

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSAAaq_XshE

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC: IN LIGHT OF COVID-19, AND PURSUANT TO EXECUTIVE ORDERS 7B and 9H, THE TOWN IS CONDUCTING THIS MEETING VIA WEBEX AND TAKING LIVE PUBLIC COMMENT VIA WEBEX DURING THE MEETING.

✓ Back-up documents relating to the agenda items can be found at www.fairfieldct.org/bof.

Board of Finance Quarterly Review Meeting Final Minutes
Tuesday, February 16, 2021
7:30 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT: Edward Bateson, Jim Brown-Chair, Lori Charlton, Christopher DeWitt-Vice Chair, Mary LeClerc-Secretary, Sheila Marmion, John Mitola, Jack Testani, James Walsh

ALSO PRESENT: JRIB Chair Carolyn Trabuco, CFO Jared Schmitt, FPS Executive Director of Finance & Business Services Doreen Munsell, Superintendent of Schools Mike Cummings, FPS Director of Operations Angelus Papageorge, Special Education Director Rob Mancusi, BOE Chair Christine Vitale, FPS Executive Director of Personnel and Legal Services, Title IX Coordinator Colleen Deasy, Fire Chief Denis McCarthy, Police Chief Robert Kalamaras, Police Captain John Bucherati, Police Captain Chris Tursi, P&R Director Anthony Calabrese, Controller Caitlin Bosse, Attorney John Stafstrom, DPW Director John Marsilio, FairTV

The Board of Finance Quarterly Meeting was held virtually on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 7:30 pm in Fairfield, Connecticut.

1. Call to order

Chair Jim Brown called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Jim Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Brown said at tonight's meeting the BOF will discuss the second quarter financial updates plus a few additional items. He said the public cannot comment live, but can send email comments to jcarpenter@fairfieldct.org.

3. To review the performance of the Town's Pension and OPEB funds

Carolyn Trabuco, JRIB Chair, presented the figures for the quarter ending 12/31/20 and said they are good. She said the entire presentation is in the backup which can be found on the Town website.

4. PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR (*requires RTM approval*)

To hear, consider and adopt a bond resolution as recommended by the Board of Selectmen entitled "A resolution appropriating \$3,920,000 for the purchase of vehicles and equipment for the Department of Public Works and authorizing the issuance of bonds to Finance such Appropriation"

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to put Item 4 before the BOF. Mr. Bateson seconded the motion.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Marsilio if he had anything to add from the last meeting. Mr. Marsilio said he had information that was requested and said Mr. Schmitt had the schedules if anyone wanted them. He also said the items designated for replacement were in the backup. Mr. Marsilio said there was a five-year replacement plan with years 21, 22 and 23 in the bond package for the request for heavy equipment. He said in 2024, the replacement request goes down and in 2025, it is even less. Mr. Marsilio requested four snow plows this year and three next year. He said going forward, if a plow is replaced annually, the fleet and drivers will be kept safe. Mr. Brown said if this item passes, the Board will be approving \$3,920,000 for the next three years. Mr. Walsh asked Attorney Stafstrom why the language in the resolution was so broad. He said he thought it should refer to plow trucks and not heavy equipment and it should be clear as to the intention. Mr. Stafstrom said to refer to the backup. Mr. Walsh said he wanted to make sure the money is going to the plan and nothing else. He said he also wanted to be sure that the plows are the large machines that cost over \$100,000 because he doesn't want the bond to outlast the life of the equipment vehicle. Mr. Brown suggested adding "for equipment over \$100,000" or "with the cost over \$100,000". Mr. Marsilio said he has every expectation that this will be what is proposed unless there is a catastrophic failure with equipment, but he said he has every reason to believe that this is the way it will go. He said these items are called heavy equipment and the items in the operational budget are called service vehicles. Attorney Stafstrom said he wanted to be sure that any item listed for \$100,000, but goes down to \$90,000 would still be purchased with this bond. He said he doesn't want to limit it in the event something could be less. Mr. DeWitt suggested including an exhibit of the five-year plan which shows what is going to be bought and the cost rather than putting the \$100,000 amount. He said the problem with attaching an exhibit is that if something needs replacement that is not part of the plan, it takes away any flexibility. Mr. Walsh suggested taking the names of the vehicles and putting them in the plan without a specific dollar amount. Mr. Marsilio said that all plows will last 20 years as the backup shows. He said some plows are even 30 years old and sweepers may last a year or two less. Mr. Marsilio said buckets, lift gates, back hoes and beach cleaners are all within the 20-year range. Attorney Stafstrom said the bond resolution would need to be amended. He suggested adding the word "thousand" to items 1 and 2 in the bond resolution. He also suggested the following language for item 1 in the resolution, "*for the cost related to purchasing vehicles and equipment for the Department of Public Works as listed in Exhibit A, as well as all related administrative, financing, legal, contingency and other soft costs*". Mr. Brown said an Exhibit will be created with the columns from the plan in the backup.

