

REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

APRIL 8, 2021

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Tax Collector: There was no notable increase to the budget. Fairfield is one of 12 towns who still collect taxes quarterly which is labor intensive so they will be investigating transitioning to twice a year collections.

Economic Development: Mark Barnhart said the budget includes funding to update the Town website and the elimination of the administrative assistant replaced with a marketing coordinator.

Active Employee Benefits: CFO Jared Schmitt said the BOF decreased the amount requested by the First Selectwoman based on AON's calculations and the reduction in the number of employees. In response to Jill Vergara, it was explained that there is now a surcharge for Fairfield County municipalities participating in CT 2.0 as healthcare is more expensive in this region. Carlton Lindgren said there was no advantage to moving the Town program to CT 2.0 unlike the initial move that the BOE made particularly now with the surcharge.

Human Resources: Jim Haselkamp explained the increases for software products and license fees including the online application system, Test Genius, and the time & attendance collection system. Two employees have been hired as a result of VERIP and reorganization and is now fully staffed. The increases in education and membership is for staff development and training opportunities.

Insurance: Risk Manager Pat Egan explained the increase for workers comp, heart & hypertension liability and property insurances noting the volatility with flood insurance. Town Attorney Jim Baldwin noted there is language in the agreement for the regional 911 center that says liability will be covered by the municipality where the call is responded to. Risk management will be discussed in further detail in executive session at a later time.

Unemployment Compensation: Unemployment benefits have been extended due to Covid19. The Town gets reimbursed by the federal government for the supplement.

Legal Services: Town Attorney Jim Baldwin explained the budgetary increase was due to the increase in the number of tax appeals, contract reviews, and compliance issues. Attorney Baldwin said his hourly rate is the same as his predecessor's. Legal services are professional services that are not required to go out to bid according to the Town's purchasing policy. Attorney Baldwin will provide an accounting of the various law firms retained by the Town in response to Ms. Vergara's request.

First Selectwoman Kupchick and Attorney Baldwin explained the difference between SLR the environmental firm who is assisting the Conservation Department in the daily operations and the law firm that is providing services regarding compliance with land issues. There will be additional legal fees associated with compliance and oversight with the fill pile; the FEMA appeal for Penfield Pavilion was also denied.

Police: Chief Kalamaras said the budgetary increases were due to contractual salary increases, training and the policy accountability act and technology costs. He further explained that cell phones, radio lines, and vehicle computers were all contained in the communications line item and the taser replacement program.

Lengthy discussion ensued regarding staffing, response to domestic violence calls, training, traffic calming and various enforcement programs.

Fire: Chief McCarthy noted that the CBA expires on June 30th and is currently in negotiation. He expects 4 recruits in the fire academy next year. The budget also contains a fire inspector for half the year. He explained the SCBA replacement program as the current units do not meet standards.

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Board of Education: Superintendent Mike Cummings said the budget supports investments in social emotional learning, diversity and equity initiatives, early literacy, and indoor air quality/HVAC improvements. The major budget drivers are staff salaries and benefits, the operation and maintenance of buildings and transportation costs.

Special education population changes have increased from 2010/11. There has been a decrease in high school enrollment but an increase in elementary school enrollment. The system is well supported by the Town with a PPE of \$19,143 ranked 66 in the state.

Targeted enhancements include early literacy academy, elementary social workers, teacher residency program, teacher stipends, indoor air quality and preventative maintenance. 34 staff were in the remote learning academy temporarily and will move into general. The SR2 program at the high school this summer will be grant funded.

A suicide prevention policy has been in place since 2011 and was updated last year. Funding has been increased in the elementary schools; support staff is one of the district's strengths in which intervention is provided as early as possible. In-person learning has had a positive impact on the students as they are back with their friends and not isolated. Social-emotional learning opportunities provide support as early as possible. It was new to students to learn remotely which created anxiety for them to keep their grades up. The district is meeting the state instructional level hours; the summer program was not budgeted for as federal funds will be used towards it. Assessments are used to identify reading needs and language arts support for students who are struggling early on who are not special education

Superintendent Cummings explained that they are awaiting State guidance for the RLA as they do not know if there will be a regional approach in the fall or if federal funding can be considered for it. Students who have medical conditions with doctor's instructions to learn from home will learn remotely as their condition does not allow for them to come to school for a period of time.

Doreen Munsall explained next year will be the 2nd year of the 2% surcharge for the CT 2.0 health insurance. The SR2 funds for summer school is a 2-year grant that allows for spending up to \$1.2 million over 2 years.

In response to a question from Ms. Iacono about cost saving measures Mr. Cummings agreed that the spending growth was not sustainable, and cited work that has begun to address this by the BOE Finance Committee, and also revisions to the District Improvement Plan. Mr. Cummings also agreed to have the BOE Finance Committee copy the RTM and BOF on agendas and meeting minutes to keep the Bodies informed.

Discussion ensued regarding revenue enhancements, long-term goals that need to be built into the District Improvement Plan, high school enrollment, and 5-year budget projections.

While reviewing several budget requests between the Town and BOE, representatives suggested projects may be eligible for federal stimulus funds/Build Back Better Infrastructure funding. The US Treasury is developing the criteria and the town administration is working with Congressman Himes' Office on the most current information as they prioritize a list of shovel ready projects.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC
Town Clerk