

**Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing #1 Thursday,
March 10, 2022
7:30 pm
Via Webex**

The Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing #1 was held via Webex on Thursday, March, 10, 2022 at 7:30 pm in Fairfield, Connecticut.

A recording of this meeting can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmcpBGqFkAA>.

FIINAL MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lori Charlton-Chair, John Mitola-Vice Chair, Craig Curley, Christopher DeWitt, Mary LeClerc, Kevin Starke, Jack Testani, James Walsh

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sheila Marmion-Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT: First Selectwoman Brenda L. Kupchick, DPW Interim Director John Marsilio, Erika Eng, Executive Director, Discovery Museum, Eileen Bakos, Director of Development, Discovery Museum, Joyce Leiz, Interim COO & Director of Development, Audubon Society, Ruthann Greco, Administrator, Sullivan-McKinney Elder Housing, Stephanie Coakley, Executive Director, Pequot Library, Christine Catallo, Chief Librarian, Pequot Library, John Gleckler, Finance/HR Manager, Pequot Library, Betsy Browne, Town Clerk, Alex Vishno, Chair, FairTV Commission, Gerry Speno, Manager, FairTV, Matt Waggner, Registrar of Voters, Steve Elworthy, Registrar of Voters, Jim Wendt, Planning Director, Tim Bishop, Conservation Director, Mark Barnhart, Community & Economic Development Director, Jared Schmitt, CFO, Gerald Foley, Purchasing Director, Ross Murray, Tax Assessor, David Kluczowski, Tax Collector, Frank Magneri, Budget Director, FairTV, members of the public

1. Call to Order

Chair Lori Charlton called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Charlton led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Summary Budget Presentation by First Selectwoman

First Selectwoman Kupchick shared her presentation with the Board and on the screen. She said it was updated with the Board of Selectman changes. The full presentation can be found in the backup documents as well as the meeting recording link at the top of this document.

Craig Curley referred to page six of the First Selectwoman's presentation regarding the Fund Balance and maintaining it at 11.34% from the surplus. Mr. Curley asked what the dollar amount was that represented the 11.34%. First Selectwoman Kupchick said it was \$2.3 million. Mr. Curley then referred to the \$2.5 million reduction in the Board of Education budget and wondered if the list of suggested BOE cuts could be shared, but that list was actually from the BOE. Mr. Curley asked First Selectwoman Kupchick if she had a cut list of her own or if the reduction was to get the overall budget to a certain amount.

First Selectwoman Kupchick said the last two years of increases in the BOE budget have been the largest she has seen in 20 years, and she based her reduction on the average BOE budget funding of 2.8%. Mr. Curley then asked about the investment income that dropped by almost \$1 million. First Selectwoman Kupchick said when you are a Municipality, you have to be careful of the investments and the funds don't typically yield what other people are getting from more fluctuating or riskier funds.

There was also a discussion on staff changes and if they were in line with where First Selectwoman Kupchick had wanted to be; some departments have added positions. Jack Testani asked about First Selectwoman Kupchick's reduction to offset insurance increases referring to a reduction in the DPW capital outlay. Mr. Testani asked how much the reduction was. First Selectwoman Kupchick said she is recommending a \$200,000 reduction, but not relating to a specific item. Interim DPW Director John Marsilio said he will determine where the reduction will be from. He said the insurance increases are \$800,000 split evenly between the Town and BOE. CFO Jared Schmitt said an increase in tax collection would account for \$570,000 which would also help offset the insurance increase. A more detailed discussion followed.

James Walsh commented on the ARPA funds for paving and the costs of asphalt going up. Mr. Walsh talked about the surplus and putting some of it toward paving to avoid bonding and keeping it in the operational budget. Mr. Walsh then spoke about the BOE budget.