Mr. Brown made a motion to amend the original motion to read, "*As recommended by the BOF and the BOS, the Town of Fairfield hereby appropriates the sum of \$3,920,000 for costs related to purchasing vehicles and equipment for the Department of Public Works as listed in Exhibit A, as well as all related administrative, financing, legal, contingency and other soft costs (the Project)*". Mr. DeWitt seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

The BOF then voted to approve Item 4, as amended, that was already before them. The motion carried unanimously.

5. PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR (*requires RTM approval*)

To hear, consider and adopt a bond resolution as recommended by the Board of Selectmen entitled "A resolution appropriating \$1,000,000 for costs related to road paving and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation"

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to put Item 5 before the BOF. Mr. Bateson seconded the motion.

Mr. Brown said this has nothing to do with the upcoming budget. He said this was already in last year's budget deliberations for this year's budget. Mr. Walsh said the bond resolution is for 20 years, but it is for a 15-year asset. He said he supports the \$1 million for bonding, but he wants to follow policy that the length of the bond is the same length of the asset. Mr. Marsilio said there are treatments DPW can use on the roads such as crack sealing and armor coating. He said he expects roads to last 30 years. He said he believes that if it is properly done, 20 years for the life of a road is a safe forecast. He said there are two pots of money – one to cover treatment that extends the life of the road and the other for more extensive work that will maintain a road for 30 years. Mr. Bateson said he is unfamiliar with the two pots of money. Mr. Marsilio said it used to be just paving, but now he has a full overhaul of a street to last 30 years. He said he'd like to see flexibility within the \$1 million. Mr. Bateson said he would entertain going to 15 years to get the best for all roads, but he does not want to limit Mr. Marsilio. Mr. DeWitt said the Town hasn't bonded paving since 2010 and didn't have to worry about it when it was in the operating budget. Mr. Marsilio said there was always a line item for paving, but he is not sure how it was spent. He said he knows DPW performed maintenance with the crack sealing and it does cause problems down the road. He said he has spent a lot of capital money on roads and they have lasted 30 years. Mr. Marsilio said in the operating budget there is still money and it can go to extending the life of the road. He said he was surprised that the \$1 million was in bonding.

Mr. Walsh made a motion to amend the bond length in paragraph six of the bond resolution, to 15 years from 20 years. Mr. Bateson seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

The main motion, as amended, carried unanimously.

6. NON-RECURRING CAPITAL – 10 YEARS (*requires RTM approval*)

To hear, consider and adopt a bond resolution as recommended by the Board of Selectmen entitled "A resolution appropriating \$150,000 for the costs of certain nonrecurring capital projects and authorizing the issuance of bonds to finance such appropriation"

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to put Item 6 before the BOF. Ms. Charlton seconded the motion.

Mr. Bateson said he missed the last discussion and wanted to know why the \$100,000 was being bonded as opposed to being in the operating budget. He wondered if this is approved, if it would open the door for other plans and the method of bonding. He said he understands the long-term value, but bonding concerns him. Mr. Walsh agreed and said the Board has not bonded other strategic plans, just school plans and there is usually reimbursement. He said he supports the need to get this done, but not how to finance it. Mr. Walsh said he doesn't want to pay for this for 10 years. Mr. Brown said if the Board did approve this, it didn't mean it would have to approve every plan. He said he is concerned that this will be cut if it goes into the operational budget. He said it has been a tough year and is afraid if it goes into the operational budget, it will get reduced. Ms. Marmion said she appreciated the information that Mr. Calabrese sent. She said she was confused about the Darien plan and thought it was strategic, but it looks more like an audit. Ms. Marmion thought it was a strategic plan, but said it looks more like an audit and could be given to any Town. She said the cost is a concern and suggested doing an audit for less money and then have a strategic plan. Mr. Calabrese agreed that it wasn't a strategic plan.

