

**Westport Finance Committee
Westport Select Board
Westport School Committee
Meeting Minutes
Hybrid Meeting
January 03, 2024**

Present: Finance Committee : Karen Raus (Chair), Cindy Brown (Vice-Chair), Hugh Morton , Al Lees, Zachary Lebreux, Michelle Orlando, Christopher Thrasher, Al Lee(remote) Gary Carreiro(left early)

Present: Select Board: Richard Brewer , Shana Shufelt , Manny Soares

Present : School Committee : Nancy Staton-Cross Evan Gendreau

Also Present: Susan Brayton, Jim Hartnett, Thomas Aubin, Nicole Pearsall

Karen Raus called the meeting to order at 6:00pm, and a Pledge of Allegiance .

Richard Brewer from the Select Board called the meeting to order at 6:00pm

1.Discussion: Karen Raus from the finance committee opened up the meeting having everyone introduce themselves. Karen Raus continued mentioning back in October and we started the early process of our budget season, kicking off the fiscal 25 and we're a couple months further into it. Jim Hartnett, the town administrator, has the first draft of the budget that he presented to the Select Board a couple of weeks ago. That's been distributed to everyone. A lot of unknowns at this point are still in the budget process in terms of revenue from the state aid in particular. There are still some expenses that are still unknown. As for the Town for positions there are no position cuts. The lack of positions is still the same as we've experienced in previous years. At the present time, the 54% split with the school is posted in that budget and it's barely balanced at this point.

a.Fiscal 24/Fiscal 25 Budget: Karen Raus mentioned the Fiscal 25 budget thinking about where we all stand for the next five years, where are we going with this, budget we all have talked about previously that we've balanced the budget in previous years using some amounts of free cash to help. Balance the budget and part of that was the hopeful attempt that we would have had an override that would have helped fund additional revenue to help balance the budget on a more permanent basis. We all know that the override didn't pass and so we're faced with a continued lack of revenue. The difficult part of how we balance this budget in a sustainable way over a long-term period and potentially minimizing or not using free cash in the operating budget to balance their budgets.

b.5 year Operating &Capital Plan : Richard Brewer (Chair) from the select board mentioned for the 5-year operating & capitol plan there are final touches and would be subject to change and would need to go over as a whole group but should have it to everyone is about a week or so. Town Administrator Jim Hartnett mentioned to project forward what type revenues and funds

that will be available for expenses and salaries. Looking back 10 years and looking at our revenue this year, and last year. I feel pretty comfortable that we can do a 3% increase yearly in the budgets. Could probably do a 3 1/2 percent increase yearly in the budgets. That would be roughly \$800,000 for the school and \$650,000 for the town side. We cannot sustain anything more than that, if we do go more than that on one side and the other than we would have to make cuts on the opposite side. Karen Raus (Chair) said It's going to get more difficult or not even sustainable, so without going too much further into a five-year plan, but that just lays the groundwork for really where this budget needs to sit and how we manage a sustainable budget here knowing that next year. Year after will continue to get further furtherly difficult.

School Committee Nancy Staton -Cross said with the budget when we spoke with the town administrator about what we could cut for the school last year we cut \$275,000 from our staff, which were teacher assistants. The next thing that we can do, going forward to see what we can cut that mandated to do. We're not mandated to do is pre-K. We can cut that except we have to continue to do special needs pre-K we're mandated to do, and we're mandated to put so many role models. Another option would be half a day kindergarten and lose two or three of our kindergarten teachers. Another option would be to cut staff in classrooms. Maybe we should look at putting more of the taxpayer money into the operating budget. We have to become a little bit more flexible to high inflation.

Shana Shufelt from the select board mentioned maybe we should be using that free cash for a special purpose and start funding like we did for vacation payouts. We have a fund, and I don't know what the mechanism is. We're not directly funding the operating budget, but we are setting aside money that could be used for that.

Karen Raus from the finance committee said we walked into town meeting with a balanced fiscal 24 budget that already incorporated lots of cuts for both the school and the town. The override that was discussed to say if we got the override funds, these are the positions we would add and how we would spend it we would. They didn't have to talk about what cuts would be made because we already walked in with a balanced budget which already incorporated those cuts. Fast forward a year or two and then say these will become the cuts if we don't get the override looking ahead a year. We are going to anticipate that. So now we are looking ahead to the year and here we are. We didn't discuss that as part of the override.

c. Fiscal Policies (overall policies ,budget, free cash)Next step :Timeline& Deliverables:

The Select Board has to present and close their balance budget to the finance committee by February 10, 2024. March 10, 2024, the warrant articles have to be closed.

2.Next Steps: Timeline & amp; Deliverables: Select Board and School Committee mentioned they will look over what has been discussed at tonight's meeting. Next meeting one more time attentively January 31, 2024

3.Comments and Statements: N/A

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

Adjourn

Board of Selectmen: There being no further business to come before this meeting a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:00pm was made by Shana Shufelt and Manny Soares seconded the roll call vote was 3-0 in favor. The roll call vote Brewer ;aye Shufelt aye, Soares; aye

Finance Committee: There being no further business to come before this meeting a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:14pm was made by Cindy Brown and Christopher Thrasher seconded the roll call vote was 7-0 in favor. (Carreiro left early) The roll call vote Raus ;aye Brown ;aye Morton ;aye Lee ;aye Orlando ;aye Lebreux ;aye Thrasher ;aye

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica McKane
Finance Committee Recording Clerk

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

TA DRAFT budget (in fincom format) 12-12-23.pdf
TA Budget Details V 12-12-23 .xlsx
FY25 Budget 12-18-23 presentation (prepared by Jim Hartnett).pdf
Agenda Wed Jan 3 2024.docx

