

**Board of Finance
TOWN OF SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 5:45 P.M.
In Person Meeting /Simsbury Community Media Live Stream**

PRESENT:

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

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. Budget Discussion

Ms. Heavner opened the meeting with an overview of the budget, the process, the issues, and the role of the Board of Finance. Ms. Meriwether gave a more in-depth overview of the numbers which shows the proposed Town Operating budget for FY24, without ARPA, is \$27,552,704 which is a \$1,050,183 (3.96%) increase over last year.

Ms. Heavner mentioned that there is a state cap that municipal states taxes cannot increase more than 2.5% or the rate of inflation, and added that there are exceptions. She asked Ms. Meriwether to calculate and ensure they remain within limits of the cap.

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the Levy Calculator worksheet and explained the numbers in further detail. She reviewed various scenarios to show what the impact to taxpayers would be and addresses questions from the Board. They also reviewed the estimated numbers for future years which showed a continued increase. She reviewed their legal obligations and fixed costs for both the Town and the Board of Education, some of which were reduced, but overall indicated a proposed increase.

A conversation followed on the vacancy rate and Ms. Heavner said it's something she'll be monitoring.

Ms. Meriwether reviewed the Capital Projects budget, the various funding sources, and debt service. Ms. Heavner said their target is to get debt service to a lower number and not exceed it, and said that over the summer the Board will look into giving a dollar amount cap on the amount that can be spent on debt services as opposed to a percent of the budget.

The Board reviewed the debt chart in the out years and asked to see if anything can be done to decrease the estimated payments especially in FY 26 & 27. Mr. Helfand asked if Squadron Line Elementary School was included in the numbers as he had heard there would be work needed, and it was confirmed it was not. A discussion followed on using ARPA for various Board of Education projects or potentially putting projects out and using ARPA funds to reduce the burden on taxpayers.

Ms. Heavner, on behalf of the Board of Finance, asked the Board of Selectmen to evaluate what can be done to reduce future borrowing costs, whether it may mean not doing certain projects or moving them out to a later year, which will help get them through the FY26 peak.

Ms. Meriwether reviewed various Mill Rate scenarios using the levy calculator to show options and the effects they would have. Ms. Heavner asked if they can put a challenge to the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education to see if they can reduce the number by \$500,000.

Mr. Peterson asked to review the Board of Education fixed and non-fixed costs to see if there could be a savings there. Ms. Heavner asked whether the Board of Education can think about utilizing the Capital Reserve fund and Mr. Peterson asked again for a list of prioritizations for Capital projects. Mr. Peterson recommended that each Board find a way to save \$1M in their budgets, as a stretched target, and recognized that it will not be easy this year or next.

Mr. House and Ms. Heavner agreed that both Boards should look at alternate sources of funding and try and reduce the number. Mr. House added that they will likely have to recommend to the voters of Simsbury a revenue increase larger than they want it to be and added he's not comfortable with proceeding with the amount of tax increases that they have rolled up to at this point.

Ms. Heavner asked for a summary of any new budgetary savings or offsets, and asked to separate capital, debt services, and supplements. She also asked for a draft of the public hearing notice and a copy of the draft budget document so they can see the numbers in advance. Ms. Heavner asked for a total cost for projects for the CIP this year, estimated start and completed dates for CIP capital projects, include the number of years a project has been on the CIP to be included as well as a few other updates, and acknowledged all the additions that were already complete.

4. Adjourn

MOTION: Mr. Helfand made a motion, effective March 1, 2023, to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 P.M. Mr. House seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Marion Lynott
Commission Clerk