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Members of the Public: Due to COVID-19 & pursuant to Executive Orders 7B & 9H, the Town is holding this meeting via Webex & taking live public comment via Webex during the meeting.

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**BOARD OF FINANCE PUBLIC BUDGET COMMENT OPEN FORUM FINAL
MINUTES
Saturday, March 27, 2021 9:30
Via Webex**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Jim Brown, Vice Chair Christopher DeWitt, Lori Charlton, John Mitola, Jack Testani, Jim Walsh

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ed Bateson, Mary LeClerc, Sheila Marmion

OTHERS PRESENT: Members of the public

I. Call to Order

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 9:30 am.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Public Budget Comment Open Forum

Mr. Brown opened the meeting by recognizing the opportunity for public comment. He said today is a day for the BOF to listen to the public. He said comments by BOF members can be made afterward. He asked for all comments to pertain to the budget.

- Caitlin Clarkson Pereira, 1375 South Pine Creek Road, said she supports the BOE budget and would like the budget restored.
- Steve Baker, President of Fairfield PTA Council, made a statement on behalf of the Fairfield PTA Council and said he supports a restored BOE budget.
- Carol Guernsey, 241 Brookside Drive, is the newest member of the BOE and supports restoring the BOE budget.
- Craig Curley, 109 Lakewood Drive, was opposed to the budget increases as people are still hurting from the pandemic. He asked the BOF to make cuts where it needs to and hold off on full restoration until after residents can afford it.
- Jen Jacobsen, 40 Victoria Court, BOE member, supports the BOE budget and asked the BOF to consider the \$2 million restoration. She said she will send a written statement as well.
- Jessica Gerber, 25 Shady Hill Road, BOE member, supports the budget approved by the BOE and asked for the restoration of the funds.

- Kasandra Marshall, 112 Judd Street, supports restoring the Conservation position that was cut.
- Kathy Braun, 245 Sunnyridge Avenue, supports a fully-staffed Conservation Department.
- Katie Flynn, 204 Grandview Road, spoke in support of restoring the BOE budget.
- Mary Hogue is in support of reinstating the Conservation position.
- Reini Knorr, 83 Alberta Street, is in support of reinstating \$1.5 million to the BOE budget. She is also in support of reinstating the Conservation position.
- Jennifer Maxon Kennelly, Edgewood Place, BOE member, is in support of restoring the BOE budget and also supports restoring the Conservation position.

Mr. Brown opened the meeting comments up to the BOF members.

Jack Testani said he wants to reassure the public that the comments are received. He said OPEB and retirement pension funds were not funded last year, but are funded in this year's budget. He said all the information will be assessed.

RTM member William Gerber said he wanted to know what is expected for the average increase in taxes.

Ms. Charlton gave her sincere thanks and said it's really all about balance. She suggested taking out non-recurring spending and using the \$25 million of funding for that.

Mr. DeWitt said the '20-21 Fiscal Year was the year of cliffs. He said the end of this budget year will be happy. He said this is a transparent, fully-funded budget. He said the BOF are advocates for obligations and fund balances among other things. He said he budget fully refunds the Town's obligations.

Mr. Mitola thanked the public for coming out and voicing their concerns. He said he wanted people to know that the BOF does not have the authority to reinstate positions. He said the Board could put the money back in the budget, but there would be no obligation to use it. He said the First Selectwoman made the decision and she will have to see if it is working or not going forward. He said there are ways to relieve the burden and the Board will try to do that. Mr. Mitola said the Board can do things to move the cliffs so there is not such a large tax increase.

Mr. Walsh thanked everyone for their comments. He said last year everything was shut down and the BOF knew coming into this budget that cliffs had been created by not funding things that are always funded because of the pandemic. He said teachers received a great contract, unions in Town need to be funded and spending isn't usual. Mr. Walsh said an expense increase is not a tax increase. He said an expense budget is always higher. He said it will be a tough year building all of the long-term liability, but next year will be back to normal. Mr. Walsh thanked First Selectwoman Kupchick for her guidance during the pandemic as well as the health department and first responders. He also thanked the First Selectwoman for the courage to fund the liabilities and said he has studied fund balances for years.

He said the American Recovery Act is to help students catch up. He said the Superintendent has commented on that at other meetings. Mr. Walsh said the Town could probably fund things on the waterfall project and not from the budget. He said no one knows what the average tax increase will be. He said there was a revaluation and 1/3 of properties went down, 1/3 of properties stayed the same and 1/3 of properties went up and they will see increases in tax and value. He said the BAA will have an impact too, but they don't know how much yet.

Mr. Brown explained that one advantage to our town government is that each board gets more information as the vote progresses. He said First Selectwoman Kupchick made the right decisions. Mr. Brown said every budget is intertwined with previous budgets. He said expenses were not reduced; funding was reduced and went into reserves. He said expenses don't go away. He said costs could be inherited from other administrations and RTM decisions. He said First Selectwoman Kupchick made up for funding that didn't go in the previous budget. Mr. Brown said the Town has an AAA rating and is very proud of that. He said the bulk of the Town increase is in OPEB and Pension. He said there are options to lower the tax rate and therefore lower the mill rate. He said there is also criminal activity from the fill pile that needs to be paid for.

Mr. Brown thanked everyone who participated.

IV. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:42 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Pru O'Brien
Recording Secretary