

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-xRph55yRg>

*****FINAL MINUTES*****
BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING
April 29, 2020

A Virtual Board of Finance Special Meeting was held at 8:55 p.m. on Thursday, April 29, 2020. (The meeting was scheduled to begin at 7:30 pm, but started later due to the BOF's 7 pm special meeting ending at 8:55 pm).

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

ALSO PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE: Town Attorney James Baldwin, Interim CFO Caitlin Bosse, Budget Director Linda Gardiner, CAO Thomas Bremer, First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick, Town Clerk Betsy Browne, Police Chief Christopher Lyddy, Deputy Police Chief Donald Smith, Building Director Thomas Conley, Parks and Recreation Director Anthony Calabrese, FairTV

1. Call to Order – Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 8:55 p.m.

Mr. Brown reminded everyone that there will be no live public comment. He said the public is encouraged to email comments including their name and home address before or after the meeting to bof@fairfieldct.org.

2. Pledge of Allegiance – Mr. Brown waived the Pledge of Allegiance which was said at the 7:00 p.m. meeting.

3. Continued Budget Deliberations with Certain Departments

Mr. Brown commented briefly that the following departments were asked to present revenue projections based on the economic situation and give their thoughts on the budget change due to COVID-19.

Town Clerk

Ms. Browne updated the Board on revenue. She said she is keeping recording fees flat like this year and is bringing the conveyance back down. She said copying revenue is increasing because more people are working online. Ms. Browne reported that her office is open and is experiencing steady activity. She said she spoke to realtors who have experience other recessions and feel the Town will rebound. First Selectwoman Kupchick said she's also spoken to many people who say that New Yorkers are looking to move to Connecticut. Ms. Charlton said with many different things at play including a high rate of unemployment, this may be too optimistic. Mr. Testani asked if Ms. Browne's revenue calculations are based on trends. Ms. Browne replied yes. Ms. Browne said her office may be busier next spring with marriage licenses since people are postponing their weddings now.

Building Department

Mr. Conley thanked his co-workers who he said are out in the field every single day making them essential front line workers. He reported that permit activity year-to-date is over \$3 million in revenue and is right where his department should be now.

He said in the two months since COVID-19 began, his department has taken in \$319,000 - even during the pandemic. Mr. Conley said that in April alone his department received \$180,000 in revenue. He said permits are coming in every day; he has about 30-40 permits currently on his desk and there are upcoming code reviews to be performed. He said the Town's two universities are just waiting on other department approvals to move forward with construction.

Mr. Dewitt went on record that he wants Mr. Conley's revenue to go up. Mr. Conley feels in a conservative sense a three-year average is good to go by. He feels he will meet his department's revenue projections and stated that the pandemic will not affect revenue outside the three-year average. Mr. Conley said he thinks his department will receive another \$200,000 in revenue.

Police Department

ECC – Deputy Chief Smith analyzed the impact of a delayed ECC opening. He reviewed the expense and revenue breakdowns depending on start month. Mr. Bremer and Ms. Gardiner further explained the numbers and cost split. Deputy Chief Smith spoke to the architect and the team and said they are looking at a September opening date with no financial repercussions for opening late.

Vehicle list – Chief Lyddy said the list of 109 vehicles includes motorcycles, bicycles, trailers, prisoner transport van, command post and decommissioned vehicles that are awaiting auction as well as five that are being scuttled for parts. Mr. Bateson said the Board needs to review this list. Mr. Walsh commented there are more vehicles than police officers and said he wants a BOF committee set up to review all the vehicles and their use. First Selectwoman Kupchick said the finance department is reviewing fleets in all departments.

Parks and Recreation

Mr. Calabrese reported public golf courses are scheduled to open except H. Smith Richardson which he said is delayed due to the clubhouse project underway. He said beaches will open for residents only. He said the revenue sheet reflects everything fully open as of July. Mr. DeWitt asked if police will be on overtime to monitor any people congregating. First Selectwoman Kupchick replied there will be one officer for the beach and one for Lake Mohegan. Ms. Charlton said the Governor's reopening protocol is not consistent with this and he is stating limited public access at least through the calendar year and openings in stages.

Mr. Calabrese said his project budget numbers took into consideration cancelled events. He said it all depends on data through each phase of the virus so he had to make an assumption. Mr. Calabrese said he reduced revenue based on reduced participation. He estimated a 50% camp loss and a 50% reduction at Penfield. Mr. Mitola asked if the Town could legally limit beach access to residents only. First Selectwoman Kupchick explained that per the Town Attorney, the Town can do since it is under an emergency situation. There was a lengthy discussion on golf rates and restrictions.

Town

#1 Mr. Bremer reviewed the collection rate package and picked the lowest collection rate. He said it's the largest determining factor on how much money is coming in. He noted the tax and collection rates of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. Mr. Bremer said he wants to use the 98.61% actual rate. He said that when things lighten up, unemployment will come down. Mr. Bremer said the bond sale was a success and the Town Clerk and Building department are doing very well with taking in revenue. He said the AON health insurance number shows the Town picked up another \$590,000.

Mr. Bremer said building revenue remains over budget and golf courses opening back up will make a difference. He said the collection rate is the key number and will dictate whatever cuts are necessary. Mr. Bremer then calculated various scenarios.

#2 The non-tax revenue adjusted for COVID-19 by department was reviewed with suggested cuts.

#3 The suggested expense adjustments for COVID-19 and their impact were explained.

#4 Mr. Bremer said the budget adjustments for FY21 that the BOS had recommended for due to COVID-19 and the tax rate impacts will give a starting point and a sense of different scenarios.

Mr. Walsh questioned how many towns are going to use bonding to bring down their budget. First Selectwoman Kupchick answered five or six: Stratford, Greenwich, Trumbull, Westport and Monroe. She said Bridgeport is on the line. She said some towns are using their fund balance and some not sure yet how they would bring down their budgets.

First Selectwoman Kupchick said the Human Resources Director said no bargaining unit is doing anything until after the FY21 budget is set.

#6 Ms. Bosse reviewed the projected net estimated operational variance executive summary including revenue, expenses, operational savings, budgeted contribution, surplus and fund balance. She said the Tax Collector will have an updated collection rate Tuesday. Mr. Bremer said he doesn't think a lot of people know about the deferment program based on participation. Mr. Walsh requested a report from Ms. Bosse a week from Friday showing what the numbers are.

Ms. Bosse examined the directly related COVID-19 expenses by department and stated numbers change daily. She said the finance department is tracking COVID-19 payroll separately. Ms. Bosse said the Finance Department assigned and trained an employee specifically to work on and submit reimbursement costs to the State. Mr. Bremer said the budget has nothing in it about the CARES Act.

Upon review of COVID-19 expenses submitted by departments for the Finance Department to review before filing, Mr. DeWitt asked what DPW, Registrar of Voters and Parks and Recreation spent money on in relation to COVID-19. Ms. Bosse said the Parks and Recreation department has been spending an inordinate amount of time processing refunds for all the cancelled parties and programs. She also said the Registrars had to perform extra work due to the Primary Date being moved. First Selectwoman Kupchick said some COVID-19 expenses incurred by the Police will be for patrolling the beach and lake to monitor people congregating when those spaces open. She also gave an example of first responders spending additional time collecting PPE as a COVID-19 overtime expense.

Ms. Charlton asked about unemployment compensation expenses. Ms. Bosse said if an employee was laid off or put on furlough, the Town will get reimbursed 50% through the CARES Act.

Going back to the list of COVID-19 expenses submitted by departments, Mr. Walsh asked for a breakdown of overtime that Fire and Police incurred due to COVID-19 which Ms. Bosse said the finance department will provide. Ms. Bosse noted that reimbursement request numbers are changing to which Mr. Walsh asked for a list of DPW overtime in addition to the Fire and Police departments by May 1, 2020.

Ms. Bosse reiterated what Mr. Bremer had said that the finance department will review all department requests. Mr. Walsh said he fears police overtime will go over \$100,000 so he'd like to get an explanation. Mr. Walsh also questioned the Health Department and the reimbursement cost listed for interpreting the Governor's Executive Orders.

Ms. Charlton asked for timely explanations on the departments' reasons for COVID-19 expenses to ensure the Town gets reimbursed. Mr. Walsh questioned if the Fire Chief would be getting more in his salary from some of the reimbursement. First Selectwoman Kupchick said much of the reimbursement requests are attributable to a pandemic.

The Board discussed future meetings.

4. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Charlton moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:01 a.m. Mr. DeWitt seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 9-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheila Tesei
Recording Secretary

Public Comment Submitted Via Email for this Meeting:

From: Steve Jones
Sent: Friday, May 1, 2020 4:42 PM
To: BOF <BOF@fairfieldct.org>
Cc: Board of Selectmen <BOS@fairfieldct.org>
Subject: Fire Department Comments/Questions

To the Board of Finance,

My wife and I saw the sarcastic comments/quips made by a member on the Fairfield Fire Department. What a sad day for Fairfield when an elected official shows very little regard for the service that they give to us as a community and the life-saving services they provide to us. Yes, it's essential and we pay for them but our department is actually REALLY incredible. My wife has MS and has fallen many times, and the fire department has had to help us pick her up because of my own injuries sustained from working in a mechanics shop.. While there isn't much glory in what they do to help my family alone, they do it honorably and with much kindness. While that particular member and others on the Board of Finance can snicker and laugh during his questions (which I found elementary at best), the fire department should be praised considerably for what they do on a daily basis. I would hope the Board of Finance shows a little more respect to our first responders. If you're all about questioning big spends, why don't you take a harder look at the extra and costly staff the First Selectwoman has hired instead?

Steve Jones