

A special meeting of the Town of Fairfield was held on Monday, May 2, 2022 at 6:30 PM via Webex.  
[RTM 5-2-2022 Budget Appeal Session - YouTube](#)

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Moderator Mark McDermott.

PRESENT: 39                      ABSENT: 0                      VACANCY: 1

PRESENT: Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Perham, Steele, Durrell, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Gale, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

VACANCY for Schwartz

**ITEM NO. 1 ON CALL:**                      PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & MOMENT OF SILENCE

Moderator McDermott led the Body in the Pledge of Allegiance

**ITEM NO. 2 ON CALL:**                      TO HEAR AND CONSIDER AN APPEAL BY THE FIRST SELECTWOMAN AND THE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES FROM THE FOLLOWING VOTE OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE PERTAINING TO THE HR (1330) BUDGET:

TO REDUCE ACCT. #51010 BY \$110,517 AND ACCT. #52200 BY \$8,454 (REQUEST FULL RESTORATION)

<u>Requested</u>		<u>Board of Finance approved</u>
Acct. 51010	\$522,770	412,253
Acct. 52200	\$39,959	31,505

Jay Wolk, District 5 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

HR Director Jim Haselkamp said he was asked to put together a model for the HR department addressing the lack of diversity and affirmative action in town before he leaves. He thought it would be better to have an asst. HR director than a risk manager as it would be more valuable to address some of the deficiencies and focus on some of the bigger issues facing the department like developing an affirmative action plan.

First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick explained the importance of the HR Department and enumerated the different functions from labor relations, employee benefits, staff services to recruitment, insurance, pension, workers comp and FOIA. With the reorganization of other departments and the VERIP, the focus was on reorganizing the HR department in this budget. They took the risk manager position and moved those responsibilities to the asst. HR director and added an HR generalist and diversity recruitment coordinator. These changes would benefit the community at large.

**Public Comment:**

Speaking in support of the restoration of funds were: Town Engineer Bill Hurley, Fire Chief Denis McCarthy, Police Chief Bob Kalamaras, DPW Director John Marsilio, Human & Social Services Director Julie DeMarco and Health Director Sands Cleary.

## REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

May 2, 2022

Page 2 of 5

Speaking on behalf of the majority of the BOF Chair Lori Carlton clarified that the BOF did not cut the risk manager position. Mr. Haselkamp had said the department was dysfunctional but he has led the department for two years. It is not the role of the BOF to decide how to structure the department having approved 4 of the 5 FTEs in the budget request. The priority should be hiring a new HR director who will own it and will have time to assess the department structure and people before restructuring the dept. In researching other municipal HR departments there is no typical structure as some have payroll as an HR function and others as a finance function, pension or labor negotiations are outsourced while others are in house.

Ms. Carlton further explained that the budget request should have been accompanied by goals or accomplishments as there was more compelling information to support of other personnel requests such as police and senior center. She looked forward to seeing the HR department getting a fresh start.

Sharon Pistilli, District 3 asked if there were any metrics in place to measure the need for this role to which Mr. Haselkamp said there are systems such as Munis that need a reboot.

Marcy Spolyar suggested putting the diversity coordinator in next year and asked how long the risk manager position has been vacant to which Mr. Haselkamp replied 6 weeks.

Jeff Steele, District 2 said the Body not only heard from the First Selectwoman and HR Director but also other department heads made very compelling arguments as to how important the department is in assisting them in carrying out their work.

Liz Zezima, District 4 said more thought should have gone into letting the risk manager go and asked what percentage of the asst. HR director's time should be allocated to risk management. Mr. Haselkamp felt there was capacity there for the asst. HR director to take on risk management. It is not good practice to leave a person in place when their position is being cut in the budget. Workers comp is a big issue we need to mitigate risk with a safety plan. The asst. HR director would have more responsibilities in labor management as well.

Margaret Horton, District 9 said there is a need for a more robust HR department but where is the data to support the use of the funds or is it the personnel or systems. Mr. Haselkamp said the dollars are the same; the cut that was made is the same as the risk manager. He further explained there is little diversity in the workforce and the need for an affirmative action plan to diversify the workforce.

Ken Astarita, District 10 asked if any members of the BOF spoke with Mr. Haselkamp prior to cutting the \$118,000 to which Ms. Charlton replied only during the budget presentation.

Pamela Iacono, District 8 cited her experience as an HR professional and how she couldn't understand how the department functioned without an HR generalist. In her experience on the RTM, she had not heard of other department heads speaking on behalf of another department to reinstate funding. There were things the Body wanted from the VERIP such as job descriptions and analyses but we didn't get them because the department is understaffed. If the BOF had been given more information perhaps it would have helped.

Ms. Pistilli asked what the process was for creating the CAO position to which First Selectwoman Kupchick explained she went to the BOF with a request to transfer funds from two departments that had vacant positions then put the position in the next budget. Ms. Pistilli asked if a funding request could be made after the HR director is in place to which Ms. Charlton said that is the process. Ms. Pistilli suggested the best approach be to wait and see the talents of the new HR director and fill in the gaps below.

REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

May 2, 2022

Page 3 of 5

**VOTE:** The motion to sustain the appeal by the First Selectwoman & Human Resources Director failed to gain a two thirds majority with 17 in favor and 22 opposed.

**IN FAVOR:** Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Steele, Durrell, Gale, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

**OPPOSED:** Perham, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton

**ITEM NO. 3 ON CALL:** TO HEAR AND CONSIDER AN APPEAL BY THE FIRST SELECTWOMAN AND THE DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES FROM THE FOLLOWING VOTE OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE PERTAINING TO THE HR (1330) BUDGET:

TO ELIMINATE RISK MANAGEMENT ACCT. #58920 (REQUEST TO RESTORE \$500,000)

	<u>Requested</u>	<u>Board of Finance approved</u>
Acct. 58920	\$850,000	0

Jay Wolk, District 5 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

CFO Jared Schmitt explained all the cases are reviewed and discern what will be necessary to resolve them. This is part of the internal service fund (ISF), but they are not asking for a full restoration only \$500,000. The credit rating agencies do not want to see dramatic changes to funding. There is a \$6 million fund balance but because of Covid 19 restrictions there were fewer instances of people going to the doctor or court cases being heard so the fund grew during an unprecedented time. Mr. Schmitt's concern is potential scrutiny from the rating agencies regarding funding.

Ms. Charlton explained the \$850,000 was cut because the ISF has adequate reserves for all existing claims. The cushion of \$6 million is on top of the aggregate liability for litigation, medical and workers comp. the expenses to the fund are the aforementioned claims and the revenue comes from the general fund transfer. FY20 is an anomaly because of Covid19, but workers comp claims have been trending down. After cutting the \$850,000 there is still a cushion of \$5.2 million

There is no ISF fund balance policy, however if we apply the federal fund balance policy it would be \$1.1 to \$1.5 million. The ISF was critically underfunded but the fund balance has been built up. The \$850,000 would not be spent and should not be in the budget.

Selectman Tom Flynn said the Town had been on a negative watch from the rating agencies because of underfunding. They had adopted a policy to fund it to cover the activity for each year. He noted these are only estimates, but he has seen a lot of volatility in the ISF and General Fund. He suggested the BOF review the policy before moving the fund balance down in one year.

Ms. Zezima said this cut is saving taxpayers money.

REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

May 2, 2022

Page 4 of 5

Ed Bateson, District 1 said at the end of FY23 we will see more medical claims following the pandemic. He felt the \$500,000 restoration was reasonable considering the risk and the estimates that AON provides.

Dru Georgiadis, District 9 said she could not support over taxation.

**VOTE:** The motion to sustain the appeal by the First Selectwoman & Human Resources Director failed to gain a two thirds majority with 17 in favor and 22 opposed.

**IN FAVOR:** Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Steele, Durrell, Gale, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

**OPPOSED:** Perham, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton

**ITEM NO. 4 ON CALL:** TO HEAR AND CONSIDER AN APPEAL BY THE FIRST SELECTWOMAN AND THE CHIEF FISCAL OFFICER FROM THE FOLLOWING VOTE OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE PERTAINING TO THE CONTINGENCY (2010) BUDGET:

TO REDUCE THE CONTINGENCY ACCOUNT #58010 BY \$350,000 (REQUEST FULL RESTORATION)

	<u>Requested</u>	<u>Board of Finance approved</u>
Contingency	\$2,768,149	2,418,149

Joe Seibert, District 5 moved this item as distributed with the Call, duly seconded.

CFO Jared Schmitt explained the “normal contingency” is the only tool that is not spoken for in some way that can be transferred quickly by the BOF if necessary in case of an emergency. The appeal is about the risk to the Town, not the money, if we lose the ability in a funding emergency if this goes away. He cited the fire union arbitration’s unknown impact on the contingency account.

Ms. Charlton disagreed that contingency is the only tool in an emergency as it has not been used for that purpose. The Town has generated a surplus every year and is handled outside the budget process such as using surplus toward OPEB. Actual emergencies have occurred and costs have been absorbed through the budget.

Hannah Gale, District 6 asked what impact this has on operations if it’s unavailable. First selectwoman Kupchick said every project has a contingency and there needs to be some flexibility by having a contingency account.

Ms. Georgiadis said it is evident Mr. Schmitt cares about the Town and asked if he thinks the Boards would not approve funding, and if the BOE has a contingency account. Mr. Schmitt said he was concerned about committing funds as it takes time to get the three boards’ approvals; it’s not the dollar amount but the time to go through the process. First Selectwoman Kupchick said there was a contingency transfer for the BOE in FY18 for \$141k.

Ms. Charlton said it is her understanding the BOE does not have a contingency account. The administration request transfers from contingency or from department to department.

REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

May 2, 2022

Page 5 of 5

Budget Director Frank Magneri explained 3 CBAs were settled after the BOF vote. The retroactive payments for FY22 are in the FY22 contingency. When formulating the FY23 budget there were no settled contracts so the prior year salary information is in the department salary lines and the estimated increase is in the salary contingency; there is no double accounting.

Christine Vitale, BOE Chair said the BOE does not have a contingency and the transfer from contingency in FY18 was to move the BOE maintenance into a new location.

Ms. Zezima asked if contingency can be earmarked to which Ms. Charlton replied yes, but it is not binding.

Jill Vergara, District 7 said there were 6 open CBAs that were used in calculating the contingency and even after the BOF cut there is still \$2.4 million.

**VOTE:** The motion to sustain the appeal by the First Selectwoman & CFO failed to gain a two thirds majority with 17 in favor and 22 opposed.

IN FAVOR: Bateson, Furey, Longo, Ruggiero, McCormack, Steele, Durrell, Gale, Ference, Iacono, Messina, P. Tallman, Scinto, Astarita, Britton, Petise, S. Tallman

OPPOSED: Perham, Galdenzi, Lambert, Pistilli, Karson, Kelly, Spolyar, Zezima, Diaz, Garskof, Siebert, Wolk, Berecz, Graceffa, Havey, Kuhn, McDermott, Vergara, Wackerman, Brown, Georgiadis, Horton

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC  
Town Clerk