

**Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING and PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 4, 2023, at 5:45 P.M.
In Person Meeting /Simsbury Community Media Live Stream**

PRESENT:

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

ALSO PRESENT:

Amy Meriwether, Finance Director; Matthew Curtis, Superintendent, Sue Lemke, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning; Neil Sullivan, Assistant Superintendent of Administration; Jason Casey, Director of Infrastructure & Technology; Tom Fitzgerald, Acting Deputy Town Manager; Nick Boulter, Chief of Police; Tom Roy, Director of Public Works/Town Engineer; Lisa Karim, Library Director; Tom Tyburski, Director of Culture, Parks & Recreation; Orlando Casiano, Parks Superintendent; Brian Johnson, Golf Course Superintendent; Jenna Caulfield, Chair of the Police Commission; Michael Long, Police Commission; Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman; Amber Abbuhl, Deputy First Selectman; Board of Selectman Heather Goetz, Selectman; Eric Wellman, Selectman; Susan Salina, Chair, Board of Education; Tara Willerup, Board of Education; Jen Batchelor, Board of Education

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. Presentation of the FY23/24 Budget Process and Overview

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 4, 2023, to continue the Public Hearing to April 18, 2023 at 5:45 P.M. in the Town Hall meeting room. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Heavner presented on the budget process and gave an overview of the next steps. She explained the role the Board of Finance plays. She said the board must present to the public a balanced budget and said this year's proposed expenditures total \$121,948,062 with 67% of the spending towards Education, 26% for Town services and 7% for Debt Services. She reviewed the specifics of the proposed budgets which showed a total of over \$7M on new spending which she added is the largest spending they've had in recent years.

Ms. Heavner reviewed the items the Town proposes to be funded through fees and major grants which does not impact property taxes and provided an overview of the long-term obligations which make up about 10% of the budget. She reviewed the major capital projects and said the estimated mill rate is 32.04 and estimated medium tax increase is 5.94%. Ms. Heavner then explained why the taxes are going up, and explained how the change in home values will impact taxes. She added that as a result of the revaluation some houses will have higher taxes and some will have lower and provided details about how that process worked. She reviewed historical tax data, outlined who pays taxes, reviewed the debt service allocation between the town and Board

of Education, and provided at look at how Simsbury is borrowing in comparison to other Connecticut towns. She reviewed the fiscal health of the town and mentioned that rating agencies have rated the town as fiscally strong with a Aaa rating. She reviewed population and enrollment trends and reminded the public where local tax relief is available.

4. Presentation of the Proposed FY23/24 Board of Education and Board of Selectmen Operating and Capital Budgets

Ms. Salina presented on the approved Board of Education budget highlighting their strategic priorities and said their proposed budget this year came in at \$82,182,136, a 6.69% increase over last year's operating costs. She reviewed the Board of Education's approved budget versus the fixed cost analysis. She said the budget does not include the \$300K CNR request for buses and said they had reduced their proposed budget by over \$2M since they first presented it during the budget workshops. Ms. Salina reviewed the per-pupil expenditure and enrollment projections. She highlighted the main budget drivers which included contractual obligations, enrollment driven staffing, market driven increases and prior year budgetary deficits.

Mr. Casey spoke about the proposed capital project improvements which included the Tariffville School Modular Classroom Replacement and the district-wide Security Improvements. He said the total capital replacements totaled \$750K.

Ms. Mackstutis presented the approved Board of Selectmen budget and outlined how they determined the budget and what was included in it. She highlighted the Board of Selectman's goals and priorities and the many meetings and discussions they attended to determine the numbers presented. She mentioned that new growth without revaluation is \$2,039,834 or 2.45%, reviewed the grand list and mill rate changes over the past 20 years, and presented the FY 23/24 revenue assumptions. She provided an overview of the budget and the FY23/24 debt service reduction approach and the associated savings by using the ARPA themed funds.

Ms. Mackstutis reviewed the service improvements that were included in the budget numbers, and outlined the additional departmental requests which were not funded this year. She reviewed other reductions and additions and provided more insight into the projects funded through the American Rescue Plan ACT (ARPA) themed funds which totaled \$3,261,07. She reviewed the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) projects and an overall chart view of the funding for all the projects.

Ms. Mackstutis reviewed the Capital Non-Recurring funded projects which included \$946,380 for Public Works/Engineering; \$366,359 for Parks and Recreation; \$6,800 for the library; \$225,000 for Water Pollution Control; \$451,542 for Police; and \$449,950 for General Government projects.

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

1. Jan Lintner, Chair of the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge, spoke in favor of funding improvements to the flower Bridge and overall maintenance. She also spoke in favor of the proposed additional staff to the Parks and Recreation department.

2. Sharene Wassell, past co-chair of the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge, and currently on the Board of Directors, spoke in favor of funding for repairs, painting, and maintenance of the flower bridge.
3. Deeg MacKay spoke in favor of funding for repairs, painting, and maintenance of the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge.
4. Jerry Lintner, 22 Massaco Street, spoke about the impact of the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge, the partnerships with businesses in town, and presented a flyer with a map of the town with all the supporting restaurants.
5. Justine Medic, 8 Lawton Drive, spoke in opposition to the removal of the librarian from the Latimer Lane School and urged the board to consider other areas that would not have such a large impact when considering budget cuts.
6. David Bush, 4 Katherine Lanes, commended the good work done on preparing the budget, and asked that the Parks Maintainer and Program Coordinator positions be funded. Mr. Bush also spoke in favor of maintaining the two historic barns as the town spoke loud and clear to fund that property initially.
7. Gary N Wilcox, 19 Oakwood Road, spoke in favor of the Simsbury SVA ambulance budget request, which would allow them to continue their current level of service. He provided information and data to support his request. He also spoke in favor of the SVA's request for the elimination of \$75K debt on the recent radio improvements.
8. Jim Baldis, 16 Deepwood Road, spoke in favor of the Fire Departments request to use ARPA money to fund the replacement of 2 generators stating they are both at the end of life and are in need of replacement.
9. Lori Boyko, 15 Oakhurst Rd, voiced her concerns in relation to increases not just in this year's budget but the following years. She spoke about the various incomes of residents in town, and the hardships an increase in tax could cause. She added the Boards should take a look at wants versus needs, especially for the Board of Education, as it has the largest spending. She provided information to support her concerns.
10. David Richman, 52 Wood Duck Lane, provided a suggestion to help reduce town costs by reaching out to the businesses who live in the community for their services and products. He provided some examples and suggested thinking outside of the box.
11. Nord E Christensen, 35 W Mountain Rd, spoke in favor of all the projects mentioned in the budget but was not in favor of the reevaluation increases. He said he appealed his revaluation and received zero consideration. He spoke about where the money is coming from and asked the town to consider the people working to generate the money that's being spent by everyone.
12. Borden Schofield, 37 Northgate, voiced his concerns related to the tax increases and added as a retiree he and his group of retirees don't use many services and contribute a lot of money to the town.

Ms. Heavner thanked the public for the emails received related to the budget and said they were grouped into various categories including the Latimer library media specialist position, concerns about taxes being too high, concerns about funding the electric charging station, support for business relief programs using ARPA themed funding, and support for the flower bridge.

Ms. Heavner added from a process standpoint that the Board of Finance approves a bottom-line dollar amount for the education budget and does not decide how the Board of Education spend those dollars. She reminded the public that there are two opportunities for public audience

during the budget process and asked for additional information to be available for the next public hearing meeting.

6. Budget Discussion and Possible Action

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the details of the budget and spoke about how the numbers in the budget were calculated. She reviewed the impact on future years based on various assumptions. Various scenarios and assumptions were reviewed and discussed to show the impact on taxes and the mill rate and addressed questions from the Board. Ms. Heavner spoke about the savings being generated by the Board of Selectman by reducing the borrowing amount in debt service. Mr. Peterson asked for the cost of debt assumption numbers and Ms. Heavner asked for the recent budget model which has those numbers included to be emailed so the board can manipulate the numbers before the next meeting. Ms. Heavner said they will have a better idea on where the Board of Education's projections will be at the next meeting. Ms. Heavner opened a discussion on how the board would like to use reserves best and the board provided their thoughts on this.

Ms. Heavner asked Ms. Meriwether to put together additional scenarios for the budget and summarized the next steps. She added they are waiting on the status of the Education Bill and a discussion followed on the state mandates in association with it. Ms. Heavner spoke about the possibility of needing a second referendum in November for supplemental appropriations and said they should have better information in April in terms of year end projections.

The Board asked further questions, discussed options and scenarios, and said they are limited as to what they can do. She reiterated Mr. House's point that the budgets come to the Board of Finance and about 70% – 80% of expenditures are legally obligated.

Ms. Schofield raised a concern about public awareness and asked if the budget and public hearing information can made easy to find on the website. Mr. Peterson added that they should inform them that the Public Hearing has been extended.

7. Approval of Minutes

February 27, 2023

March 1, 2023

March 7, 2023

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 4, 2023, to approve the minutes from February 27, 2023, March 1, 2023, and March 7, 2023 meetings with non-substantive and grammatical changes as submitted. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

5. Adjourn/Recess

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 4, 2023, to amend the continuation of the Budget Public Hearing meeting to April 18, 2023 at 6 P.M. Mr. Doyle seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Mr. House made a motion, effective April 4, 2023, to recess the Budget Public Hearing until April 18, 2023. Mr. Helfand seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk