virtually): Chairman Regina Wexler; Members Kerry Guilfoyle, Paul LeClair, Dan Charest, Ben Witte; Alternates Ryan Bingham, Bart Baxter, Lourena Helt; Recording Secretary Penny Miller (in at 7:40 PM)

Others Present (virtually): First Selectman Dan Jerram, Superintendent of Schools Brian Murphy, Board of Education Chairman Tim Goff; Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward. Several members of the public also joined the meeting virtually.

Chairman Wexler called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

Seating of Alternates:

Alternate Ryan Bingham was seated for absent member Stephen Tuxbury.

Adoption of Agenda:

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of Minutes: February 9, 2021:

The Minutes of the regular meeting dated February 9, 2021 were deemed approved by Chairman Wexler as there were no changes to the minutes as presented.

Opportunity for Public Comment:

Chairman Wexler opened the meeting to public comment.

Steve Unger of 706 West Hill addressed the Finance Board regarding the West Hill Pond Association line item in the budget. He requested that the line item be restored to the \$15,000 funding that it has been in the past. He saw a copy of the proposed budget on the Town Website and saw that the line item was proposed at \$13,500. Mr. Unger explained how the Pond Association uses the town funding to pay for weed removal from the Lake, which is essential to good water quality. He thanked the Board of Finance for their continued support of this initiative.

First Selectman Jerram commented that the Board of Selectmen met last evening (Monday, the 8th) and had restored that line item to \$15,000. The most recent update of the proposed budget had not yet been listed on the website.

Mary Hourdequin of 47 Harriet Highway addressed the Board and informed them that she had recently had a conversation with an acquaintance who resides near a different lake requesting information on the Weed Monitor Program that has been implemented at West Hill Pond. Mary thanked the Town for their partnership in this successful program and looks forward to its continuance.

Martin Seifert of 704 West Hill Road updated the Board briefly on progress that has been made with respect to the Emergency Action Plan for the West Hill Dam. He mentioned that there are annual expenses associated with the implementation of the plan and is eager to see the town support of the West Hill Pond Association continue.

Board of Education Chairman Tim Goff and Superintendent Brian Murphy:

Board of Education Chairman Tim Goff presented the Capital Plan to the Finance Board. He explained the various items to the Board. In the Technology line item, the BOE is requesting

\$40,000 to replace Chrome Books. Every student is given a Chrome Book and they have about a five-year life span. The Capital plan shows \$40,000 every year for the entirety of the five-year plan. This allows for an ongoing replacement program. There is also a request for funding for sidewalk removal and replacement at Bakerville School. This expense was cut from the budget last year and has been put back in for this year. Funding towards the Playground Equipment is also included. Security upgrades (replacement of doors for increased protection in the schools) has been recommended by both the Police and the Fire Marshal; and this line has a \$9,000 request for the next five years. This will allow a gradual replacement of all of the doors that need to be removed. Funding for tile replacement in a classroom that suffered water damage due to seepage from runoff from the adjacent hillside in the rear of the school has been included in the proposal; as well as funds for a failed boiler at New Hartford Elementary School. Mr. Goff explained the need for all of these items and answered questions posed to him.

Following the presentation of the Capital proposal, Chairman Wexler stated that it has been five years since the topic of School Consolidation has been reviewed. She suggested that there be a committee formed to look into this matter. BOE Chairman Goff said that the topic of closing a school hasn't been looked into. Next year they are looking at 436 students which is an increase for them. In the 5 years since the referendum vote there has been a reduction of 7 students. Even if a school was closed these improvements would still need to be done regardless of the usage of the building. Chairman Wexler said she isn't suggesting that any one school be closed but that the finances be reviewed and on a 6-year cycle this is a prudent way to marshal our town's assets and resources. She commented that 75% of our tax dollars are spent on education and there are currently three schools operating on very low-capacity. The number of children in the schools is not the only factors that goes into the ultimate decision by the townspeople. We need to have all the facts when we are allocating town revenue towards the education system. Alternate Member Helt interjected that one must keep in mind that the 75% of taxes is not only funding the local schools, but is also funding Regional 7 which is a "huge nut."

Supt. Murphy when asked about open, closed and balances on Capital Projects, he responded the Capital plans for this year have been completed except the monies for the Playgrounds at New Hartford Elementary and Bakerville Schools.

Chairman Wexler informed Superintendent Murphy and Chairman Goff that Superintendent Judy Palmer had contacted her regarding the public hearing on April 6 asking that the Regional 7 budget be presented first. The presenters have a conflict that evening as they have to also do a presentation for Barkhamsted. Chairman Wexler has approved their request; therefore, the local Board of Education will be second on the agenda that evening.

The local Board of Ed will present first at the workshop scheduled for Saturday, March 13.

Regional #7 Budget: discussion and possible action:

Chairman Wexler said that our assessment will be down 1.55% next year if their proposed budget is passed. This is a savings to us of \$162,281. First Selectman Jerram said that last year we did take savings and the number to us will be \$87,281. We did fund many items with our savings last year. Ms. Guilfoyle asked are there any major factors that we need to be aware of before the meeting? Chairman Wexler responded that the enrollment is down 62 children and an increase of 1.85% in their budget.

