

Woodstock Board of Finance Minutes

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

7:00 pm

Woodstock Middle School Cafeteria

Public Hearing

A recording of this meeting can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfucCXMkImE>

1. **Call to order:** Chairman Michael Dougherty called hearing to order at 7:02 pm
2. **Roll Call**
 - a. **BOF Members Present:** Michael Dougherty (Chairman)
David Fortin
Fred Chmura
Jeffrey Kelleher
Michele Woz
Asa Scranton, Alternate
Philip Parizeau, Alternate
Julie Marcotte, Alternate
 - b. **Others Present:** First Selectman Jay Swan, Town Clerk Judy Walberg, Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick, Selectman Chandler Paquette, Selectwoman Kate McDonald, Woodstock Public Schools Business Manager Janice Thurlow, Superintendent of Schools Victor Toth, Recording Secretary Amy Monahan and approximately 70 members of the public.
3. **Reading of Public Hearing Notice**
 - a. Chairman Michael Dougherty read the public hearing notice for the record.
4. **Elect Moderator**
 - a. Judy Walberg was ***Nominated** to be moderator by Karen Fitzpatrick and ***Seconded** by Jay Swan. ***Judy Walberg was unanimously elected Moderator of the Public Hearing.**
 - b. Judy Walberg reminded those present of the rules and procedures of public hearings.
5. **General Government Budget and Five Year Capital Plan Presentation**
 - a. Jay Swan thanked everyone for attending and noted that the Board of Selectmen have chosen to present a FY 24 24 budget based on the requests that were received from department heads, board and commissions and outside organizations which provide social services and regional services for the town. Jay Swan stated that the budget request may not be attainable but it is the duty of the Board of Selectmen to let the citizens of Woodstock and the Board of Finance be made aware of the requests that have been made. This request budget proposal reflects an increase of approximately 14% from FY 23 including debt service.
 - i. Jay Swan noted the following increases for a total proposed increase of \$799,537
 1. Debt Increase-Local Bridge Project of 34.5% or \$276,547
 2. EMS 24/7 Service with paid EMT's/EMR's of 32.8% or \$262,614
 3. General Government Services of 11.3% or \$90,999
 4. Health Insurance of 5.4% or \$42,800
 5. Public Recreation, Health & Welfare (including TEEG, Libraries, United Services, Elderly Nutrition, etc.) of 4% or \$32,300

Woodstock Board of Finance Minutes

6. Northeast District Department of Health (NDDH) of 3.8% or \$30,777
7. Highway Department Diesel/Gas of 3.3% or \$26,500
8. Pension (CT MERS) of 2.4% or \$19,000
9. Fire Services (including Fire Marshal) of 2.3% or \$18,000
- ii. Jay Swan reviewed the Five-Year Capital Plan and the projects that the Town wishes to complete this year in the total amount of \$1,813,650. The capital plan is a multi-year projection of the town capital needs and does not represent a commitment to funding. This document is available to view on the Town Website along with other FY Budget documents - <https://www.woodstockct.gov/board-finance/pages/fy24-budget-information>

6. Questions and Comments- General Government

- a. Suzanne Woodward noted concern with the vision appraisal process; specifically, how evaluation of only half of the properties in town impacted the values of all the homes in the town. Jay Swan noted that is part of the reason that he wants to change to a company that will complete evaluation and actual inspection of all properties during the revaluation process.
- b. Glen Lessig thanked town officials for the presentation of the requested budget increases.
- c. A question was asked about the why Highway department telephone budget shows such a high dollar amount. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that all teamsters are reimbursed for personal cell phone charges per union contract in addition to regular phone and internet charges at the Town Garage.
- d. A resident referenced the \$20,000 increase to open space and asked if the town was purchasing a parcel. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that the Open Space Land Acquisition & Preservation Committee is a statutory committee that builds funding annually for future purchases and that each year the request from the committee is reviewed and funds allocated appropriately.
- e. Lindsay Paul asked if there was a comparison sheet with values by department from year to year. She suggested creating a document with that information that is easy to view for presentation to the public.
- f. Judy Walberg asked if the town of Eastford participates in the costs of the dam repair at Crystal Pond Park. Jay Swan noted that the town of Eastford will split costs 50\50 with the town of Woodstock for all costs associated with the dam repairs as both towns jointly own Crystal Pond Park.
- g. A question was asked about the Bridge projects on the Capital Plan and timelines of those projects. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that the capital plan is a wish list of projects that need to be done and can help with funding processes in some situations. The current bridge projects were approved in the 2018 budget but have taken 4 years to go through process to start construction. It was first suggested by the state to address the bridges in 2011.
- h. It was asked what the expectation for the mil rate is moving forward. Judy Walberg repeated that this presentation is the budget as requested by departments. The actual budget number will be determined at the next Board of Finance meeting on April 11th
- i. It was asked why some items on capital plan operational instead of capital investment items. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that Revaluation is a statute that allows for CNR funds to be used for payment if it cannot be paid out of the town budget. Having an item on the capital plan allows for use of funds for those items out of CNR if needed in addition to the budget funds allocated. The capital plan also allows for some items to receive grant reimbursement for items if they are on the capital plan. The capital plan is a tool for use of funds in some instances.
- j. Suzanne Woodward asked about the money from fire departments that has been used for EMS staffing and if it will be reimbursed to the fire departments. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that the fire department funds used would be repaid by purchase of the requested ambulance with ARPA funds.
- k. A resident asked about the increase in EMS costs. It was noted that the number presented included all items applicable to EMS and came directly from EMS. This new rate for EMS would be the new base for

Woodstock Board of Finance Minutes

rates going forward in future years. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that EMS is a state mandated service and other options for this service could be even more expensive than proposed by our Woodstock EMS.

- l. A resident asked if people can still volunteer for EMS. Jay Swan noted that certified EMS responders can volunteer as long as they are not paid by our EMS entity. There are labor laws that do not allow paid employees to volunteer additional hours for the work they are paid to perform.
- m. A resident questioned the missing allocation for the Town planner in the Land Use Department. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that town planner is now a regional position with NECCOG but remains on the land use budget sheet until 3 years removed per a legal statute.
- n. A resident asked about benzene costs in the budget. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that the Town of Woodstock is legally obligated to monitor and address all benzene levels until no trace of benzene is found. This is result of a spill at the Elementary School many years ago.
- o. A resident asked if the increase EMS cost is essentially better pay to increase response times. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that is the goal of the change to paid EMS and that response times have already greatly improved in the Town of Woodstock with this change.
- p. A resident asked about the large increase in NDDH services from last year. This increase in the per capita rate was billed to towns without warning in the last billing cycle. Many towns, including Woodstock, are working together to address the rate increase and are looking into other options for Health Services.
- q. It was asked what the philosophy with salary increases was as there seem to be discrepancies in rates of increase. Judy Walberg noted that highway and town hall union rates are set percentages. Karen Fitzpatrick noted that Woodstock salaries for professionals are lower compared to other towns of similar size and the salary increases are requests to get salaries to a fair rate of pay.
- r. A resident asked if there are items that the town could make money on like the Woodstock Fair. Michele Woz noted that an Ad Hoc committee has been formed to look at all things like this and hopefully will have a report in the fall.
- s. A resident asked about the \$1200 allocation for the Economic Development Commission. Judy Walberg explained current commission is a volunteer commission and focus has been on promoting town business operations.
- t. Suzanne Woodward asked about raising permit fees to a rate that would allow the transfer station to become self-sufficient. The Board of Selectmen has been discussing this concept and continues to develop a plan for the transfer station in the future. Judy Walberg noted that only a small portion of the town residents use the transfer station.
- u. A resident asked how the solar farm at the old dump location benefits the town. Power from that solar field is used to offset electric costs for the municipal use including Town Hall, Transfer Station and Highway Garage. The Public Schools also have their own solar field that offsets the cost of electric in the Public School buildings.

7. Board of Education Budget and Five-Year Capital Plan Presentation

- a. Superintendent of Schools Victor Toth presented key information from the Board of Education budget. He noted that according to the budget survey sent out to the town, 67% felt that education is of high importance and 72% would like to see an increase in education spending.
- b. Victor Toth reviewed the 3-year plan to change our rating of 164th out of 169 towns in CT.
 - i. 23-24 Improvement Plan Budget Items include: Math Instructional Coach, 4th Grade Teacher (due to number of students increased in current grade 3), Restoration of Library Media Specialist to be sheared between WMS and WES, Additional Pre-K Teacher with 3 paraprofessionals (due to large number of students on waitlist every year), Funding for remainder of EL Materials, Professional Development on Differentiation Strategies, WMS LA Series consumables, WES Software Licenses

Woodstock Board of Finance Minutes

- ii. 24-25 Improvement Plan Budget Items include: Math Coordinator, Literacy Coach K-8, Illustrative Math or Envision Math Series Grades 5-8, Continue with LA Series consumables at WMS, Social Studies Curriculum Alignment, Science Curriculum Alignment, Technology Refresh (smart displays, laptops & tablets)
- iii. 24-25 Improvement Plan Budget Items include: Health and Wellness Teacher WES, 2nd Math Instructional Coach, 2nd Literacy Coach, Spanish Teacher, Literacy Coordinator K-8, Social Studies Series WMS, Technology Refresh (smart displays, laptops & tablets)
- c. Key increases in the FY 24 budget proposal include Special Education cost increase, additional staffing, tuition costs increase, increase in salaries and contractual items. The budget also includes the Woodstock Elementary School tunnel encapsulation project.
- d. The proposed budget request is for a total Board of Education budget of \$22,771,317 which is a 13.09% increase. This proposal can be viewed on the Board of Education Website- https://core-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/485/District/2889997/23-24_Proposed_Budget.pdf
- e. Victor Toth noted that the district is lucky to have the Woodstock Education Foundation (WEF) and the PTO that help to fund many educational programs for Woodstock students.
- f. Janice Thurlow reviewed capital projects including gym floors, encapsulation, capital assessment, security grant, intercom systems, picket fence at WES, carpet replacements, air conditioning on additional levels of WMS.

8. Questions and Comments- Board of Education

- a. A resident referenced the improvement plan that raised expenditures per pupil and stated that he would like to see plan to improve performance and how to track that improvement. Victor Toth noted that the curriculums purchased in the improvement plan will improve student performance and be measured by the testing outcomes.
- b. A resident requested the average class size in the school system. Victor Toth noted that almost every grade level has lost one teacher in recent years and classes currently range from 20 to 25 students depending on the grade.
- c. A resident asked what are the numbers for enrolment in Woodstock Academy are currently and projected to be for the upcoming year. It was noted that the tuition number will decrease from 477 current students to 425 for the upcoming year. However, special education enrollment and STRIVE enrollment will both increase in number and cost extra on top of the tuition amount in the budget.
- d. It was noted that the capital assessment is in both the education budget and capital plan.
- e. A resident asked what the fair market salary range is for 4th grade teachers. Our starting \$47,000 salary is currently at the bottom of Windham county salary range.
- f. A resident asked about the high increases in audit and cyber services and what the process is for acquiring those services. It was noted that only one audit service bid and that was the fee of that bid. It was also noted that cyber services have not been raised in 7 years (in that time, software has been added in every grade level).
- g. It was noted that ARPA funded positions were teachers hired in order to provide remediation and recovery in the school system and included 2 language arts teachers, a social worker and a Special Education teacher. These positions are now part of the school staffing and would remain as paid positions in the proposed budget after ARPA funding is depleted.
- h. A resident asked what a ½ part media specialist position is. Victor Toth clarified that this position would be split between providing 7th and 8th grade research skills and librarian functions.
- i. A resident asked what the value of each student having an iPad is. Victor Toth noted that all testing is currently done on devices but lower grades may not need individual iPad in the future.

Woodstock Board of Finance Minutes

- j. A resident asked what the procedure is for the budget process going forward. Michael Dougherty noted that the Board of Finance will meet next Tuesday to decide an acceptable budget amount to go to town meeting and referendum.
- k. A resident asked what a Principal Sub position is. Victor Toth stated it is a permanent sub that goes into the classrooms every day even if not teacher is absent. The increase for this position is 100% because it was previously paid by ARPA funds. It was noted that current sub rates are as follows: teachers get \$120 per day, a retired teacher gets \$130 per day and paras get paid by the hour.
- l. Glen Lessig asked for perspective of the changes with the repeal of Prop 46. Michael Dougherty stated that if Prop 46 was still in place the maximum increase allowed would be \$1,342,892 or .92 mil increase or 4.41 % to tax bill. This proposed budget would be 3.15 mil or 15.1% as presented.
- m. It was clarified that the Woodstock Academy tuition does include capital assessment for all students from all towns that attend the school. The Board of Finance has asked to pay that separately in the past under prop 46 restrictions.
- n. I was clarified that Recovery of Education due to financial restrictions is replacing positions that have been lost over the years to benefit the students.
- o. A resident asked about the previous Gifted and Talented program and if that will be brought back to the school system. Victor Toth noted that there is an enrichment teacher that could go full time if other positons that she currently covers are staffed.
- p. A resident shared a compliment to all involved this town and stated that they are doing a great job in being professional and well educated. Thank you to all.

9. Announcements

- a. The next Board of Finance meeting will be on April 11, 2023 at 7 pm. At this time, the Board of Finance will set a proposed budget amount for FY24. This meeting may be moved to the Woodstock Middle School to better accommodate public participation. Please watch the town website for location details.
- b. The Annual Town Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 2, 2023 at 7 pm.
- c. The Budget Referendum will be held on Tuesday, May 9, 2023 from noon to 8 pm.

10. Adjournment

- a. Michele Woz made a ***Motion** to adjourn. ***Seconded** by Michael Dougherty. ***The meeting adjourned at 9:17 pm.**

Respectfully submitted by Amy Monahan, Recording Secretary. DISCLAIMER: These minutes have not yet been approved by the Board of Finance. Please refer to next month's meeting for approval/amendments.