He said the quote is based on what he asked for which is an audit and other things like where enhancements could be made and in what order so he can add this to the waterfall. Mr. Calabrese said his goal is to have a facility audit master plan. He also said this company isn't necessarily the one he will use, but he will see which company has the best price for what he wants. Mr. DeWitt said he supports the plan and understands the bonding issues as Mr. Bateson addressed, but said he will support the bonding. Mr. Mitola said he will not support the expense in the operational budget, but will in a bond. Ms. Charlton said she supports the plan, but she is bothered by the plan to bond it because the Town can't afford it in the operational budget. Mr. Brown suggested splitting it in half and putting it in the operational budget for two years. Mr. Calabrese said he was not sure if the Purchasing Department would support that.

Mr. Brown read the item again and took a vote, which was three in favor and five against. The motion did not carry.

7. To review the BOE FY21 second quarter financial update

Ms. Munsell reviewed the second quarter report for the BOE. Mr. Mitola said the first paragraph of the report said the deficit is directly related to the pandemic. He said there is a line for the Corona Virus Relief Fund and he wanted to know if there is reimbursement or if the BOE was getting anything else regarding COVID relief. Ms. Munsell said the State said the allotment is \$1.27 million. She said more information would come out and the application will come soon, but she hasn't heard anything. She said she will complete the application as soon as it is available. Ms. Munsell said a large part of the funding is focused on making up for students' loss of learning during the pandemic. She said the State wants to see the funds used for that. She said it will be used for summer programs, after-school programs and could also be used for the deficit this year. Mr. DeWitt said he noticed a significant increase in outplacement and tuition costs. Mr. Mancusi said it is due to the prolonged pandemic and loss of learning for students with disabilities. Mr. DeWitt wanted to know if the BOE is spending more because of the hybrid situation. Mr. Mancusi repeated that the current situation has created a loss of learning for children with disabilities. Mr. DeWitt said it did not make sense to him that a Fairfield child is not getting support so the child is outplaced. Mr. Mancusi said the school has a meeting with the parents and if it is determined that the student is not making adequate progress, the student could be outplaced which creates tuition costs. He said the student could also be unilaterally placed and if it ends up in mediation, the district has the burden of proof. He said the BOE has to weigh the costs of tuition versus the expense of due process. Mr. Brown said the cost goes up, but the excess cost is reduced and he did not understand that. Ms. Munsell explained that if a student is quarantined or does not go to school, money is saved. Ms. Marmion asked how the BOE is assessing if students are learning and if it was captured in the budget. Mr. Cummings said standardized assessment is the STAR assessment in Math/Reading performance. He said schools use this to see where students are and if they are meeting goals. He said in middle/high school, the assessment is based on the student's daily performance on homework, quizzes and those types of things. Mr. Walsh asked what the assessment is showing. Mr. Cummings said what the BOE is seeing in Fairfield is math is slipping away from grade level expectations due to loss of daily interactions with the class and this is a great concern. He said most students are reading at grade level. He said there is work to do, but a great majority of the kids are where they need to be. He added that prior to COVID, the BOE was looking at Math programs. Mr. Walsh wanted to know the total cost for the RLA (Remote Learning Academy). Ms. Munsell said she didn't have it separate from the hybrid learning. Colleen Deasy said some of the expense is from staff coming in and out on leave and shifting people between buildings. Mr. Walsh asked about a plan to bring students back full-time.

Mr. Cummings said a meeting is being planned to discuss that. Mr. Walsh also wanted to know how the BOE planned to get the deficit to zero and asked for a contingency plan in the next two weeks to be presented to the BOF. He also suggested Mr. Cummings and Ms. Munsell meet with the BOF every month until June. Ms. Munsell said it is difficult to plan when things change so rapidly, but the BOE will look at the information month to month. Ms. Vitale said last year there was a deficit due to changes in the health insurance plan and an emergency roof repair at Osborn Hill. She said the BOE will provide updates and will hopefully receive State funding. Mr. Brown said he will keep Mr. Walsh's request under advisement and will keep in touch with the BOE. Mr. Bateson asked about the ESSER 2 funding and what it stood for. He also wanted to know if there was a date for the meeting about going full-time at school. Ms. Vitale said the tentative dates for the meeting are February 25 or March 3. Mr. Cummings said the ESSER 2 is for Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief. He said he will forward the letter from the State to the BOF. He said the BOE is waiting for more information. Ms. Munsell said the BOE proposed budget book will be distributed next week.

8. To review the Town FY21 second quarter financial update

Jared Schmitt and Caitlin Bosse reviewed the report for the Fiscal Year '21 second quarter financial update. Mr. Brown said at the last quarterly meeting VERIP was discussed and any cost that would affect the quarter. He said he wanted to take a look at the savings monthly. Mr. Schmitt said when the second quarter ended, VERIP didn't have an impact. He said the BOF will get the first glance of what re-organization has done as a whole when First Selectwoman Kupchick presents her budget proposal.

9. To hear an update on the Fairfield-Westport Multi-Town Emergency Communications Center

Mr. Brown congratulated Chief Robert Kalamaras and said he looked forward to working with him. Mr. Schmitt presented a Powerpoint on the multi-town Emergency Communications Center. Mr. Schmitt said there will be a bonding resolution and part of it will be for the additional spending requirement for the capital cost. Mr. DeWitt commented that Mr. Schmitt mentioned getting enough communities involved to get Fairfield in the black. Mr. Schmitt said between the other community fees and State funds (operating grant), 1-2 more communities will be needed. Chief Kalamaras said there are interested Towns that will come. He said smaller towns' operations would need to change and they would need commitment from Fairfield that the ECC will be built. Mr. Mitola asked what would be the cap on other towns as there would need to be more staff. He said he also wanted to know why Sacred Heart University changed the location of the ECC. Captain Bucherati said originally the ECC was going to be at the West Campus, the former GE building. He said since SHU approved a hockey rink to be built there, it needed a new space. Captain Bucherati said the ECC ended up on the bottom floor of the library and will be starting from scratch and SHU will not be charging fees. Mr. Schmitt said there will be a lease agreement for 12.5 years with an option of continuing 12.5 years. He said it may be changed it to 20 years so it is the length of the bond. First Selectwoman Kupchick said Town Attorney Jim Baldwin is dealing directly with SHU and doesn't see any problem with that, but will update the BOF when the lease is complete. Ms. Marmion asked if there was a fee structure with other towns for Fairfield to get money back. She also said she is hoping the lease agreement includes information about the library renovation. Mr. Testani asked how staffing costs will be divided. Chief Kalamaras said there are 22 employees and dispatchers. He said Fairfield has 15 allocated spots and Westport has six. He said one position is still open. He said the bargaining unit will include Westport employees, but not police officers. Chief Kalamaras said there is a training program to be a dispatcher.

He said there are 21 fully certified dispatchers with both towns. He said an interlocal agreement states a Fairfield Police captain will supervise the ECC. Mr. Walsh said there will have to be a mechanism that can be presented to the BOF for reimbursement of capital and operational expenses by other towns that will use the ECC.

10. To hear, consider and act upon any communications

Mr. Brown said he and Mr. Schmitt discussed the potential for a special meeting next week with the Assessor and the reval company. He said that in the Town Charter, the BOF does have a role in the assessment system (8.3D for anyone who wants to look it up). He said it states, "*The BOF shall install and shall modernize from time to time a system by which equitable and just values of taxable property within the town may be ascertained.*" Mr. Brown said he is looking to meet with Assessor Ross Murray before March. First Selectwoman Kupchick asked if the BOF would be more interested in meeting with the Assessor after the Board of Assessment Appeals finished their process. She said she thought the BOF would better understand the impact on the Town and how it impacts the budget. Mr. Brown said the BOF usually has its meeting with the Assessor at this meeting and is looking to meet with both Mr. Murray and Municipal Evaluations. He asked Mr. Schmitt and First Selectwoman Kupchick to check with the Assessor on this and to get back to him.

11. Adjourn

Mr. DeWitt made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:16 pm. Mr. Walsh seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary