



BOF Member Craig Curley said he voted against the cut although he respects the process and majority view of the BOF which was a 5-4 vote. Many things were addressed in the appeal memo. Government needs to be modernized and there were a lot of good things that came out of the Charter Revision that could be leveraged, but the fatal flaw was the one question.

BOF member Amy Ruggiero said there are a number of priorities that the first selectman has that should be focused on first and look at the Charter down the road.

Jeff Steele, District 3 said although Charter revision is definitely needed and believed the one question doomed it to fail, there is reason to pause as the first selectman looks at things through the lens of that position rather than as a former RTM member. He has taken on some big initiatives such as the payroll correction and auditing departments. There are processes that need to change. A lot of money is being spent on the UI litigation and taxpayers need a break; we can push it back 6 months.

Sharon Pistilli, District 5 said she followed Charter Revision Commission meetings closely and First Selectman Gerber attended and did his homework regarding the Charter. If \$400,000 was spent then it's smart to do it now while the information is relevant.

Ken Astarita, District 1 said when you have a fiscal responsibility and a lot of priorities you need to really focus on those that will have an impact.

Liz Zezima, District 4 said it's time to modernize government, this is the 21st Century. After promises of modernization, greater efficiency and a referendum guaranteed to fail. They still went ahead with an omnibus question, and it failed, so it's four years behind.

Melissa Longo, District 1 said she supports Charter revision as it is long overdue. Being first selectman is a huge responsibility and Mr. Gerber's insight is a great thing she is just uncomfortable with the timeline. Regardless of tonight's outcome she hopes the revised Charter will be stronger.

Chris Shea, District 2 said he values the process in town and especially the deliberative, bipartisan decision of the BOF. The Legal Services budget increased 55% including the \$100,000. Fiscal restraint should be shown and perhaps waiting a year may be a better course of action.

Chris Carroll, District 8 said he believes this will save money by doing it now.

Dave Rock, District 2 said there was a lot of good work done already that can be built upon by doing this now.

Collin Colburn, District 8 suggested breaking the original question out and getting it on the ballot now and doing a full Charter Revision in 2027.

Tara Cook-Littman, District 2 said waiting stagnates the town; breaking out the original question would be a mistake as more has been learned since the last Charter Revision Commission.

Mr. Walsh said he respectfully objects to Mr. Curley being allowed to speak. If this item does pass, the budget appeal process needs to be clarified in the Charter. He would fully support this money going in next year and other BOF members indicated same in their budget deliberations.

Mr. Steele said currently there are payroll, auditing and an investigation that all still need to play out that may enhance the Charter.

Marcy Spolyar, District 4 said this needs to be on the ballot during a local election and new items need to be addressed as well. By starting in September, the First Selectman will be almost a quarter into his term.

Mr. Rock said it's good governance that the RTM could defy the BOF.

**VOTE:** The appeal by the Town Attorney and the First Selectman from the vote of the Board of Finance was approved with 30 in favor and 9 opposed (Astarita, Britton, Longo, Sparacino, O'Shea, Shea, Steele, Colburn, Ludwiczak).

**ITEM NO. 3 ON CALL:** TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON SELF-SUPPORTING FUNDS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$10,484,594 FOR THE WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF JULY 1, 2024 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2025.

Karen Wackerman, District 9 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** This item was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**ITEM NO. 4 ON CALL:** TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON SELF-SUPPORTING FUNDS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$3,959,441 FOR THE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF JULY 1, 2024 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2025.

Dru Georgiadis, District 9 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** This item was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**ITEM NO. 5 ON CALL:** TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON SELF-SUPPORTING FUNDS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$425,000 FOR THE REGIONAL FIRE TRAINING SCHOOL FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF JULY 1, 2024 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2025.

Scott Nickel, District 7 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** This item was approved by unanimous voice vote.

**ITEM NO. 6 ON CALL:** TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON PROPOSED APPROPRIATIONS IN THE AMOUNT OF \$369,709,303 FOR THE FISCAL YEAR OF JULY 1, 2024 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2025, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE, FOR ANY LAWFUL PURPOSE. THE TOTAL PROPOSED BUDGET AS APPROVED BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE IS AS FOLLOWS:

Board of Finance Recommended Budget	<u>\$369,709,303</u>
Less: Non-Current Tax Year Revenue	<u>(40,806,921)</u>
Net Revenue to be raised by Current Year Taxation	328,902,382
Plus: Senior Tax Relief	3,755,000
Plus: Assessment Appeals (Open Court Log)	400,000
Plus: Reserve for Uncollected Taxes/Other Credits	<u>3,321,914</u>
Gross Amount to be Raised by Taxation	\$336,379,296

Liz Zezima, District 4 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

Rob Blanchard, District 6 moved to reduce the Legal Services line 53200 by \$25,000, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion to reduce the Legal Services budget by \$25,000 was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Sharon Pistilli, District 5 moved to reduce Active Employee Benefits Line 52100 by \$45,000, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** The motion to reduce Active Employee Benefits Line 52100 by \$45,000 was approved by unanimous voice vote.

Jeff Steele, District 3 moved to reduce Finance line 51010 by \$15,000 to bring the CFO's salary to \$175,000, duly seconded. Mr. Steele said this is a 12% salary increase and compared salaries among Norwalk Ridgefield, Trumbull, Westport and Greenwich.

Dru Georgiadis asked if those positions had a pension or defined contribution plan to which Mr. Steele said he did not know. Ms. Pistilli said our geographic corridor is not comparable to the Danbury area. First Selectman Gerber said he did not have pension plan data but noted that our cost of living is different. He does not think a seasoned CFO will be found without a salary in the market range.

**VOTE:** The motion to reduce the CFO salary to \$175,000 failed with 10 in favor (Astarita, Britton, Longo, O'Shea, Rock, Shea, Steele, Blanchard, Colburn, Ludwiczak) and 28 opposed (Ambrose not present.)

Collin Colburn, District 8 moved to reduce the BOE budget by \$110,000, duly seconded. Mr. Colburn said since 2011-12 enrollment has gone down 9.2% but the budget has gone up 52%. He is aware of the nuances and increased headcount and equated the \$110,000 to 2 entry level positions.

Sharon Pistilli appreciated the observations on enrollment but there has been a learning loss and increased mental health awareness coming out of the pandemic that kids are still catching up from.

Steve Berez, District 7 said the services teachers provide have drastically changed from 2012. Dru Georgiadis said the majority of the BOE budget is unfunded mandates.

Supt. of Schools Michael Testani said several unfunded mandates came down and they do not know what will come out of the current legislative session either. A first-year teacher position with benefits is \$85,000. Most teachers are coming in with a wealth of experience.

BOE Chair Jenn Jacobsen said there was a significant revenue loss from ARPA and special education funding. Students with significant needs have increased over the decade and cost avoidance has been addressed as well.

Ken Astarita said this is hardly an unreasonable request in an over \$200 million budget. Year after year needs increase and the budget goes up but enrollment has gone down year after year. ARPA was intended to get us through a crisis. He questioned how long these increases can be sustained.

Cindy Waldron, District 3 said when she worked at McKinley School they started the year with 3 sections of kindergarten and more were added during the year. Houses are being built all over town.

Mr. Astarita referenced the chart on page 143 of the BOE budget book where enrollment decreased from 10,273 to 9,180.

Jay Wolk, District 5 said there have been years when the BOE returned money to the Town and said he favors the budget as is.

Melissa Longo asked for clarification of the budget cut by the BOE. Ms. Jacobsen said the BOE reduced the Superintendent's budget recommendation by \$220,000.

Kristen O'Neill, District 5 referenced the per pupil expenditures; we are 56<sup>th</sup> on the list but 17<sup>th</sup> in the wealth index.

Karen Wackerman, District 9 moved the question, duly seconded.

**VOTE:** Motion to call the question failed to achieve a 2/3 vote with 22 in favor and 17 opposed.

**IN FAVOR:** Sparacino, Cook-Littman, O'Shea, Rock, Hartigan, Waldron, Wapnitsky, McCabe, Zezima, O'Neill, Barahona, Blanchard, Donne, Kuhn, Nickel, Berchem, Carroll, Georgiadis, McDermott, Wackerman, Contratto, Ratzki

**OPPOSED:** Astarita, Britton, Longo, Shea, Steele, Spolyar, Garskof, Pistilli, Wolk, Graceffa, Berecz, Delgado, Colburn, Ludwiczak, Havey, Ambrose, Horton

Mr. Colburn agreed with Mr. Berecz that school employees are under more pressure but it's a tiny portion of the budget as FTEs are going up because needs have changed. It's more dynamic in some areas but not unrealistic in others.

Ms. Pistilli asked if the BOE could explain costs when a student with additional needs petitions for outplacement. Ms. Jacobsen explained the ECC costs on p. 158 including guidance, social workers, restorative justice, psychologists. She noted the addition of a 3<sup>rd</sup> level ASL course. Supt. Testani said FTEs at McKinley were transferred from grants to the operating budget along with fixed contract services. There are other out of district placements such as the magnet school so enrollment is closer to 9,400.

Ms. Spolyar said she thought the district did well in not creating cliffs by using ARPA funds. She noted that if this cut is approved it does not necessarily mean a cut of 2 positions.

**VOTE:** The motion to reduce the BOE budget by \$110,000 failed with 8 in favor (Astarita, Britton, Longo, Sparacino, Shea, Steele, Colburn, Ludwiczak) and 31 opposed.

Jeff Steele, District 3 moved to reduce First Selectman line 51010 by \$7867, duly seconded. Mr. Steele said this would reduce the Operations Director salary to \$131,118.

Mr. Becker said this budget had already been reduced by the BOF for that amount in the Longevity line.

Mr. Steele withdrew the motion.

Jeff Steele, District 3 moved to reduce Administrative Services line 51030 by \$32,600 to reflect a "real" part time salary of \$61,000 for the Communications Director, duly seconded. Mr. Steele said he knows there's a lot going on with UI and the newsletter.

First Selectman Gerber said the recent town hall meeting about the monopolies was put together by the communications director. She is the chief press contact and gets the answers from the departments. She works more than 19.5 hours a week without benefits. Mr. Steele said it's not about the person in the position; it is a new position with a large expense.

Mr. Gerber said they are trying to make the position more factual supplying information about important initiatives that people do not know about. Ms. Georgiadis said this position allows the first selectman to focus on his priorities.

Christine Ludwiczak, District 8 said she applauds Mr. Gerber for hiring a communications director but wondered if he should feel it out for a year to balance it out to see what the true needs might whether it be a full-time or part-time position.

Public Comment: Laura Devlin said this person is working full time although it is a part-time position which puts us at great risk. This tax increase is a broken promise.

Mr. Gerber said he did not remember promising no tax increase rather he does not want to over tax the taxpayers and have huge surpluses.

**VOTE:** The motion to reduce the Administrative Services budget by \$32,600 failed with 9 in favor (Astarita, Britton, Longo, Sparacino, O'Shea, Shea, Steele, Colburn, Ludwiczak) and 31 opposed.

Public Comment: Laura Devlin spoke in opposition to a tax increase.

Mr. Astarita said he agrees about having a large surplus and we should not be overtaxing our residents. He hopes next year we can hold taxes steady or lower them. Ms. Zezima said to get to a zero it would be a \$4 million cut. This budget fully funds schools, maximizes efficiencies and addresses modernization, returns the bonding capacity at reasonable rates and is fiscally sound creating a long-term plan to keep Fairfield vibrant and affordable; she thanked everyone who helped craft it.

John Kuhn, District 7 said the 1.4% increase is sub inflation and a negative real growth budget when we have many state mandates.

First Selectman Gerber said he would like to change dialogue about taxes and mill rates and educating the public about them particularly with revaluation.

**VOTE:** The overall budget in the amount of \$369,789,303 for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025 were approved with 32 in favor and 7 opposed (Astarita, Longo, Sparacino, Shea, Steele, Colburn, Ludwiczak).

**ITEM NO. 7 ON CALL:**

TO CONSIDER AND ACT UPON THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION AS RECOMMENDED BY THE TAX COLLECTOR: "RESOLVED, THAT UPON APPROVAL OF THE TOWN BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2024 TO JUNE 30, 2025, AND, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 12-142 & 12-144A OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES, INSOFAR AS THE ADOPTION OF THE BUDGET CALLS FOR THE LAYING OF A TAX ON PROPERTY OTHER THAN MOTOR VEHICLES, THE REAL ESTATE TAX SHALL BE DUE IN FOUR QUARTERLY INSTALLMENTS ON JULY 1, 2024, OCTOBER 1, 2024, JANUARY 1, 2025, AND APRIL 1, 2025, RESPECTIVELY, AND SHALL BE PAYABLE WITHOUT PENALTY BY AUGUST 1, 2024, NOVEMBER 1, 2024, FEBRUARY 3, 2025, AND MAY 1, 2025. THE PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX SHALL BE DUE IN TWO SEMI-ANNUAL INSTALLMENTS ON JULY 1, 2024 AND JANUARY 1, 2025 AND SHALL BE PAYABLE WITHOUT PENALTY BY AUGUST 1, 2024, AND FEBRUARY 3, 2025, AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT INSOFAR AS SUCH TAX APPLIES TO MOTOR VEHICLES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 12-144A OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES, **SUCH TAX SHALL BE DUE IN ONE SINGLE INSTALLMENT ON JULY 1, 2024, AND SHALL BE PAYABLE WITHOUT PENALTY BY AUGUST 1,**

**2024.** AS TO SUPPLEMENTARY TAXES ON MOTOR VEHICLES, AS PROVIDED IN SECTION 12-71B OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL STATUTES, SUCH TAX SHALL BE DUE IN A SINGLE INSTALLMENT ON JANUARY 1, 2025 AND PAYABLE WITHOUT PENALTY BY FEBRUARY 3, 2025.”

Dru Georgiadis moved the item, duly seconded.

Mr. Walsh said he thinks we are a better town than to do this to taxpayers. 38% of our taxpayers cannot afford to pay this in one payment. It only saves us \$7,500; it is draconian. Most people make their tax payments online so the Tax Office is processing less and less. Seniors on social security have to budget. He urged the Body to look inside its soul to save \$7,500.

Margaret Horton, District 10 said she had concerns about this and appreciated the synopsis provided by the tax collector during the budget presentation.

Dave Kluczowski explained a position was cut in 2017 and has been down for 6 years. The result of this is to modernize the Tax Office. Only 20 towns collect taxes twice a year. It's a confusing tax because it is collected in arrears. You are paying a tax on a vehicle you registered 15 months earlier. He has been trying to reduce the number of adjustments. There is an employee in the WPCA budget who helps during the busy times with sewer use bills. This is only a change for motor vehicle taxes; real estate taxes are not being changed.

Jennifer Barahona, District 6 said she, too, had concerns about the proposal but feels we should focus on other areas to keep the town affordable for residents.

**VOTE:** The resolution was approved with 29 in favor and 8 opposed (Steele, Garskof, Blanchard, Kuhn, Colburn, Havey, Ambrose, Contratto). (Berchem & Ratzki not present to vote).

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC  
Town Clerk