

**Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, March 21, 2023, at 5:45 P.M.
In Person Meeting /Simsbury Community Media Live Stream**

PRESENT:

Mike Doyle, Lisa Heavner, Robert Helfand, Arthur House, Derek Peterson, and Linda Schofield

ALSO PRESENT:

Amy Meriwether, Director of Finance; Nick Boulter, Chief of Police; Orlando Casiano, Parks Department; Jenna Caulfield, Chair of the Police Commission; Brian Johnson, Golf Course Superintendent; Lisa Karim, Library Director; Amber Abbuhl, Deputy First Selectman; Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman; and Eric Wellman, Selectman

1. Call to Order - Establish Quorum

Ms. Heavner called the meeting to order at 5:45 P.M.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Heavner providing an overview of the goal of the meeting and the budget process. She said there will be no cuts to the Board of Education or Board of Selectmen budgets at this week's meetings, and they will be presented at the Public Hearing meeting on April 4th for citizen input before any final action is taken by the Board of Finance. She added that after citizen input the Board of Finance may accept or amend the budgets prior to sending them to referendum for citizen vote. She said this year the budgets are calling for new spending that is greater than expected revenue, which is resulting in a proposed increase in the range of 5.93%, which is the largest increase in many years. This tax increase effects most but not all residences. She added that although the anticipated mill rate of 32.04 is lower than last year due to the revaluation, 90% of homeowners will see an increase in taxes because the town is spending more. She provided information on the revaluation and explained that some homes will have higher taxes and about 1 in 10 will see a tax reduction depending on the appraisal. She added there will be an increase in Debt Service, the annual cost of the Town's borrowing for Capital projects and said the modeling does project tax increases for the next few years and they will be talking about steps and strategies they can take now to help mitigate these increases.

3. Presentation: Board of Selectman 2023/2024 Budget

Ms. Mackstutis reviewed the Board of Selectman budget presentation which started off with listing their priorities. She presented on the FY23/34 revenue assumptions, showed the levy calculator worksheet, a comparison between this year and last year, and an overview and key items that effected this year's budget numbers.

The presentation continued with options to approach reducing debt service and Ms. Mackstutis presented their approved spending requests for service improvements. Ms. Schofield had a question on the mechanic which led to a conversation on the use of outside services versus in-house. Ms. Heavner asked for numbers associated with this for the April meeting. Ms. Heavner

asked Ms. Meriwether to look into whether the consulting services for Engineering can be charged to the capital project as opposed to the operating expenses.

Ms. Mackstutis continued with their presentation, and the Board of Finance asked follow up questions on the services requested which were addressed. Mr. Wellman said the service improvements requests are just allowing the Police, Parks, and Public Works to maintain the level of service that the community has grown to expect. Ms. Mackstutis reviewed where they made reductions and other additions and a discussion followed on Police holiday pay, overtime and hiring. The board asked further questions on the line items presented, which were addressed.

Ms. Mackstutis presented a list of the proposed ARPA themed funding uses. Some items were elaborated and questions from the Board of Finance were addressed. Ms. Schofield asked about the longer-term plan for the Simsbury Ambulance and Ms. Mackstutis said they will be looking into this. Mr. Peterson asked for more information on the Flower Bridge as it is such a large amount of the total and Ms. Mackstutis explained it is one of the gems in the town, used by a lot of people.

Ms. Mackstutis continued with a list of capital improvements and where the funding came from for the current year, highlighting new projects. Ms. Meriwether was asked to follow up with more details from Mr. Roy on the fluctuation of number on the Pavement of Roads project. Mr. House asked for information on the Meadowood Barn restoration project and added they are sheds that are falling apart as opposed to barns. He asked if the planks where the historic signatures can be saved as opposed to the barns themselves. Mr. Casiano said the planks have been removed and are in storage and Mr. Wellman provided further information on the reason the barns should be restored. Mr. House was not in agreement.

Ms. Heavner asked about the timing of the appropriation on the Climax Road bridge and was concerned it was on the list before the grant was approved. Ms. Meriwether said they would not be starting the project until they knew they had the grant money, and that she would look into the timeline. Ms. Mackstutis provided information on the East Coast Greenway and the associated grants. Mr. Casiano provided information on the Golf Course Irrigation project additional funding. Ms. Meriwether said she would consult with bond council as to whether it needed to be a separate question on the referendum. Ms. Mackstutis reviewed the CNR funded projects and addressed questions from the Board. A conversation followed on the electric vehicle charging stations cost and usage and the crosswalk safety improvements project. Mr. Casiano and Mr. Roy spoke about the Public Works and Parks and Rec projects. Mr. Johnson and Chief Boulter spoke about the police projects and addressed questions from the board. Ms. Heavner asked if the recurring expense of replacing the library computers could be added as operating expense and Ms. Meriwether agreed.

Ms. Heavner and Ms. Meriwether reviewed the numbers and the summary of the budget. Ms. Heavner explained there was a decrease in the mill rate and an increase in the tax rate due to the revaluation. Ms. Heavner provided an overview of the numbers in comparison to other local towns. Ms. Meriwether reviewed the levy calculator numbers and reviewed the impact on various home values. She looked at various numbers to show what could happen under various scenarios. Ms. Heavner explained that the Board of Finance looks at the timing of a project to

see when is the best time to do it and added if they can get debt service down it helps out every other budget.

Ms. Meriwether provided information on year-end projected savings. She said she will review again in April once she has more information available. Ms. Meriwether reviewed the fund balances and addressed questions from the Board. Ms. Schofield asked for more information on how the Boards came up with their utility estimates and asked if they can include what assumptions are based on going forward so it's more uniform across departments. She also asked about the business personal property audits. Ms. Meriwether stated that Francine will look into this before the end of the year, and she added that the best practice analyses has moved to the top of the list now that the revaluation is complete.

Ms. Schofield said they are looking at a significant change in the pattern in tax increases from past years and asked how this will be communicated to the public. Ms. Heavner said she will do a draft communication and share with the board for review before it gets sent out to the public. She added the information will be on the Town website and Ms. Mackstutis said she will have their budget on there also. Ms. Mackstutis asked if the budget details can be included in the legal notice advising the public of the public hearing date and time. Ms. Heavner checked if there is an email address for the public to submit comments and said they welcome that and Ms. Meriwether confirmed its listed on the website.

Ms. Heavner asked whether bonding is required or not on the Simsbury Performing Arts Center as it was listed differently in the packet. Mr. Peterson had a question on the grand list chart and spoke about the mill rate saying it's not just about this year and spending overall needs to be cut back this year and future years to make Simsbury an attractive town to live in. Members of the Board added comments on the budget and how it affects future years and taxes.

Ms. Heavner provided a summary of the discussion and asked that the Board of Selectman identify \$150K in budget cuts. She asked Ms. Meriwether to provide hard recommendations in April to reduce debt service. She added that it was not a mandate, and the public will have an opportunity to give feedback at the public hearing before changes are made. A conversation followed on the state cap and Ms. Meriwether will be reaching out to council prior to the April meeting to make sure they have something in writing confirming that they are not putting any funding at risk. Mr. Peterson asked for a 15% budget reduction of the proposed increase and asked that \$2M – 2.5M be pushed out in Capital Projects. Ms. Schofield clarified that the request is to reduce the budget numbers between \$150K and \$236K.

Ms. Heaver stated they are keeping an eye on the Education Bill which would bring in about \$2.2M to the town if it passes, and there may also be extra revenues from the Special Education Bill. Mr. House added that the Board of Selectman should also include their priorities in case they are unable to fund everything. A conversation followed on the timing of the presentations, delivery of the updated numbers, the next steps, and the overall budget pressures. Ms. Heavner asked Ms. Meriwether to send copy of the non-lasting fund balance. She added that the Board of Finance is just evaluating the budgets at this time, and they will be going to public hearing for the public to weigh in before any adjustments are made.

5. Adjourn

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective March 21, 2023, to adjourn the meeting at 8:43 P.M. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk