

## **CALL TO ORDER**

The Regular Meeting – Budget Workshop I of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Main Meeting Room of the Simsbury Town Offices. Present were: First Selectman Wendy Mackstutis; Deputy First Selectman Amber Abbuhl; Board members Heather Goetz, Eric Wellman, Chris Peterson and Sean Askham. Others in attendance included: Town Manager Maria E. Capriola; Deputy Town Manager Melissa Appleby; Town Clerk Trish Munroe; Building Official Henry Miga; Director of IT Rick Bazzano; Assessor Francine Beland; Finance Director/Treasurer Amy Meriwether; Community and Social Services Director Kristen Formanek and other interested parties.

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **OVERVIEW OF BUDGET**

### **• Revenues and Budget Assumptions (Tab 2)**

Ms. Capriola said the FY 22/23 grand list growth is very strong, up 3.72% due to real estate increases and the McLean expansion. The motor vehicle increased 27.56% and personal property increased 11.83% due to upgrades of the utility companies.

She gave a revenue recap and budgeting assumptions including an analysis of certified grand lists growth over the last 20 years, the average of which was from 0.79% to 1.00% without revaluation. They used the tax collection rate of 98.5% and local revenues remain strong.

Ms. Capriola said the Governor proposed a budget cap on motor vehicle mill rates at 29 mills with reimbursement contribution to the Town estimated at \$2,006,464. Also, the proposed ECS will increase by \$466,228.

### **• GENERAL GOVERNMENT REQUESTS**

#### **• Town Clerk (Tab 8)**

Ms. Munroe said the Town Clerk's office has three full time employees and their budget proposal will increase by 2.58%. They are focusing on applying for the CT State Library Historic Documents Preservation Grant of \$7,500. This grant is to preserve the Town's permanent records and organize records on high capacity shelving in the vault. They want to draft and implement a training and procedures manual for the Town Clerk's Department for cross-training. There is a proposed increase in salaries and computer software due to land record volume.

#### **• Registrars/Elections (Tab 7)**

Ms. Munroe said the proposed budget increase is 47.04% for the Registrars/Elections operating budget. FY 22/23 will include three elections. The increase includes salary increases, program supplies, equipment and maintenance, copy, printing, etc.

There was some discussion on the no excuse absentee ballot voting versus early voting.

- **IT (Tab 11)**

Mr. Bazzano said there are two full time employees in IT. They are asking for a 16.15% increase in their budget, which includes an increase in contractual services, salaries and benefits. He is asking for an Information Technology Specialist, staff computer replacements, the final phase of software upgrades and a cyber-security audit. His areas of focus are updating the disaster recovery plan, migrating remaining Town Departments to cloud-based email services, etc. He spoke about proposed service improvements due to a change in technology and the needs increase due to the scope of their responsibilities which include body and cruiser cameras, network storage, expanding Wi-Fi, video surveillance, on call support, etc. They are also on call 24/7. There was discussion on the technology challenges presented by COVID, and what they are looking for in a new employee.

- **Finances, including Revenue and Assessments (Tab 10)**

Ms. Meriwether said the Finance Department, Tax Collector, Assessment, and Board of Finance proposed budget proposed increase is 3.07%. Some of the increase is for wage increases and benefits. They want to maintain a Aaa bond rating and keep adequate reserves. They want to implement procedures, address the auditor's comments, maintain the tax collection rate, continue to value property fairly, assist contracted vendors for 2022 revaluation, etc. A new Deputy Finance Director, who just came on board, will help us to move forward and streamline the auditor's suggestions.

Ms. Meriwether went through the budget highlights which included a software increase, increase in contractual service contracts, related wage and negotiated contract increases, etc. Ms. Meriwether said they need help with a backlog of fieldwork which is cost neutral. This position was approved last year, but there hasn't been a lot of interest in the position and others have not been qualified. They need to be more flexible with this position. There was some discussion on shared services for this position. They discussed the revaluation process and cost. This service has gone out to bid.

Ms. Meriwether said the proposed CNR project is to fund revaluation, which occurs every 5 years.

- **Town Manager's Office, General Government, Legal (Tab 4)**

Ms. Appleby went through the Town Manager's Office proposed FY 2022/23 budget increase of 2.19%. There are four full time employees in that office. There is an increase of 2.35% for salaries, as well as a small increase in the seasonal account due to the increase in minimum wage.

General government proposed increase is 8.56% which include tuition reimbursement, copying, postage, telephone, training, etc. She said there are anticipating an increase in telephone services and mobile data services, education and conferences. There was some discussion on education and conferences and how they were planned and funded.

- **Board of Selectmen Public Agencies/Community Service (Tab 5)**
- **Boards and Commissions (Tab 6)**

Ms. Appleby said the Board of Selectmen/Community Service on tab 5 proposed increase is just under 1% which includes the First Selectman stipend, funding for the Board of Selectmen clerk and other clerks.

Ms. Appleby said this tab also includes money for posting legal notices in the newspapers, dues and membership fees. There is an increase for Farmington Watershed, North Central EMS Council, Greater Hartford Transit District and Amplify, which are based on a per capita fee. Remaining funds in Public Agency Support reflects FY21/22 approved requests.

Outside agency grants are level funded, but there is a slight increase for those on a per-capita basis. There is one new request and SCTV, Main Street Partnership, Chamber of Commerce and Hartford Interval House are looking for increases. These items will be further discussed at the meeting on Saturday.

Ms. Capriola said the Health budget is regarding our contribution to the Farmington Valley Health District. They are asking for an increase of 3.43%. The census population has decreased. Our contribution is on a proportional share based on our population. The Health District is preparing a list of pandemic recovery needs and that could potentially be funded with ARPA dollars.

The Town Manager's Office is focusing on updating rules and regulations which haven't been updated since 2009, negotiating successor agreements to the collective bargaining agreements that are expiring or already expired. They also support the work of the Board of Selectmen and other committees, and they are focusing on spending the ARPA dollars. They are also working on the preservation of the Meadowood properties. There is a RFP out for the agricultural parcel and are looking forward to working with a good steward of that land.

- **General Liability and Workmen's Compensation Insurance (Tab 19)**

Ms. Appleby said the proposed operating budget increase is 0.02% which includes liability, worker's compensation, cyber, crime, underground storage tanks, etc.

Ms. Capriola said the health insurance fund is stable. They are recommending no increase. The estimated fund balance for FY 22/23 is 26% of expected claims, which is a good place to be. She went through the employee benefits assumptions, OPEB and pension.

- **Health Insurance Fund (Tab 25)**

Ms. Capriola said the Health Insurance Fund is in stable position. The estimated fund balance is 26% of expected claims. Claims have been down due to the pandemic. The employee benefits interest rate of assumption is 6.5% with the existing rate of 6.65%. Utilizing a 6.5% interest rate results in increases which applies to pension plans and OPEB trust.

- **CNR Projects**

Ms. Appleby went through the proposed FY 22/23 CNR projects which included Public Safety radio system maintenance and repairs. She said there will be a \$10,000 operating transfer. The Town and Fire District will split mutually agreed costs. Ms. Appleby said there are two expenses for FY 22/23 to replace the microwave link between Wintonbury Tower and Main Fire Station and the inspection of the Firetown Tower.

• **Community Development**

• **Building/Planning (Tab 12)**

Mr. Miga said there are 7.54 full time employees in the Building Department, including one employee that is contracted to Bloomfield. Ms. Appleby said there is an increase in planning salaries. Planning and Building use shared permitted software.

He went through the areas of focus including rewriting zoning regulations, creating a permit book, FEMA flood insurance rate maps, engaging in plan reviews, permitting and inspections, etc. They are trying to close out old permits for sold/transferred houses.

They will be engaging in residential development and reviewing security and inspections at Talcott Mountain, Highcroft Place, Barber Cove, etc.

• **Community Services**

• **Social Services (Tab 16)**

Ms. Formanek said they are asking for a 2.76% increase for Community and Social Services due to contractual increases and step increases. There are 6.31 full time employees in their department.

She said they are focusing on following the increase in demand in needed services due to the pandemic and the relocation of the Food Pantry and donations. She wants to higher two new social workers possibly using ARPA funds to help implement new programming. These funds need to be used by 12/31/26.

Ms. Formanek said there are some proposed service improvements including Youth and Family Social Worker and a Community Social Worker. There will be start-up costs when hiring the new staff along with supervision costs. An interim social worker will support pandemic recovery through mental health and well-being for the residents. They are focusing on following the increase in demand in services, knowledge of programs and services.

There was a lot of discussion on the increase in demand for referrals and not being able to refer people to anyone as no one is available.

The proposed Youth and Family Social Worker is about outreach and programs services for youth and families, which includes parent education. She said there is a new global trend for clinical social workers to work with the Police Department for cases related to mental health and family issues.

Ms. Formanek said the proposed community social worker would perform outreach services for residents under age 64 and follows up with police calls related to family violence, substance abuse, mental health crisis, etc. There is a mental health crisis in America, not just in Simsbury.

There was a lot of discussion on hiring two new people for these services and how to pay for them. The Board asked for more data on what social services does now and what the new employees will be used for. There will be further discussion at the budget meeting on Saturday.

**ADJOURN**

Mr. Peterson made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. Mr. Askham seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathi Radocchio  
Clerk