

**Westport Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting-Remote Participation
January 03, 2023**

Present: Karen Raus (KAR), Cindy Brown (CB) Charles "Buzzy" Baron (BB), Hugh Morton (HM), Gary Carreiro (GC), Zachary Lebreux (ZL)

Absent: Lawrence Holsworth (LH)

Also Present: Nicole Pearsall, Sue Brayton, Bernadette Oliver, Carol Freitas, George Ripley, Chief Brain R. Legendre, Deputy Daniel Baldwin

KAR opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

KAR read the following: This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts *'March 12, 2020, order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A Section 20 and on June 16,2021 Governor Baker signed an Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency. This meeting is being recorded.*

(Kar) opened up the meeting saying one of our long-term Finance Committee members, Robert McCarthy has retired or resigned from the committee effective last week. He's been with the Finance Committee for 28 years and I would like to thank him for his extended service that he's done for the town and the Finance Committee, and he will be missed. (GC) motioned to recognized Robert McCarthy in his tenor with the Finance Committee whether that would that be at town meeting or board of selectmen meeting. (CB) second the roll call vote in favor was unanimous.

1.Fy2024 Budget Meetings with Departments:

Veterans Services Carol Freitas Veterans Services Officer was in attendance to present the FY24 department budget. She said my biggest expenditure is veterans' benefits, which I left the proposed budget the same \$350,000 even though I haven't come close to spending that over the past couple of years. But we've been in COVID for almost three years, and I haven't been able to do a ton of outreach. And I'm hoping to do some outreach because I think there might be some more qualified recipients out there and I am hesitant to reduce the budget and then need to somehow find the additional money to provide those benefits to those low income. I did reduce one of the budget lines regarding veterans' benefits, which is

what we call the medex budget, which is the benefits that are basically paid directly to vendors instead of to the veterans or their spouses. It is a bare bones budget as it is. (Kar) asked Carol to give us a view of what you do. Carol said she does veterans benefits for low-income veterans or their surviving spouses or dependent children. The state does reimburse 75% of what we spend out in those benefits to the town, and I do have to be certified. In order to get the 75% reimbursement. And I just completed my 3-year recertification back in November. The other things that I do is veterans claims for disability, for VA healthcare, for pension and a program called adin attendance for veterans or their spouses, surviving spouses also property tax exemptions for veterans. We just built a Veterans monument in July that was completely funded by donations of about \$20,000. (CB) asked how the benefits were determined what a veteran receives? Carol said it is a calculation that's based on what they're paying out for shelter, what their income is, whether or not they're retired or if they're still working. Carol said for property tax exemptions 10% and 90% percent services connected it's \$400 a year. If they're 100%, it's \$1000 a year. If they require specially adapted housing, I think it's \$1500 a year. And then if it's a surviving spouse and the veteran died from a service-connected disability, it's a 100% exemption.

- A. **Library** George Ripley was in attendance to present the FY24 department budget and said here at the Westport Free Public Library, we continue to strive to meet the literary and information needs of all the residents of the town in an ever-changing landscape. Different reading styles keep us on our toes as we see a large number of people moving to digital books access for free with their library cards. We're also seeing increases in physical books have been taken out too. In the first five months of FY23, we have seen an increase in our monthly circulation compared to the first five months of 2022 of 1000 items. Corresponding with that, we have also conducted 188 one-on-one technology help sessions to help people learn either to set up an e-reader or how to use our computers we have here at the library. Public access to the Internet is becoming even more vital as more and more companies shift to requiring job applications to be submitted online. We've had 92 meeting room uses in our first five months as compared to last year with an additional 1542 people or an additional 64 people coming to the library every single day. This number translates to an average of 176 people visiting the library each day, and obviously that goes up during the summer months. Adjusting to an increase in varying workload can be a challenge, but the fantastic staff here has shown themselves to be more than capable of rising to fulfill the literary, technological, educational, and informational needs of our residents, thanks to the continuing support of the town and the recognition of the vital services that the library offers. The FY24 department budget has no increase in the number of staff or staff hours. The last two years we have been using State aid grant to fund an increase in work hours for our principal clerk positions. This does present a burden to the library as those funds could instead be used for many other priorities. But we recognize the high importance to deliver the best customer service possible to the residents of Westport and see that as the key gateway to utilizing all of the other services that we offer. Thanks in part to this initiative, the Westport Libraries had zero employee turnover in the entire calendar year of FY22, which we're proud of. The other line items involved, the budget reflects the tool needs of maintaining the libraries physical space through our heating and electrical. These have seen increases the last year Our focus and borrowing material budget are currently completely funded

outside of the municipal budget through funding from the Friends of the Westport Library, from direct donations from trust funds and from a revolving fund from library fines and fees in FY24 if the proposed town recommendation is accepted the library will need to spend at a minimum of \$46,119 on borrowing material just to maintain our certification with the state. Without that certification, Westport residents would lose access to material and all other libraries in Massachusetts. They would be borrowing services basically in every other town. The other line item that deserves particular mention is professional services. That line actually pays for a regional library consortium membership and data processing associated with the libraries catalog and our cardholder database. The \$11,000 there represents approximately half of that total assessment. We also receive support from the Westport Cultural Council and the Phillips Center Foundation. For our programs, we strive to offer our artistic and literary programming. to enrich people's lives and inspire everyone who visits our library thank you for joining support. (KAR) asked George a question about the part time clerk she said , it looks like you made a request to increase your budget from the Fy23 approved budget of \$67,000. You had asked for request of \$87,720 and it looks as though the town administrator backed it back down to \$70,000. George said that was the state I mentioned in my introductory remarks. Basically, we had two we have two principal clerks at the library whose positions we requested through the town that we increased the hours. One went from 20 to 25 hours respectively to 40 from 32 hours with the understanding that if the town couldn't afford to pay for the increase in hours, we could make up the difference with our state aid grant award, and that's what that represents. I will continue to ask the town to see if they can cover the differential with the understanding that we can make up the difference for now as we need to with that state aid to work and we've actually been able to double it since we took over two years ago.

- B. **Town Clerk** Bernadette Oliver was in attendance to present the FY24 department budget she said I stuck with level services with contractual increases. Basically, for the town clerks' budget and for the election budget, we vary a little bit when we look at the coming year and see how many elections are coming up. I adjust the budget down a little bit because we're we only have right now the 2023. And how the election is planned there may be a special election I adjusted some of the election figures down a little bit because of that. (CB) asked Bernadette to tell us a little bit about the town beach issue as far as beach stickers are concerned and what kind of time that consumes and do you see any solution to that problem? Bernadette said that's the big problem since after COVID hit. We've increased the annual amount of beach passes by about 1310 pre COVID. We used to top out at about 3000 and now we're closer to 4300. It's very time consuming and during the busy month between depending on the weather between April, May 2 and on it is almost like a full-time job. we've changed one process a little bit in the past. When we received an application that wasn't complete, we would reach out to the applicant, usually via e-mail, and say look we received your application but you're missing a check, or you have a copy of our registration that's got the plate number cut off, or whatever the problem may be. And there was a lot of back and forth and it was very time consuming. what we're doing this year is if it's not complete. You're getting it back with a formal letter that has a list that we check off saying This is why it's incomplete. Please complete it and resubmit it, and I think that's going to save us a lot of time.

- C. **Fire Department** Chief Brian R Legendre and Deputy Daniel Baldwin was in attendance to present the FY24 department budget. Chief Brian Legendre said the budget has changed, whether the request is increased, or the request has decreased, it is a level service budget, as requested for FY24, which basically just provides for collective bargaining. By increases for the life of the collective bargaining agreement to meet the fiscal year requirements in our personal serve in our expense line, we did have some increases. While we have been representing the increased our vehicle repair of gas and diesel line has increased obviously because the fuel prices were so high when we were in the red last year with that. Everything else, there are a couple decreases in the expense line. The online services and telephone which we had a decrease last year and what our expenses were. We try to make it as accurate as possible as we have in the past. like I said the deputy put the budget together he can answer any other questions. Deputy Daniel Baldwin said this past year, acquiring funds from outside of the Westport tax base, for example, we require we obtain \$265,000 in federal funding for scott tax, which is actually going to allow us to return about somewhere between \$150,000 and \$170,000 out of the capital award that we are very fortunate to get last year on the capitol award came to us several months after the town meeting voted in favor of that counter request that we had that gave us \$255,000 and We have gotten \$25,000 federal funding for a power load system we've taken advantage of the Oper funding; we acquired \$350,000 in Bristol County Oper funding replacing over \$100,000 worth of SUV's and we also received \$70,000 for new plow truck. That's been a capital request. All of those numbers I just mentioned total right around \$850,000. And that is not coming from the Westport taxpayer. That is outside of the Westport taxpayer and the operating budget. (Kar) asked We've talked about, your long-term staffing plan to add one new full-time person each year for four years. Have we made any progress on that or we do? Chief Brian Legendre said the plan started in 2006 when I made chief and so far, we've gotten one additional person. (Kar) said you mentioned 24 to 29 would be kind of where Westport should land. How many are there now right now? Deputy Daniel Baldwin said we have 21 employees. Chief Brian Legendre said budget does not include extra person and ambulance revenue ending Fy21. We have not calculated Fy22 yet and it was \$832,988. with \$522,188 going to the general fund. The other deductions were basically for the ambulance detail account and the end of ambulance revolving account.

2.Fy2024 Town Budget &Override Discussions: (KR) said we have the town administrators first draft of the budget put together. I'm not going to go over in any detail tonight. It's balanced with some pretty heavy cuts throughout the departments. There are still some numbers yet to come in, in terms of state aid it's very preliminary at this point. If anybody that's interested in seeing the first draft of the budget it is available on the town website that anybody can access.

3.Committee Updates /Liaison Reports: Kar said we need representatives for School and Infrastructure Committee if anyone is interested

4.Minutes: The minutes for December 13, 2022, was presented for approval. (CB) motioned and (GC) seconded to approve. The roll call vote was unanimous in favor.

5.Topic for next Meeting Agenda: N/A

6.Meeting Schedule: January 10, 2023, January 17,2023, January 24,2023, February 07,2023

7. Correspondence: N/A

8.Topics not reasonably anticipated forty-eight (48) hours in advanced of the meeting:
N/A

Adjourn There being no further business to come before this meeting a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:00pm was made by (CB) and (HM) seconded the roll call vote in favor was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica McKane Recording Clerk

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

0.2023 01 03 AGENDA INDEXED.docx

1a Fy24 Elections.pdf

1a Fy24 Town Clerk.pdf

1b FY24 Veterans.pdf

1c Fy24 Library.pdf

1c FY24 Westport Free Public Library Finance Committee Presentation (1).pdf

1d Fy24 Fire.pdf

1d Fy23 Fire Dept memo and budget.pdf

2 bos_budget_presentation_12-19-22pdf

2 Fy24 Bos Budget Master 12-19-22.xlsx

2 Fy24 fincom format Budget TA Version 12-19-.xlsx

4 12-13-22 Meeting Minutes .docx