First Selectmen Reports:

Proposed Five Year Capital Plan

First Selectman Jerram said that the annual average over the past 5 years for the town capital has been \$366,000. In this year's capital is the Large Plow payment for \$95,000, Technology for \$10,000, Town Hall Equipment for \$25,000, Town Hall Equipment for \$10,000 is from 2020 Capital and wasn't funded last year. This is for electric charging stations and replacement of older fuel tanks that are underground. Recreation Dept. @ \$35,000 for general park improvements; Rails to Trails \$30,000 for Phase 2 of Trail Development; Garage Equipment moved up from 2022 @ \$52,000 to replace an inoperable skid steer. Currently we are leasing one. This item is used daily. Garage Equipment @ \$75,000 to replace an older mini-excavator; Garage Equipment \$30,000 to replace an older 2005 DARE F-250 pick-up truck; Downtown Improvements @ \$30,000 for care and maintenance of sidewalks & lighting; and Bridge Work @ \$50,000 – additional funding for Cedar Lane & Steele Roads - this is ongoing to conform to state assessments. The total for all this is \$441,000.

Going forward there are similar projects in the coming years. Some of these projects are replacement of a 2012 Taurus Interceptor Police Car, upgrade of the furnace at the town hall, some of the smaller trucks, the 4-bay storage garage at Antolini for yard equipment, \$50,000 for revaluation, Pedestrian Bridge (part of our master plan), replacement of the Town Hall Roof and the Route 44 water line – fire protection for Route 44 – payment 1 of 2 @ \$75,000.

All information on the current and future Capital Projects is available from the Town Clerk.

Discussion and possible Action on Capital Transfers

There are no capital transfers.

AET information update

When asked about the timeline by Chairman Wexler, Mr. Jerram said that town council has been notified. There will be a rise in legal fees for the closing and title work. There isn't any timeline yet. Getting through PURA will take about 6 months to a year. They will proceed as quickly as they can.

Bookkeeper's Report

We are doing quite well on tax collections. The tax collector just sent in \$1.9 million. We are about at the same point as we were last year. Some older taxes came in for around \$10,000. We may need to use some of the fund balance this year. The local government trimmed their budget heavily last year and raises were deferred.

On the expense side the budget is in pretty good shape. Only 4 lines are over by about \$2,500 which statically isn't very much. We are doing pretty well with the overtime for the road crews and we have some \$20,000 left.

Treasurer's report – No report was given.

Discussion and possible action re: FY 2020-2021 Budget Timeline

Chairman Wexler said that the turnout was great by the voters for the water & sewer sale. There was lots of talk at the polls to have the referendums on Saturday. Mr. Jerram said if you can change the state statue so that the Region 7 could vote on a Saturday or if you wanted to run two votes, he would be willing to consider it. But as the state statue stands now it isn't possible.

Communications and Other Items presented to Board

First Selectman Jerram said a request has been received from Farmington Valley Health District for additional funding. This additional funding would help them to cover unanticipated expenses related to COVID. The town received \$47,508 for COVID relief from the state for unanticipated expenses. The Board of Selectmen at their regular meeting on February 23, 2021 voted unanimously to recommend a supplemental appropriation of up to \$10,000 to be added to the 'Health, Sanitation and Welfare' department – specifically within the Farmington Valley Health District appropriation line.

Farmington Health District have asked all the towns they cover for additional funding.

MOTION: by Charest that we supplement our appropriation up to \$10,000 to the 'Health, Sanitation & Welfare' department of the Farmington Valley Health District line from the General Fund for COVID related expenses. Seconded by Bingham.

Unanimous

Motion passed.

Discussion and possible action re: contingency Fund Expenditures and CGS 7-348

Chairman Wexler said that Mr. Tuxbury has raised a concern that CGS Section 7-348 does not have a monetary limit on it and it doesn't allow for discretionary expenditures up to a certain limit. First Selectman Jerram explained that the Contingency Line item is a line item within the budget that can be used for miscellaneous/unanticipated expenses. Mr. Jerram thought that perhaps Mr. Tuxbury was concerned that we were tapping into a fund like the General Fund which we aren't. If you look at *Commissions and Other Agencies* department it is a line. It isn't an appropriation outside of the budget but it is a line like the other lines in the budget. It doesn't require a vote of the Board of Finance to spend it. Chairman Wexler asked Mr. Witte and Mr. Charest, as experienced members of the Board for their input on the matter. Mr. Witte agreed that there may be some confusion said that it is a contingency line item which is to cover unforeseen things. We have been appraised of expenditures that will be expended from that fund. It isn't out of the ordinary it is only \$1,000. Mr. Jerram said that CGS 7-348 talks about overspending of departments not lines. This line is oddly named and maybe that line should be renamed next year.

Adjournment

Chairman Wexler deemed the meeting closed at 8:43 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Penny Miller, Recording Secretary

Handouts (available from the Town Clerk upon request)

Minutes – Board of Finance February 9, 2021

Regional School District – Revenues Page 11 – Assessments to Towns

Capital Project List – Town of New Hartford (5 pages)

FY 2020-21 February 2021 Revenue, Expenditure and 5 Year Comparison Report

Communications:

Letter from Gina Maroney dated February 12, 2021

Request for Funding – Winchester Youth Services Bureau

Email from Caitlin Gagnon dated March 8, 2021

Board of Education proposed budget is available upon request from the Board of Education

Board of Education proposed capital expenditures is available upon request from the Board of Education

Regional School District Number 7 Proposed Budget is available upon request from Region 7

Town of New Hartford Draft Budget dated March 1, 2021

Letter of request for funding from the Farmington Valley Health District