4. Discussion on the Following Budgets:

Miscellaneous: Not-for-Profit Organizations:

2170 The Discovery Museum – page 88

Eileen Bakos, Director of Development, talked about the afterschool programs that address the learning loss due to COVID and meet the New Generation of Science Standards (NGSS). She said Fairfield is struggling to meet these standards. She said there is a program for fifth graders called Challenger and it is an interactive exhibit. Ms. Bakos said the Museum had to turn Fairfield students away last year. Erika Eng, Executive Director, also spoke about the programs that benefit children. She said the Museum is asking for \$34,500. Chris DeWitt asked if that money would be for all children's programs or just for Fairfield. Ms. Eng said it would be just for Fairfield. Mr. Walsh asked about the Museum's relationship with Sacred Heart University (SHU). Ms. Eng explained that the museum needs a lot of work and SHU helped it upgrade and supply technology. She said SHU also does landscape and janitorial work so the money the museum raises can go directly to programs and salaries for teachers. Funding and the different ways it is being spent was discussed.

2210 Audubon Society – page 90

Joyce Leiz, Interim COO & Director of Development, talked about programs during the pandemic that served Fairfield schools such as reading, writing and math skills, as well as hands on Science. She said these programs were funded by a donation that the Society cannot guarantee will be supported this year. She said the \$5,000 increase in the budget is to keep these programs going.

2370 Sullivan-McKinney Elder Housing – page 99

Ruthann Greco, Administrator and Property Manager, said SMEH added \$16,500 to cover repairs on a brick structure that is part of the fire pump room that is leaking. She said it is located in the courtyard. She said there are tenants in the building so she needs to keep everyone safe. She said the structure is old, and the fire pump room is very important. Mr. Walsh commented that he supports this increase.

2130 Pequot Library – page 84

Stephanie Coakley, Executive Director, thanked the Town for helping Pequot Library meet its capital needs last year for the roof repair. She said the Town support is 24.4% of the Library's budget and everyone at Pequot is grateful. Craig Curley said last year the Library asked for \$350,000 which is \$50,000 more than this budget. Ms. Coakley explained that the \$50,000 was specifically for the roof repair and it is finished now. She said the historic red roof is now watertight and looks amazing. Mr. Walsh commented that the Town has a third library with Pequot Library and thanked Ms. Coakley and her team for all they do for the Town.

Public comment, 2 minutes per comment

There was no public comment.

Administrative & General: 1010

First Selectwoman's Office - page 30

Craig Curley asked why there were three salaries listed in Contingency. Frank Magneri, Budget Director, said they are for current salaries. He said last year's increases were budgeted in contingency and distributed during the year. Chair Lori Charlton said last year's budget did not include increases and the increases were put in Contingency. She said what shows as increases are current salaries in effect as they were allocated out of Contingency. First Selectwoman Kupchick said that Contingency is based on assumption of where increases might fall. Mr. Walsh asked if increases were based on performance. First Selectwoman Kupchick responded that non-union increases are based on performance and are in line with what Unions are paying. She said union increases are based on their contract. Mr. Curley said he noticed Education and Membership and Training and Travel went up and wanted to know why. First Selectwoman Kupchick explained it was for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) membership. She said she also wants to have training for employees. First Selectwoman Kupchick said the account hasn't increased since 2020. She said the Travel account is for meetings and trainings held in other towns.

1030 Town Clerk – page 32

Betsy Browne, Town Clerk presented her department budget. She said increased revenue lines are due to the Conveyance Tax. She said there are potential sales coming up that will bring gains and conveyance tax. Mr. DeWitt said the budget book did not reflect the increase voted on by the Board of Selectmen of \$50,000 in Recording Fees revenue. He said the line should now read \$350,000. Ms. Browne talked about expenses and specifically, advertising. She said there is a lot of verbiage on the RTM agendas and they need to be published publicly. Ms. Browne said she is trying to get that changed to be able to use media and not print publishing.

1040 FairTV – page 35

Gerry Speno said the budget went up from \$79,350 last year to \$101,948 this year because of the expansion of core work service regarding virtual meetings that will be “Zoom Rooms”. He said FairTV has to provide access to Town government through live and recorded meetings of the seven larger town bodies. He said the increase will cover the additional labor. Mr. Speno said he wasn’t sure if the proposed increase would cover paying an extra person and he said he might need more money in the coming year.

1070 Registrar of Voters – page 40

Registrar Matt Waggner started the budget presentation. He said there is a significant dollar change in the budget. He said there might be a redistricting this year and polling places may need to be changed. He said the increased costs for redistricting is approximately \$60,000. Mr. Waggner said primaries are in August and with redistricting, approximately \$30,000 will be needed. Registrar Steve Elworthy was also present to answer questions regarding this budget. Mr. Waggner said the State is looking to buy new voting machines and a new voting system. Mr. Elworthy said he was concerned about that and whether or not it will be settled by November 2022. Mr. Walsh said he wanted to be sure that if the money was approved, but not spent, it would be given back to the Town and not put it into another account to pay for something else. Mr. Waggner and Mr. Elworthy agreed.

1110 Town Plan and Zoning – page 45

Jim Wendt, Planning Director presented his budget. Mr. Walsh excused himself as he could not participate in these conversations. Mr. Wendt said highlights on budget changes include: 17.3% increase from 2020 for three floater positions; a new communications line for iPads to connect to the new billing system; and \$1000 per staff member for trainings.

1230 Conservation – page 54

Tim Bishop, Conservation Director, presented his budget. He said there is a 27% decrease in anticipation of the fee structure changes. He said revenue is permit driven and dollar amount is less than in past years. He said there were 300 inland wetland applications from last year, both staff level and commission level translated to the old fees and then used those same applications with proposed fees and that is how he came up with the percentage of the decrease. Mr. Bishop said the current fee structure is cumbersome, and he found the Town was overcharging residents. He said he performed a comparison study with surrounding towns and Fairfield will have the same level fees. He said the Conservation Commission will review and vote on the fee structure in the next few meetings. Mr. Bishop said expenses went up for fuel as those prices are increasing and for training his staff. He said he is also requesting a PT administrator in the office. Mr. Walsh rejoined the meeting.

1350 Community and Economic Development – page 73

Mark Barnhart, Community and Economic Development Director, presented his budget. Mr. Barnhart said this budget reflects a decrease of 8% year over the year due to the Marketing Coordinator position. He said he was able to upgrade a PT staff position to a FT Marketing Coordinator allocating 100% of that salary into the Town budget. He said in prior years, a portion of that salary was funded from the Downtown Improvement Fund and the Downtown Employee Parking Fund as the position included administering those downtown programs. Mr. Barnhart said those programs still exist, but with a PT employee. Mr. Walsh asked about large properties in town that have been sold and if Mr. Barnhart could speak about them publicly.

Mr. Barnhart said there is a pending sale of the Fairfield Metro Station to a new development team which would like to close on the property in the next 30-60 days and are waiting for approval from the State. He said there is nothing pending at this time for the Exide property, but he and First Selectwoman Kupchick meet with the owners periodically. Mr. Barnhart discussed other potential sales, proposed housing and commercial properties filling up.

Public comment, 2 minutes per comment

There was no public comment.

Finance:

3010 Finance – page 115

Mr. Schmitt presented his budget. He said there is increased revenue related to the State pilot program due to hospitals and private universities in Town. He said there is a new formula for funds distribution and based on that, Fairfield is entitled to more funding. He said it has gone up over \$1 million. Mr. Schmitt said the Dividend and Interest income is declining in revenue due to the limited sources the Town is allowed to invest in. He said there are bonds in higher rates that will mature, and they will go down to lower rates. Mr. Schmitt said he has spoken with the Town advisors. He said there is a RFP for Investment Advisory Services that is being worked on now. Mr. Curley asked about the Dividend and Interest income and why there is a drop year after year. Mr. Schmitt said the amounts are down significantly this year and the budgeted numbers are not far off. He said there are maturities at a higher rate, but most of them won't get the high rates and will ultimately result in a loss. Chair Lori Charlton thought there would be many questions in regard to this topic and since the meeting had already gone late, she asked if the Board members could email Mr. Schmitt any questions they have and discuss this on another budget evening.

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to postpone the budget review of accounts 2020, Fund Balance, and 10030, Debt Service, to the budget hearing on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 at 7:30pm. John Mitola seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Mr. DeWitt said he will update the budget schedule and send to the Board members. Mr. Walsh had questions regarding the Veteran Tax exemption and why it had decreased. Frank Magneri stated that the Veterans were passing away and that caused a decrease in the number of exemptions. Mr. Walsh had other questions for Mr. Magneri who said he'd send answers to Mr. Walsh. The discussion is on the recording linked at the top of this document.

3030 Purchasing - 118

Purchasing Director Gerald Foley presented his budget and said there were no major changes. He said he did ask for adjustments in staffing - an Assistant Director position for an internal candidate and to keep the other Junior Buyers. Mr. Walsh asked about the PT payroll line that was zero. Mr. Foley said last year, a FT position was approved and filled and now he has three Buyer positions. He said the Assistant Director creates a steppingstone for the department. Mr. Walsh also asked about a shredder that is requested under capital funds. Mr. Foley explained the shredder will be used by multiple departments. He said a shredding service is used for record retentions, but this is more for sensitive documents.

1050 Administrative Services-page 38

Mr. Foley said the mailroom service is outsourced and there were no major changes to this budget.

2020 Fund Balance

Postponed to Tuesday, March 22, 2022

3050 Assessor – page 122

Tax Assessor Ross Murray presented the highlights of his budget including that contractual software went up 7%. He said Fees and Professional Services went up due to court appeals that are remnants from the BAA (Board of Assessment Appeals) from last year. He said 108 cases went to Court, and it was reduced to 76. He said he is hoping to close them this year. Mr. Murray said there was also an increase in cost for the Motor Vehicle Guidebooks used to assess vehicles. Jack Testani asked about the fuel line and wanted to know what that was for. Mr. Murray said his inspectors use the cars to do field work and that line is for the gas. Mr. Walsh asked about if this will be the last year for the appeals in court. Mr. Murray said this year is the lowest for appeals in five years. He said the numbers should start coming down next year.

3130 Board of Finance – page 135

This budget is for the RFP for the new auditor. Chair Lori Charlton said she was concerned with the budget being flat as she thinks fees are going up. She said the Purchasing Policy is ongoing, and she is concerned with the fees relating to this. Mr. Schmitt said he is comfortable with this budget and if there are additional fees, he will have a transfer proposal to cover the cost.

10030 Debt Service

Postponed to Tuesday, March 22, 2022

3090 Tax Collector – page 125

Tax Collector Dave Kluczowski presented his budget. He said there is nothing major for revenue and the lines in the budget are three-year averages. He said there are no plans for a tax sale, so he used the averages. Mr. Kluczowski provided the collection rates for the last five years to compare to the collection rate in the budget for next year. He said FY17-98.73%, FY18-98.95%, FY19-98.85%, FY20-97.96% (deferment year), FY21-99.01%, FY22-98.89%. He said these are four-year averages not including the deferment number. There was a discussion about the deferments mandated by the State during COVID. In expenses, Mr. Kluczowski said he has proposed to add a position for sewer tax collection as well as regular tax collection. He said the sewer clerk in DPW used to handle that, but the position has been vacant and Mr. Kluczowski has been doing that work. He said this position would be funded 80% by the WPCA and 20% by the Tax Collector budget because the position would be collecting other taxes as well.

Public comment, 2 minutes per comment

There was no public comment.

5. Adjourn

Mr. Walsh made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:02 am. Christopher DeWitt seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary