

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TOWN OF FAIRFIELD

April 8, 2024

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2Tc3FYZev0>

A Meeting of the Town of Fairfield was held on Monday, April 8, 2024 at 7 PM at 501 Kings Highway East & via Webex.

The meeting was called to order at 7 PM by Moderator Marcy Spolyar.

PRESENT: 35	ABSENT: 5	VACANCY: 0
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PRESENT: Astarita, Britton, Longo, Cook-Littman, O’Shea, Rock, Shea, Hartigan, Steele, Straus, Waldron, McCabe, Spolyar, Garskof, O’Neill, Pistilli, Wolk, Barahona, Blanchard, Donne, Berez, Delgado, Kuhn, Nickel, Berchem, Carroll, Colburn, Ludwiczak, Georgiadis, Havey, McDermott, Wackerman, Contratto, Horton, Ratzki

ABSENT: Sparacino, Karson, Zezima, Graceffa, Ambrose

ITEM NO. 1 ON CALL: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

Moderator Spolyar led the Pledge of Allegiance.

First Selectman Bill Gerber gave a brief overview of the budget proposal highlighting investments in the WPCF, flood resiliency throughout town, policy revisions and new software programs through Human Resources, changes in legal representation with a mid-size regional firm, and changes to headcount including 4 firefighters as a result of the CBA settlement, 1 police captain being freed up from the ECC, 1 teen librarian, and 1 additional Conservation staff. Offsetting expenses is \$1.1 million from the debt service fund, and reducing the internal service fund by \$1 million. Surplus funds will be used for some capital projects in the future.

The budget as it stands is a 3.6% increase which is below the 3-year average. We are benefitting from higher interest rates and budgeting much tighter in that regard. There will be an increase to the haulers because the waste disposal facilities have increased their fees. Planning for the next revaluation is underway.

BOE: Superintendent of Schools Michael Testani gave a bifurcated presentation. The budget proposal was \$221,500,484 and now stands at \$220,221,484 following reductions by the BOS and BOF. Budget hurdles include contractual obligations, inflationary costs, and unfunded state mandates impacting special education costs.

In response to Sharon Pistilli, Mr. Testani explained that the district receives less excess cost revenue because of a change in the distribution calculation. An additional security guard has been added to each of the high schools, transferring contracted services at the Walter Fitzgerald campus to an inhouse individual.

Myke Hartigan, asked if this budget is enough to respond to the changes that other towns are responding to. Mr. Testani said there are liabilities such as funding for substitute teachers for long-term absences but they are not compromising any services for children. The teacher shortage is effecting all school districts.

Cindy Waldron asked about the restorative practice person at Walter Fitzgerald to which Mr. Testani explained her brings much experience from CES and Boys & Girls Village and is encouraging and supportive of the students’ needs.

Mr. Testani reviewed the enrollment projections in response to Colin Colburn. Lisa Havey asked why there are additional FTEs requested when enrollment is declining. Mr. Testani explained the majority are 1 to 1 paraprofessionals because of IEPs. Last year was a “revolving door” of school psychologists at an elementary school. BOE Chair Jen Jacobsen said the counts in the budget book are from October 1 and approximately 70 more students have enrolled at the elementary level.

In response to Mark McDermott, Courtney LeBorious said 14 retirements have been budgeted and 7 are confirmed to date. Mr. Testani confirmed that population is the metric used to determine the number of school psychologists for Ms. Horton. They are monitoring the number of visits to counselors and social workers.

Jeff Steele asked what is being done about mental health. Mr. Testani said there is a lot of training through the health curriculum. They are sending resources home to parents about social media content; a partnership with Fairfield Cares and are trying to curb use of smart phones in the lower grades. A socio-emotional platform for students with age-appropriate videos is also utilized. Mr. Steele said one of the most impactful tools is a speaker series of individuals who speak about their experience. Mr. Testani said they want to put a resource page on the website.

Michelle McCabe asked if there has been training in restrictive practice. Mr. Testani said there has been 3-day training for administration and deans; they are looking at cohorts for teachers and will continue next year.

Cindy Waldron asked what is being done for excellence and momentum. Mr. Testani said the district is recognized for athletics, music and arts achievements. Ms. Jacobsen said each district is required to have a district improvement plan with targets as well as each school having one.

Ken Astarita asked how students are doing in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetic. Mr. Testani said they are doing well but can do better. There are new internal assessments focusing on growth targets. Ms. Jacobsen explained the AENGL v PPE. More mandates have come from the state with no funding behind them. There are 3 additional pre-K classes because of the kindergarten cutoff birthdate change.

Jay Wolk asked when all schools will be done with the improved HVAC/IAQ. Mr. Testani said they are just getting underway and will be a multi-year project for the foreseeable future.

The district plans to pre-buy with surplus monies, there is savings of \$16 million additional expenditures in staying in-district rather than out of district special education. Chromebooks are purchased for students entering middle and high school and carry them through the entirety. There is monitoring where they need to replenish or replace them.

Health: Health Director Sands Cleary noted there are 2 part-time nurses at a small private school that are funded through the season payroll.

Human & Social Services: Director Julie DeMarco noted that there has been an increase in the services they provide this year notably the Fairfield Youth Mental Health Collaboration offering programs on depression, social media and a Fathers Forum. The HVAC is out for bid. The kitchen hood will be replaced, but the renovation may be revised because the lunch program has been changed and is only used as a warming kitchen.

In response to Christine Ludwiczak, Ms. DeMarco explained the veterans services line is for financial assistance for veterans limited to \$500 annually. Ms. McCabe asked if electric vehicles had been explored to which Ms. DeMarco said they plan to look at the costs for a hybrid pending a grant award.

Harbor Management Commission: Chair Don Hyman explained the increase was due to the cost of a sign at the Lower Wharf.

First Selectman's Office: First Selectman Gerber said the communications director and constituent relations coordinator were moved into the office from Administrative Services. The increase is driven by the communications director position which is comparable to the PETA level rather than THEA, but it is not a union position. In response to Mr. Steele, Mr. Gerber said the salary was negotiated based on the individual's experience and what he was seeking for the position.

FairTV: Commissioner Kamlet said there is an increase in freelance labor. The BOF removed \$30,000 for a new broadcast server pending a grant award. If the grant is not received then the funding will come from contingency. The "zoom rooms" are not under the purview of FairTV, but IT.

Conservation: Director Tim Bishop said he has been waiting over 6 months for the dump truck. The budget increase is for a new Natural Resources Specialist.

Registrars of Voters: There is a reduction to the regular payroll line due to the removal of the full-time secretary position and an increase in part time payroll. Mr. Waggner said the registrars are working on staffing the office which has dropped a few hours due to the availability of the two registrars. Budget Director Frank Magneri explained the need for full-time secretarial support in the Engineering Dept warranted the personnel shift. Colin Colburn asked if there are resources available to move within town hall. Mr. Magneri said they had tried that with a floater between Building and Zoning but it really didn't work.

Mr. Astarita asked if it made sense to do this with the upcoming presidential election. Mr. Becker explained the full-time employee was being under utilized in the ROV and the resources were needed in Engineering. Each ROV has a deputy and assistant registrar who have statutory authority. Mr. Gerber said this not have any impact on the services provided by the ROV, they just need to work through a schedule.

Community Development: Mr. Barnhart said the increase was for additional resources to support new commissions. Mr. Astarita questioned the \$19,000 payroll increase to which Mr. Magneri said it was reduced by \$4,000 by the BOF.

Human Resources: Mr. Magneri noted the reduction in costs for property lines coverage. Mr. Steele asked if the CAO position had been posted. Mr. Gerber said no as they are currently interviewing for CFO. Mr. Steele asked why there was a need for cell phones and what the real cost was. Ms. Simpson said hearings are being held in person rather than remote and personnel must travel as well as keeping information safe and secure. Mr. Magneri said the true number would be about \$2,000.

Carl Dickman Par 3: Parks & Recreation Director Anthony Calabrese said there was a 5% increase in revenue and a slight increase in expenses. In response to Dru Georgiadis, Mr. Calabrese said they will be looking at making it "less swampy" in the future.

HSR Golf Course: Mr. Calabrese said the BOF added the revised driving range revenue into the budget so there is a substantial increase. Minimum wage increased which is reflected in the seasonal payroll increase. \$50,000 increase in fees & professional services is for Top Tracer software. Tara Cook-Littman asked if pesticides can be phased out. Mr. Calabrese said that would have to be planned and phased in by the Golf Commission. There is only 1 organic course in the USA; the majority use IPM techniques which is what we do. Mr. Calabrese said people prefer to walk than use carts at this course; the last increase was 2 years ago when the new carts came in.

\$67,530 is the revenue from Boca which goes up each year of the 5-year agreement. There is a profit share when they break \$2 million which they are close to hitting that target.

Waterfront: Revenues include \$285,000 for beach parking and \$900,000 for beach stickers. Steve Berez asked about the allocation for the aquatics coordinator which is 40% Penfield and 60% Waterfront.

Marina: Mr. Calabrese said the budget is flat except for a step increase in payroll. Several members said there should be a fee increase for slips based on round numbers rather than a percentage which is too confusing.

Penfield: Mr. Calabrese said they anticipate booking events in April 2025.

Recreation: Mr. Calabrese noted the revenue increases in swim lessons and Burr Mansion rentals.

Parks: Mr. McDermott asked about the RLMS turf field. Mr. Calabrese said it is going out to bid after finally receiving Engineering approval and should start construction at the end of the school year. Mr. Steele asked if there were any vacancies. Mr. Calabrese said the Parks Superintendent is retiring at the end of the month. They are currently looking for a Recreation Coordinator.

Town Clerk: Town Clerk Betsy Browne noted her overall budget decrease because of the lower costs associated with hiring a new employee.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC
Town Clerk