

Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Tuesday, April 21, 2020 at 5:45 P.M.
Zoom Meeting/Simsbury Community Television Live Stream

PRESENT: Lisa Heavner, Arthur House, Derek Peterson, Robert Pomeroy, Kevin Prell, Linda Schofield

ALSO PRESENT: Melissa Appleby, Deputy Town Manager; Sean Askham, BOS; Jackie Battos, BOS; Nick Boulter, Police Chief; Todd Burrick, BOE; Maria Capriola, Town Manager; Jason Casey, BOE Director of Systems Technology; Matthew Curtis, Superintendent of Schools; Wendy Mackstutis, BOS; Amy Meriwether, Director of Finance/Treasurer; Mike Paine, BOS; Susan Salina, BOE; Lydia Tedone, BOE; Jeff Tindall, BOE; Tom Tyburski, Culture, Parks & Recreation Director; Eric Wellman, First Selectman; Tara Willerup, BOE

1. Call to Order - Establish Quorum

Mr. Pomeroy called the meeting to order at 5:47 P.M.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Approval of Minutes - April 7, 2020

MOTION: Mr. Pomeroy made a motion to approve the April 7, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes as presented. Ms. Heavner seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Finance Director's Report

Ms. Meriwether noted a Friends of Simsbury Farms donation of up to \$12,000 to fund tee box leveling projects at the Simsbury Farms Golf Course. She also referenced the Defined Contribution and Deferred Compensation Pension Plans RFQ, noting there were no additional updates from the last meeting.

5. Appointment of Auditor for FY19/20 Audit

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion, effective April 21, 2020, to appoint BlumShapiro as the Town of Simsbury's auditors for the fiscal year ending 2019/2020. Mr. Prell seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

6. Presentation of the FY20/21 Budget Process

Mr. Pomeroy began by outlining the meeting agenda and explaining the budget process of the three boards working together in collaboration with staff and the Town Manager. He explained how the boards look at challenges together at the tri-board meeting. Further, he noted the priorities of each board and the overlapping stakeholders. He noted the Board of Finance is a citizen oversight board and noted its responsibilities and criteria for FY21, including its goal of

maintaining debt service/capital under 6.7% of expenditures, ensuring long-term fiscal discipline, setting an appropriate mill rate in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, maintaining the AAA rating, managing reserves, and working cooperatively with town management and boards. Mr. Pomeroy reported that Simsbury is recognized as a fiscally strong community, noting its S&P's AAA rating, mill rate history, and 20 years of receiving the GFOA Excellence in Financial Reporting Award. Further, he noted the Board of Finance must balance expenditure needs with available revenues. He reported there is a significant increase in the Grand List and provided a three-year forecast, indicating a 2.66% projected increase for FY20/21 and more modest projected increases for FY21/22 and FY22/23. Mr. Pomeroy explained the process for setting the mill rate based on assessed property values. He noted the Board of Finance guidelines of a 2.5% cap on operating expenditures and a 2.00% cap on the mill rate increase. He further noted the budget drivers and changes and provided a slide showing the proposed budgets for the Town and Board of Education, balancing expenditures and revenues at \$102.4M. Based on the increased Grand List and the slight increase in expenditures applied against a larger Grand List, the mill rate will go down to 37.09, providing a modest tax savings of \$50 for a median home. He reported there are two tax relief programs introduced by Governor Lamont, including the Tax Deferral Program and the Interest Rate Reduction Program. Further information on these programs is posted at <http://www.simsbury-ct.gov/tax>. Lastly, he referenced the chart that the Board of Finance uses for Capital Budget planning.

7. Presentation of Proposed FY20/21 Board of Education and Board of Selectmen Operating & Capital Budgets

Ms. Salina presented the Board of Education Operating/Capital Budgets. She began by explaining the budget development process. She noted the Board of Education Budget represents a cost increase of \$1.4M, or a 2.01% increase. She noted the influencing factors in developing this budget, including enrollment shifting, the guideline of a 2.5% increase, keeping the mill rate under 40, program improvement and supporting strategic priorities/plan. She discussed balancing the fiscal reality with a vision for continuous improvement. Further, she provided per pupil expenditures as compared to peer communities. Enrollment projections were presented, indicating a projected flat enrollment for 2020-21 and a projected 11% increase over the next ten years. She reported on student growth and success, noting the 2019 Accountability index as compared to peer communities. Further, she noted the drivers of the budget process, personnel drivers, a district summary and the Non-Public School Budget for 2020-21. Moving to Capital, she noted the District Network Infrastructure project to replace aging servers.

Mr. Wellman presented the Board of Selectmen Operating Budget. He noted that this budget reflects the unprecedented times being faced due to the pandemic. He gave a budget overview, noting an operating budget of about \$23M, an increase of about 4.5%. He noted changes made from the original budget during the budget process. Further, he noted the budget drivers, including contractual salary increases, debt service, pension/OPEB. FY20/21 service changes include assessor inspection services, a police administration reorganization and a restoration of funding for library materials.

Mr. Askham presented the FY20/21 CNR (Capital and not reoccurring) projects under the

General Fund, bonding, grants, operating transfers and other funds. He further noted FY20/21 Capital Fund projects, using bonds, operating transfers, grants, the Sewer Use Fund and Capital Fund.

8. Public Hearing on FY20/21 Operating and Capital Budgets

Mr. Pomeroy opened the Public Hearing. He and Ms. Heavner took turns reading the public comments sent in to the Town by email.

Joan Coe submitted comments regarding the financial pressures due to COVID-19 and the effects of a recession. She advised both boards to produce flat budgets, reduce all non-essential expenditures and capital expenditures. She commented against open space expenditures and the Police Department reorganization. She spoke in favor of a pay-to-play policy for enhancements made to town property which directly benefit a group. Further, she wrote about unfunded labor attorney costs, reconfiguring the schools by adding a 6th grade to HJMS, and having the golf course managed by a professional golf association.

Danielle Celli wrote in support of Simsbury purchasing the Meadowood property, noting it would benefit residents and tourism.

Marianne Joyce advocated for a no-increase budget.

Gerry Wetjen noted concern about the Parks & Recreation position being cut from the budget. He added that the Simsbury Parks and Open Space Plan details a lack of funding for both staff and maintenance and advocated that per capita spending should be increased.

Michael Rinaldi asked questions pertaining to postponing all wage and step increases to Town and Board of Education employees during a pandemic, modest redistricting of students to maintain class size guidelines, the HJMS project, Board of Selectmen Budget increases relative to inflation rates over the past five to ten years, Board of Education per pupil cost increases relative to inflation rates over the past five to ten years, and the increase in per pupil costs compared to other towns/cities.

Lauren Miller wrote in support of increasing the Library's budget for materials by \$20,000.

Anne Erickson wrote in support of the proposed \$20,000 increase in the materials budget in this year's proposed Library budget.

Kenneth Waite referenced the \$50 per year reduction in taxes for the median home and asked that town leaders propose as lean a budget as possible during these difficult times.

Susan Brachwitz wrote against the inclusion of open space in the Culture, Parks & Recreation Budget. She also noted the benefits of open space and residents' strong interest in keeping these areas intact.

Lisa Newell wrote in support of making open space a top priority.

Jerry Epstein submitted suggestions regarding schools in order to improve the education process and achieve cost savings. He made suggestions on class scheduling and teachers.

Wanda Coleman wrote in support of open space and made comments regarding Tariffville Park. She also noted support of pickle ball.

John and Judy Schaefer wrote in support of open space, noting its low cost and its benefit to residents.

Bill Cordner wrote in support of preserving open space to help fight global warming and protect wildlife habitat.

Phyllis Bornstein advocated for leaving the budget as is and planning for the unknown happening.

Erin Leavitt-Smith wrote in support of preserving open space.

Gail Ryan asked that the Board increase the Library materials budget by \$20,000 to allow for more and newer reading materials in all formats to be purchased.

Allen Cramer offered comments on the budget and taxes with regard to cost savings from schools being closed. He also wrote about the mill rate and lowering the tax rate due to the coronavirus.

James Marsh advocated vetoing the two new positions, (Deputy Police Chief and Accountant), citing the uncertainty at this time.

Jane Moos wrote in support of open space with no infringement upon it for mountain biking.

Diane Nash submitted comments about open space being combined with Parks & Recreation.

Danielle D'Ermo wrote in support of protecting and preserving open space, noting the Ethel Walker location. She advocated for procuring and preserving more open space and curtailing building and development.

Rosemarie Hargrave wrote in support of open space preservation.

Amber Abbuhl wrote in support of the \$20,000 increase to the Library's material budget, noting the demand for digital material and its ability to reach vulnerable members of the community, as well as providing materials on par with other local libraries.

Helen Peterson wrote in support of the annual budget as presented and specifically noted support of land conservation, citing its low cost relative to developed land and the recent Town Survey.

Ralph Martin shared comments strongly supporting all efforts to avoid any increase in taxes and efforts to reduce taxes.

Shannon Knall made comments about regression in special education students while school is not in session. She requested that any cost savings during this time be allocated to those in the community who require assistance.

Elizabeth Burt wrote in support of the request for an additional \$20,000 for the Library, noting the decreased allocations for material expenses over the last ten years and the per capita amount spent as compared to area towns.

Kathleen Miller wrote in support of the \$20,000 increase to the Adult, Teen and Business Materials Budget request for the Library, noting the ten-year decline in spending compared to comparable communities.

Marianne O'Neil asked for support to increase the Library's material budget by \$20,000, noting the ten-year spending and expenditures per capita as compared to similar libraries, as well as the increased need and demand for additional media materials.

James Marsh advocated being cautious at this time by not adding the two new positions under consideration.

Frederick and Marlene Peterson noted that funding should be provided to clear fallen trees and debris from Town-owned property along the foot paths that cut through Mountain Farms.

Donna and Tracy Page wrote in support of the \$20,000 increase to the Library materials budget.

Mr. Pomeroy thanked everyone for their comments, which will be shared with the boards. There was discussion about the comments, which it was noted will be posted online. Mr. Pomeroy noted the public hearing will be continued to May 5, at which time the budgets may be referred to referendum.

9. Adjourn

MOTION: Ms. Schofield made a motion to adjourn at 7:36 P.M. Mr. House seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Haberlin
Commission Clerk