

Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at 5:45 P.M.
In Person Meeting /Simsbury Community Media Live Stream

PRESENT:

Lisa Heavner, Art House, Robert Helfand, Todd Burrick, Mike Doyle, and Art Wallace

ALSO PRESENT:

Amy Meriwether, Director of Finance; Matt Curtis, Superintendent; Jeff Tindall, Board of Education Chair; Jen Batchelar, Board of Education Vice Chair; Tara Willerup, Board of Education; Sue Lemke, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Neil Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent for Administration; Jason Casey Director of Infrastructure & Technology; Melissa Appleby, Budget Director; and Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman.

Call to Order - Establish Quorum

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

Pledge of Allegiance

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Audience

Ms. Heavner opened the floor to Public Audience.

Lori Boyko, 15 Oakhurst Road, spoke about her concerns with the overage in the Board of Education budget. She said the town needs to halt their increases. She spoke about reducing the 20% (\$17M) of the budget that is flexible and also about reducing the number of administrators or teachers in order to reduce costs.

Presentation: Board of Education Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget

Mr. Curtis presented the proposed Board of Education budget for FY 2024/2025 with an overall number approved by the Board of Education of \$86,270,668, which is an increase of 4.97% over last year's operating budget. He continued with the presentation stating how the Board came to that number and how they approached balancing fiscal reality and educational needs. He provided comparable data with peer communities and added their numbers are in line with the other districts. He reviewed the budget process and the various budget reduction key drivers they used to come to their overall final number. He then went through the main line items and the market driven increases with transportation being their top challenge.

Mr. Curtis reviewed budget deficit drivers and spoke about special education State reimbursements.

Mr. Curtis spoke about their Regular and Special Educational staffing needs and talked through reallocations and reductions their Board is proposing. He also spoke about the services they are legally obligated to provide.

The Board asked questions which were addressed and elaborated on by Mr. Curtis. Ms. Lemke addressed the Special Education costs and the increased volume in students. Ms. Heavner thanked Mr. Curtis and his team for working so diligently on the budget.

Further discussion followed on transportation costs and processes.

Mr. Casey presented the proposed Capital Improvement Plan which included 4 items. He gave an overview of the projects, their costs, and the reasons they are included. The Board asked questions which Mr. Casey addressed.

Finance Director's Report

Ms. Meriwether presented on the Finance Directors Report noting supplemental appropriations totaled \$131,000 at this point in time, which is well below the 3% budget cap.

She reported on the Grants and Awards, noting one update that the-risk rural road speed enforcement grant which was just approved for \$15K.

She reported that the consultants working with the Assessor's office started to interview department staff in relation to the current policies, procedures, and practices and they are moving along with the next phase of the performance audit.

Ms. Meriwether reported the financial summary as of January 31, 2024 noting they are expecting Revenues to come in over budget by about \$3.3M and Expenditures under budget by about \$940K. Ms. Heavner had a question on the percentage of the Public Works budget and Ms. Meriwether said she will follow up and get back to her.

Budget Discussion

Ms. Heavner gave an overview of the budget stating if there are no changes to the approved Board of Education budget and the proposed Town Manager's budget there will be an increase in spending by the town of \$1.5M, and increase in education spending of \$4.1M, and increase in Debt Service of about \$1.1M, for a total increase of about \$6.7M. This represents a tax increase of 7.48%. Ms. Heavner provided an overview of what it takes for a budget to balance, why they are out of balance, and what it will take to get more in balance. She added it will take a combined effort to do that and provided some numbers as examples.

Ms. Meriwether pulled up the budget modeling tool and worked on some possible scenarios to bring the numbers down. Ms. Heavner explained that the savings at the end of the year goes to fund Capital for the following year and explained this is how Massachusetts does it. They recommend about 3-5% of the budget is returned to fund capital. The Board had comments and Ms. Heavner added they are monitoring neighboring towns projections.

Ms. Heavner said one of the things the Board should give guidance on is holding future years Debt Service flat at \$8.5M or \$9M and not as a percent of the budget. Ms. Meriwether displayed the Capital Budget planning graph for FY24 – FY30 proposed by the Town Manager. A conversation followed on the Tax Collection Assumption rate and how to reduce costs and balance the budget. Ms. Heavner asked for the Town and Board of Education to reduce their numbers further and Capital and Debt Service has to be reduced also. She added that she's not sure they can get there but she asked for everyone to try. The Board discussed further, and all agreed that targets should be set with the understanding that they may not be achieved. Ms. Heavner asked for a Board of Education budget increase of 4.3%, a Board of Selectman budget increase of \$3.5M, the Board of Finance is targeted to find \$1.3M, Debt Service flat in the out years of \$8.5 and \$9M cap, and she asked to rework the CIP to show projects that fit within those

parameters. She asked everyone to weigh the risks with the cuts and come back with a lower budget number.

Ms. Heavner asked Ms. Meriwether for an analysis of using more of the Health Reserve and what that would mean in terms of risk to the following year, and she asked for any other suggestions on mill rate stabilization without creating risk. Ms. Heavner asked the Board to add a line on the CNR project list to include a line item for Education to include the busses for \$500K. Ms. Heavner asked for these revised numbers by the next meetings on March 19th or the 21st. Ms. Heavner received a unanimous consent on the proposed targets from the Board.

The Board took a five-minute recess.

Supplemental Appropriation – Dial-A-Ride Bus

Ms. Meriwether summarized that staff are requesting a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$53,171 to cover the full purchase price of a Dial-A-Ride bus. An amount of \$64,000 was approved during the FY 21/22 budget process and due to vehicle shortages and inflationary factors, the bus that is anticipated to be available by late spring is now expected to cost \$117,171. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has committed to covering the full cost of the vehicle through a grant.

MOTION: Mr. Burrick made a motion, effective March 5, 2024, to approve a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$53,171 for the purpose of purchasing a bus for Simsbury's Dial-A-Ride program. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Supplemental Appropriation - Tariffville School Modulares

Mr. Casey provided a summary of the appropriation. He noted the Tariffville School Modular classroom project was approved during prior budget processes in the amount of \$850,000. The original scope of the project included a "rough grade" of the site on the exterior of the modular. During this process drainage issues were identified outside the scope of work that need to be corrected. If left in its current state, the site will experience significant ponding and erosion. The cost to correct the drainage issues is \$18,000.

The Board of Education will not be completing the Squadron Line air quality project and will use the savings from this project to cover the cost of the Tariffville School Modular project overage.

MOTION: Mr. Burrick made a motion, effective March 5, 2024, to approve a supplemental appropriation for the Tariffville School Modular classroom project in the amount of \$18,000 and transfer said funds from the CNR fund to the Capital Projects Fund to cover the cost of the overage. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Appointment to the Simsbury Housing Policy Advisory Committee

Mr. Doyle offered to join as a representative on the Simsbury Housing Policy Advisory Committee and Mr. Helfand volunteered to be an alternative.

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MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective March 5, 2024, to appoint Mr. Doyle to the Simsbury Housing Policy Advisory Committee and to appoint Mr. Helfand as an alternative. Mr. Burrick seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – February 13, 2024

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective March 5, 2024, to approve the Minutes from February 13, 2023, as submitted. Mr. House seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn

MOTION: Mr. Burrick made a motion, effective March 5, 2024, to adjourn the meeting at 7:54 P.M. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk