

**Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING and PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 18, 2023, at 5:45 P.M.
In Person Meeting /Simsbury Community Media Live Stream**

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Amy Meriwether, Finance Director; Tom Fitzgerald, Acting Town Manager; Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks & Recreation; Orlando Casiano; Parks & Rec Superintendent; Nick Boulter, Chief of Police; Chris Davis, Deputy Police Chief; Lisa Karim, Library Director; Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman; Amber Abbuhl, Deputy First Selectman; Eric Wellman, Selectman; Susan Salina, Board of Education Chair; Jenna Caulfield, Police Commission Chair

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.

3. Public Hearing on FY23/24 Operating and Capital Budgets

Ms. Heavner thanked the public for sending in comments after the previous Public Hearing meeting and said they will be posted with the minutes on the website. She opened the floor for public hearing.

1. Joan Coe, 26 Whitcomb Drive; spoke about the revaluation and assessment process. She also spoke about the issues with addiction and mental health. She spoke about the pickleball courts, the status of the golf course, private schools should give a stipend in lieu of taxes and she asked the Board to review the expenditures and reduce the budget with no increase in taxes.
2. Lori Boyko, 15 Oakhurst Road; spoke about the schools in the community and the cost of education. She asked that expenditures are reviewed and cut where necessary.
3. Dr. Michael Rinaldi, 32 Pinnacle Mountain Road; spoke about the cost of living in Simsbury. He didn't speak highly about the Board of Education and the Board of Selectman and said the budget numbers need to be cut by \$3M.
4. David Bush, 4 Katherine Lane; spoke about taking care of the things the town acquired. He spoke in favor of hiring the Parks Maintainer approved in the 10-year master plan.

MOTION: Mr. Peterson made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to close the Public Hearing. Ms. Schofield seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Town Quarterly Financial Report

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the budget report starting with revenues. She reported they are at about \$113M or 98.31% of budget and are in line with the same time last year. She reviewed

some important highlights including motor vehicle tax, municipal revenue sharing, increased interest income, Town Clerk recording fees, and addressed questions from the Board. Ms. Heavner asked about Memorial Pool bringing in about \$20,000 more than anticipated and it was flagged as a savings for the FY 2023/2024 budget discussion.

With regards to expenditures Ms. Meriwether reported that as the end of March they have spent \$81,701,654 to date which is about 70.22% of budget and is in line with the same time last year. She highlighted some line items that are over budget due to Union Contracts that were settled in the current year. Ms. Meriwether noted that the contingency line item for union negotiations will cover that overage. She also reported salary savings from vacancies and Pension ARC payment savings.

Ms. Meriwether then reviewed the various fund balances and answered questions from the Board. Ms. Schofield noted that the Simsbury Farms Fund had close to \$1M in fund balance and inquired about the use of the balance for the FY 2024 budget. Mr. Tyburski responded that that they are proposing use of some of that fund balance for capital projects in 2024. Ms. Heavner proposed and Ms. Schofield agreed that there should be a fund balance policy for the fund so that they know what their target should be. The board asked various questions on what the plan is for other fund balances with high revenue balances which were addressed. Ms. Heavner provided an overview of policy on savings in the general fund.

Ms. Meriwether summarized that she anticipated about \$800,000 may be available at year end to contribute to the Capital Reserve Fund.

5. Budget Discussion and Possible Action

Ms. Heavner said that they received legal council's opinion on the Municipal Spending cap requirement, and requested Ms. Meriwether confirm the proposed budget is in compliance with the spending cap requirement. Ms. Meriwether and Mr. DeCrescenzo were able to confirm the proposed budget is in compliance with the State spending cap requirement.

Ms. Heavner invited comments on the budget from Board members. Ms. Schofield provided some remarks on the budget process and the unpleasant choices that have to be made. Mr. House spoke about the process and the mindset needed to get through this year and the following year. Mr. Peterson provided context on how he will be thinking about the budget, he commented on the ARPA themed reserves, and added that he is not supportive of borrowing at higher costs today for certain projects and using reserves to pay off lower cost of debt. He said it would make more sense to pay for cash what they are expected to bond for today. Mr. Helfand also provided a summary of his views on the budget process and the issues they faced this year. He added that he does not want the town government to be an institution that delivers amenities and gradually weeds out the people who cannot pay for them. He said they have to think of the town as part of a larger community and they cannot afford everything they want, or all the benefits they would like to bestow on current residents. Mr. Doyle mentioned that next year he will be pushing for a firm number for guidance from the Board of Finance and hopes to better shape the budget expectations before they come before the board. Mr. Peterson said that next year he would like to make firm recommendations in guidance to help shape the budgets before they get to the Board of Finance. Ms. Heavner also provided her thoughts on the budget process. She noted that at the

Tri-Board the Board of Finance indicated the budget would have to be limited to fixed costs, with exceptions for public safety and state mandates. She mentioned that they will be looking to cut \$5M out of the Capital budget next year and keep an eye on neighboring towns.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase the revenue for Memorial Pool by \$20,000. Mr. House seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase the vacancy line item from \$235,000 to \$250,000 for a \$15,000 increase from where the Board of Selectman ended. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase the insurance refund revenue line item from \$27,500 to \$60,000. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase the interest investment income revenue from \$100,000 to \$800,000. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase revenues in the World Skate line item from \$80,000 to \$85,000. Ms. Schofield seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to increase the Board of Selectman community service public agency line item by \$100,000 to fund the Housing Authority in the amount of \$100,000 for capital improvements. Mr. House seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to approve \$225,000 from the capital reserve fund from 2023 ARPA themed funding to the Board of Education operating budget to fund the second year of salaries and benefits for two social workers. Mr. House seconded the motion. A discussion followed. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Doyle made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to eliminate the fire district generator project in the amount of \$123,125. Ms. Schofield seconded the motion. Ms. Heavner noted that the Fire District is an independent taxing authority and they have an alternative way to fund this project through taxing or use of their reserves. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to appropriate \$100,000 in a contingency line item in the capital reserve fund. This is to be used for emergency capital repairs, unanticipated capital cost overages, or matches for unanticipated grants to leverage town dollars. The contingency to be funded with appropriation from the capital reserve fund. In accordance with Connecticut General Statute 7-348 expenditures from this line item require

approval by the Board of Finance before expenditures are authorized. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Doyle made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to eliminate the EV Station project. A discussion followed. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. Ms. Heavner noted that Mr. Roy confirmed there is no grant currently available and the new contingency line item could fund this project, should a grant become available in the future. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to eliminate the mechanics and the parks maintainer positions and move to add a Connecticut General Statute 7-348 a contingency line item in the operating budget by an additional \$100,000 for the purpose of funding a new position. In accordance with Connecticut General Statute 7-348 expenditures from this line item require approval by the Board of Finance before expenditures are authorized. Move that any unexpended amount from this contingency line item for this purpose will lapse at FY 2024 year-end close and be returned to the general fund. Mr. House seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Heavner, Mr. Doyle, Mr. Helfand, Mr. House, and Mr. Peterson voted in favor. Ms. Schofield voted against. The motion passed by majority.

MOTION: Ms. Heavner requested a motion to add a capital non-recurring project for capital funding to be funded by the capital reserve fund in the amount of \$30,000. No one made the motion therefore it failed.

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to appropriate a total of \$2M from the capital reserve ARPA themed dollars to reduce the FY 2023 borrowing costs taken from capital reserve fund and to reduce debt service from \$8,147,216 to \$7,940,310. A discussion followed. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A friendly amendment was made by Ms. Schofield to increase the appropriation from \$2M to \$3M. Ms. Meriwether noted Ms. Schofield's proposed amendment would lower debt service to \$7,806,810 and that the Capital Reserve Fund balance is projected at \$2.2M with the anticipated year-end contribution. Mr. House and Mr. Helfand accepted the amendment. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to appropriate \$1,989,000 for the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge to be funded with bonds. Mr. House seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Heavner, Mr. Helfand, Mr. House, and Ms. Schofield voted in favor. Mr. Doyle and Mr. Peterson voted against. The motion passed by majority.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to add a capital non-recurring project for the assessor audit and for the initial implementation to be funded with the capital reserve fund assigned dollars in the amount of \$150,000. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Peterson made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to add a recurring appropriation line item in the library budget for computer replacement costs in the amount of \$7,000. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to designate all capital and capital non-recurring projects as individual project appropriations capped in the amount listed for each project. Further in accordance with town policy, move that for capital non-recurring (CNR) projects only anticipated budget transfers between projects can be overspent by \$5,000 or 20% of the total project budget, whichever is less, so long as the anticipated overages do not exceed anticipated savings and other projects. Ms. Heavner noted that the policy does not apply to CIP projects, which may not be exceeded. The transfer and close out requests will go to the Board of Selectman and the Board of Finance at year end close for those overages. Further move the Director of Finance to provide monthly reports of any approvals granted under this policy. Ms. Schofield seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to remove one year of the Library Literacy program in the amount of \$4,642 using ARPA themed dollars. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Schofield and Mr. Doyle voted in favor. Ms. Heavner, Mr. Helfand, Mr. Peterson, and Mr. House voted against. 4 votes in favor were required to pass the motion. The motion failed.

Ms. Heavner opened the floor to the Board to make a motion to remove the volunteer ambulance association costs associated with running the second ambulance. A motion was not made.

Ms. Heavner opened the floor to the Board to make a motion to remove \$70,000 in loan forgiveness to the Simsbury volunteer ambulance association amount owed to the town of Simsbury for new radio equipment. A motion was not made.

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to assign \$8,600 in the capital reserve to fund the Library Literacy program thru FY25/26. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to remove \$30,000 for pollinator funding in FY24 in the capital non-recurring project. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to reduce police overtime by \$20,000 back to the Town Managers recommended amount. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Schofield, Mr. Doyle, Ms. Heavner, Mr. Helfand, and Mr. House voted in favor. Mr. Peterson voted against. The motion passed by majority.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to reduce the general fund transfer to the Simsbury Farms complex from \$183,658 to \$ 151,715, a reduction of \$30,000. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion to appropriate \$112,000 for technology upgrades and systems access for the Simsbury Town Hall and the Police Department to be funded from a

Congressionally directed spending grant. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. Peterson made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to request the Director of Finance to coordinate and develop a capital workshop for July 2023 on behalf of the Board of Finance. And to invite the boards of Education and Selectman, and any other invitees the Director deems relevant for the purpose of developing a funding and capacity plan for projects in the out years, and for developing public criteria, and to rank Capital needs. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Heavner asked Ms. Meriwether and others present whether there were any other grants the town was aware of that will be applied for and for which the town should budget for. Ms. Meriwether indicated that she was not aware of any other grants. No Department Heads or Selectmen indicated they were aware of any future grant applications.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to remove the \$20,000 for the employee satisfaction survey. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to remove the \$45,000 for the Charter revision and delay that process until the following year. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Schofield withdrew the motion.

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the changes as they stood and a discussion followed. Ms. Heavner commended all involved and said the budget is reasonable and at a point where it can be put in front of the public for their input.

Ms. Meriwether confirmed that the changes made still keeps the town beneath the State spending cap.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, for the Board of Education to reduce their proposed budget by \$200,000 in order to get below a 5% increase. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. A discussion followed.

Mr. Peterson made a friendly amendment to reduce the BOE budget by \$400,000. Ms. Schofield accepted the friendly amendment. Mr. Helfand seconded the friendly amendment. A discussion followed. Mr. Peterson and Mr. Doyle voted in favor. Ms. Schofield, Ms. Heavner, Mr. Helfand, and Mr. House voted against. The motion failed.

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, for the Board of Education to reduce their proposed budget by \$200,000 in order to get below a 5% increase. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Ms. Schofield, Mr. House and Mr. Doyle voted in favor. Mr. Peterson, Ms. Heavner, and Mr. Helfand voted against. The motion failed.

The Board took a brief recess. Ms. Heavner left the meeting and Mr. House continued the meeting as Chair.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, that the reading into the minutes of the full text of the resolutions set out is waived, copies of the resolutions having been made available to those in attendance, and recorded in these records immediately preceding these minutes, and that the Board of Finance recommends and approves the projects as presented. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, that the appropriation recommended and approved by the Board of Finance for the purposes of paying the expenses of the Board of Selectmen annual budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, shall be approved and implemented in the amount of \$31,679,397. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, that the appropriation recommended and approved by the Board of Finance for the purposes of paying the expenses of the Board of Education annual budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, shall be approved and implemented in the amount of \$81,576,437. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. Mr. House, Mr. Helfand and Mr. Doyle voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Peterson and Ms. Schofield voted against the motion. The motion passed.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, that the appropriation recommended and approved by the Board of Finance for the purposes of paying the expenses of Sewer Use Fund (Sewer Treatment Plant), Residential Rental Properties, Simsbury Farms/Special Programs, Non-Public Schools, Debt Retirement/Capital and Capital Non-Recurring annual budgets for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, shall be approved and implemented in the amount of \$17,149,930. Ms. Schofield seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective April 18, 2023, to approve the questions for the Referendum Ballot as presented. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. A discussion followed. All were in favor and the motion carried.

6. Adjourn

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion effective April 18, 2023, to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 P.M. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk