

**TOWN OF WILLINGTON
ANNUAL TOWN BUDGET MEETING MINUTES
GENERAL GOVERNMENT AND EDUCATION
APRIL 18, 2023**

Selectman Michael Makuch called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM and read the call of the meeting:

The electors of the Town of Willington and all persons who are entitled to vote in Town Meeting on the matters mentioned in the following warning are hereby warned and notified to meet at the OLD TOWN HALL at 11 COMMON ROAD in WILLINGTON on Tuesday, April 18, 2023 at 7:00 P.M. for the following purposes:

ITEM I

To discuss the proposed General Government and Education budgets for the fiscal year July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. A summary of the Town budget is:

Estimated	
General Government Budget	
Operating	\$5,289,014
Capital:	
School Bond	0
General Purpose Bonds	150,000
Reserve Fund	1,460,000
Capital Expenditures	0
Capital Projects	0
TOTAL GENERAL GOVERNMENT	\$6,899,014
Estimated	
EDUCATION BUDGET K-8	\$ 9,151,473
REGION 19	\$ 4,404,178
TOTAL TOWN BUDGET	\$20,454,665
TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES	\$ 4,014,436
 To Be Raised by Taxation	 \$16,440,229
Less Applied Fund Balance	<u>1,000,000</u>
 NET AMOUNT TO BE RAISED BY TAXATION	 \$ 15,440,229

ITEM II

To set a date, not less than seven nor more than fourteen days thereafter, for a vote on the annual general government and education budgets by a separate "YES" or "NO" vote on the voting machines.

ITEM III

To set the Town Office Building as the polling place and to set the hours, of the referendum, during which votes may be cast, not less than between the hours of twelve o'clock noon and eight o'clock P.M. and not more than between the hours of six o'clock A.M. and eight o'clock P.M.

ITEM IV

To see if the townspeople, on the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen, will adopt the Capital Improvement Program for fiscal years 2024 to 2028.

Dated at Willington this 6thth day of April, 2023

Willington Board of Selectmen: Erika G. Wiecenski, Michael Makuch & Jim Bulick

Selectman Makuch then asked for nominations for a moderator.

Christine Psathas nominated Karen Doering to be moderator.

Suzanne Chapman seconded the motion.

Vote: Majority Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstentions

Motion passes

Moderator then asked to dispense another reading of the call. There were no objections.

Moderator then read ITEM 1:

To discuss the proposed General Government and Education Budgets for the Fiscal year July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. The Summary of the Town Budget is:

Estimated	
General Government Budget	
Operating	\$5,289,014
Capital:	
School Bond	0
General Purpose Bonds	150,000
Reserve Fund	1,460,000
Capital Expenditures	0
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Moderator opened the floor for discussion.

Geoff Prusak, who is the Vice Chairman of the Board of Finance noted that we are looking at a .75 millrate increase. The Board of Finance tried to stay as fiscally conservative as possible while trying to serve the needs of the Town.

Peter Tanaka noted he is the secretary of the Board of Finance. The BOF looked at the General Government budget, the grand list increase and took inflation and into account when preparing the budget. They also made sure all of the department's spending was necessary to be as fiscally responsible as possible. Mr. Tanaka added that the K-8 Board of Education did an exceptionally good job keeping their budget flat. The Region 19 population is going down.

Alicia Corsini asked why all of the budgets are notated as "estimated"? Christina Mailhos answered that we always use the term "estimated" when the proposed budget is brought to Town Meeting. We use it because things might happen and we usually do not overspend those numbers.

Nicholas Tella stated that he has a concern on the reserve fund that the money will be used to go towards a second Referendum.

Michael Makuch stated that will be commented on at the next "present to speak".

Donna Cook asked for an explanation on what "transfers to other funds" means?

Christina Mailhos explained that the Reserve fund is like the Town's savings account. The CIP Committee tries to figure how much money we need and how much we need to put aside for the next 5 years. We have also tried to increase that by 10% each year because it was under-funded for several years. Basically, it is a transfer into the savings account (into Fund 4) and as the year goes on and the projects come up, the departments make the requests to spend the funding from the Boards of Finance and Selectmen and then to Town Meeting to appropriate the funds. She noted that we also created a sub-fund (where the \$1 million) will go towards potential school projects – such as future roof repairs or HVAC projects for example.

Ms. Cook then asked if the money that the town voted on several years ago for the roofs is still on that fund? Ms. Mailhos answered no that money was returned and used for something else.

Peter Latinsics stated as a follow up to the word "estimated" on the proposed budget. He noted that he does not recall ever acting on our town budget or BOE budgets as "estimated". We should have confidence on the budget that we control. They should be the budgets that we see and are not changed. Michael Makuch noted that he has looked back at past budgets (to prepare for this meeting) and has seen "estimated" and it is not abnormal. It is worded that way because the budgets cannot go over the amount noted but can come in under, thus returning money at the end of the year.

Doug Roberts asked if the money in the Reserve Fund going towards a new roof will be enough to fund such a project and also asked if a roof would take a higher priority over a HVAC system? Christina Mailhos noted that at the time the CIP plan was finalized, we weren't sure what the next steps were going to be as the School Building Committee and the Board of Finance hadn't met yet, but they knew that the right thing to do was to put some money aside, so they had options. There is no specific project at this time.

Samantha Hills then asked for clarification regarding the funds in Fund 4 – as she has heard conflicting information – can the Board of Finance (once we have a newly elected Board in November) change the direction on where the money is spent? Michael Makuch answered no and the process to spend the funds has to go before the Board of Finance, then to the Board of Selectmen and then to Town Meeting. It is a 3 step process that will always be approved by the taxpayers at town meeting.

Walter Zalewa asked how do you set aside funding for a roof and then use the money elsewhere? Michael Makuch answered that the original project was approximately +/- \$200,000 after 60% state reimbursement. By the time the project was about to happen, it

grew to a \$1million project; noting that after reimbursements it wouldn't have cost the Town that much but closer to approximately \$350,000 at the time. The state cancelled the reimbursement funding because we had formed a School Building Committee. Mr. Makuch explained the State requirement (to receive the reimbursement) was that we would have to use the school for another 20 years. With the state pulling the funding back, it brought the roof project back up to \$1 million that the Town would have to fully pay; which was not in the budget; therefore the \$300,000 was returned. He clarified that a million dollars wasn't floating around.

Walter Zalewa asked why we don't end the School Building committee. Moderator noted that the SBC is not on the topic of this discussion. Alicia Corsini clarified that the budget clearly states that the line is going to the School Building Committee. Christina Mailhos clarified that the line that they were referring to can be used towards any school project or for SBC if they have a need.

Moderator then closed discussion on ITEM I, noting that it will adjourn to Referendum, therefore no vote.

Moderator then read ITEM II:

To set a date, not less than seven nor more than fourteen days thereafter, for a vote on the annual general government and education budgets by a separate "YES" or "NO" vote on the voting machines.

Christine Psathas moved to set the Budget Referendum date to Tuesday, May 2, 2023.

Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.

There was no discussion.

Vote: Majority Yes, 3 No, 0 Abstentions

Motion carries.

ITEM III was then read:

To set the Town Office Building as the polling place and to set the hours, of the referendum, during which votes may be cast, not less than between the hours of twelve o'clock noon and eight o'clock P.M. and not more than between the hours of six o'clock A.M. and eight o'clock P.M.

Christine Psathas moved to have the voting place for Referendum be held at the Town Office building at 40 Old Farms Road from 6:00 AM until 8:00 PM

Peter Tanaka seconded the motion.

Discussion held:

Donna Cook asked when absentee ballots would be available. Robin Campbell answered beginning tomorrow, April 19th.

Vote: Majority Yes, 2 No, 0 Abstentions

Motion carries

ITEM IV was then read:

To see if the townspeople, on the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen, will adopt the Capital Improvement Program for fiscal years 2024 to 2028.

Michael Makuch moved to adopt the CIP Plan for Fiscal Years 2024 to 2028
Michelle Doucette-Cunningham seconded the motion.

Moderator then opened the floor for discussion.

Michael Makuch began discussion regarding the CIP plan with the SBC being in existence preventing us to do other projects. He noted that the SBC will meet tomorrow. He added that he cannot speak for the entire committee; but being Chairperson, he has knowledge of what will be discussed. He noted that the SBC will most likely gather input from the key stakeholders – the townspeople and the Board of Selectmen & Board of Education to determine what is left for them to do. He added the chances of having another referendum are very slim – he does not see that as a path going forward. He added that the SBC may even help with moving forward on the roof projects.

Christina Mailhos clarified that the funding is earmarked for SBC; but that is just one option – it is not just for the SBC. The funding was originally in there for \$200,000 which was before the school referendum. IF the school referendum were to pass, then they were thinking they would add an additional \$800,000 to soften the blow because we knew we were going to have to cover \$3 million in bonding costs. This is totally different now – even the way the funding is labeled. At least we will have some money set aside to cover projects if we decide to do them.

Zafir Hussein asked about the fire department plans. Peter Tanaka who is the Chairman of the Emergency Services Efficiency Commission noted that we have one fire department that has some serious structural and environmental issues. We need to have the two departments looking together to fit the needs of the town together.

Alicia Corsini stated that should be revamped. We do we have to have a School Building Committee if we aren't building a new school. Maybe we should have a committee to look at all the facilities.

Samantha Hills noted that she watched the last CIP meeting today. The motion regarding the SBC language was because the SBC had not met yet at the time and the CIP was in a position where they had to come up with a plan for the funding. She clarified that the money will not be able to be allocated without going through town meeting approvals first – not so they can sneak around. Michael Makuch added that not even \$1 dollar can be spent by the SBC (or any other entity for that matter) unless a Town Meeting is held to approve the spending.

Nicholas Tella said he is concerned with a new school being pushed and if the \$1 million goes back to the people – if it fails, it will just go back again. He noted that saying it is slim that another referendum will be held is taking a chance. He personally cannot say yes until the SBC has been dissolved.

Donna Cook stated it would be prudent to have the SBC wording removed from the SBC plan to put the people's mind at ease. Christina Mailhos noted that we cannot make edits to the CIP plan at this meeting. She noted if it is rejected, then the CIP Committee would have to revamp the plan, bring it to the BOF and BOS and that could take a few months.

John Blessington clarified if it were voted no tonight and it were brought back to the Board of Finance – to get a yes vote; they would have to strike one line out; that wouldn't take more than a few meetings. He added, given the history of this situation, he is going to worry about it and will vote no.

Peter Latincsics noted that he wants to support the good decisions made by the CIP and had there been a positive referendum to make sure funds were available. But that did not happen – there was an overwhelming mandate of the town rejecting the school project. Mr. Latincsics added that there is something fundamentally wrong having the words “SBC” tied to those funds. There is no reason for the SBC to have any more funding – especially since they are slated to be returning funds. He noted it is simple – he doesn't see why we just cannot remove “SBC” from the plan right now.

Moderator then clarified that the CIP Plan is not able to be changed at this meeting. It was finalized by the CIP Committee and adopted by the Board of Selectmen and incorporated into the budget that will go to Referendum.

Michael Makuch moved to call the question on ITEM IV.

Phil Monty seconded the motion.

Vote: All in favor.

Peter Tanaka moved to vote by paper ballot on ITEM IV.

Geoff Prusak seconded the motion.

Vote: Majority Yes, 9 No, 0 Abstentions

Motion carried.

Paper ballots were handed out, voted and collected.

Item IV was held via paper ballot:

Yes: 26

No: 24

Motion carried.

Moderator closed the meeting at 8:02 PM and adjourned to Referendum on May 2, 2023 at the Town Office building from 6:00 AM until 8:00 PM

Respectfully Submitted



Robin Campbell
Town Clerk

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WILLINGTON, CT.

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TOWN CLERK