

TOWN OF STONINGTON
BOARD OF FINANCE - BUDGET DELIBERATIONS
Tuesday, March 26th, 2024
Stonington High School Auditorium
Following Public Hearing

Budget Deliberations began at 8:56 PM

First Selectman Budget, Line 136 -

Mr. Johnson commented that he would like to restore the \$42,538 from Line 136 of the First Selectman budget. The Board asked to have Chief Burdick provide context as it appears that the Town is subsidizing some districts but not all of them. Chief Burdick discussed the context of this line item and the Chairman commented that he remembered this as a one-time fund. Chief Burdick feels it is too late as their budget has already been determined and posted per the district by-laws. The Board made it clear that if approved, this will certainly be removed in next year's budget, however the Chief would appreciate this final year to organize funds accordingly.

Mr. Brown expressed confusion as to why this line item was funded for years without any comments and was sympathetic to the Fire Department budget already being determined.

Mr. Fauerbach agreed that this fund should be removed moving forward however it seems fair to leave it in place for this year to allow for a transitional period.

Ms. Norman, Mr. Sternberg, and Ms. Young all agree with leaving the funds in place this year but to remove the item for next year.

Chairman O'Brien emphasized that if this is approved the funding will be reduced to \$0 the following year.

Mr. Fauerbach made a motion to restore the full funding of Line 136 and was seconded by Ms. Norman. The motion passed unanimously and the Chairman instructed the Director of Finance to restore \$42,538 to Line 136 of the First Selectman budget.

First Selectman Budget, Line 86 -

The Board asked for further information regarding Line 86 of the First Selectman Budget for 'Generator Maintenance'. A member of the fire department explained that this is an increased yearly cost of the service agreement for their generator.

**Mr. Fauerbach had a general comment in which he thanked everyone that spoke during the public hearing and explained that there may be some confusion as to the control that the Board of Finance has on actual salary figures.*

Administrative Services, Line 16 -

The Board asked for clarification regarding Line 16 of the Administrative Services budget. Ms. Chesebrough explained that the Director of that department could not be present but eventually received word that the increased figure is for Town Hall meeting incidentals.

Department of Planning, Line 15/16 -

The Board briefly discussed Line 15 of the Department of Planning budget and received further clarification from Town Planner Clifton Iler that the increase in Line 16 is for an additional printer.

Department of Human Services, Lines 68/69 -

The Chairman commented that the funds in Line 69 were to be a one-time fund and made a motion to reduce Line 68 to \$2,000 and Line 69 to \$0. Ms. Young seconded the motion.

Ms. Chesebrough provided further context for this funding; the funds help support services and outings for which they do not receive compensation.

Mr. Brown proposed bringing both line items to \$0. Ms. Young did not second this motion but commented that they should be brought to \$0 for the following year's budget.

The original motion, to bring Line 68 to \$2,500 and Line 69 to \$0, was approved by Chairman O'Brien, Mr. Fauerbach, Ms. Young, Ms. Norman, and Mr. Sternberg. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Brown did not approve.

The motion passed and the Director of Finance was instructed to reduce Line 68 to \$2,500 and Line 69 to \$0.

Department of Human Services, Lines 46-48 & Outside Agencies -

Mr. Brown discussed the proposal of reducing the library increases so that all library funds and Outside Agencies are level funded.

Ms. Young responded that the libraries have not received an increase in funding for a number of years and recommended leaving them at 5% while level funding the other outside agencies.

All board members except Mr. Brown agreed that the library funds should not be reduced from their current proposal of a 5% increase.

Mr. Brown believed non-profits are being funded more than they should from the Town and thus all outside agencies should be level-funded.

Mr. Johnson expressed support for the budget as presented.

Ms. Young and Mr. Sternberg also agreed to level-fund the outside agencies.

Ms. Norman, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Fauerbach opposed the level-funding for Line 67 specifically, resulting in a 3-3 vote as the Chairman recused himself due to a conflict of interest. Ultimately, Ms. Norman approved of the level-funding for this line.

The Chairman instructed the Director of Finance to reduce Line 55 to \$87,500, Line 60 to \$11,000, Line 66 to \$5,000, and Line 67 to \$7,500.

Board of Education -

Ms. Young reiterated that this Board does not determine salaries and expressed support for the budget that the Superintendent previously proposed. Amongst her reasoning was the notion that enrollment has dropped while the budget has continued to increase. Ms. Young also emphasized the importance of school systems.

Mr. Sternberg discussed the average class size and implied that they are undersized in regards to the capacity of the building and average class sizes in general. Mr. Sternberg reiterated that enrollment has decreased while the budget has increased.

Mr. Sternberg, Mr. Brown, and Ms. Norman expressed support and agreement with Ms. Young's comments. The budget will remain as presented.

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Fauerbach expressed disagreement

Training?

Mr. Browning commented on a line item for training funds.

Chairman O'Brien, Mr. Fauerbach, Ms. Norman, Mr. Johnson, and Mr. Sternberg voted to leave the line as is, Mr. Brown and Ms. Young opposed.

Capital Improvements -

The Board began discussing that revenues have come in higher than expected and expenses have come in lower than expected, thus alterations can be made to the Capital Improvements budget. Mr. Fauerbach expressed his opinion, that it is preferable to take advantage of the surplus in fund balance rather than issuing debt to fund capital projects.

Mr. Fauerbach proposed funding the Alpha Avenue Bridge Reconstruction (roughly \$1.2 million).

The Board discussed the general fund balance and agreed that fully funding projects now would be an appropriate use of funds.

The Board voted unanimously to fully fund the Alpha Avenue Bridge Reconstruction at roughly \$1,200,000.

Mr. Fauerbach made a motion to appropriate roughly \$720,000 towards the cost of replacing the turf at the high school.

The Chairman received votes of approval from Ms. Young, Ms. Norman, Mr. Sternberg, and himself, which was enough to pass the motion.

Mr. Fauerbach discussed funding for the high school roof repair which has a multi-year forecast of roughly \$1,500,000.

The Chairman proposed funding \$1,000,000 from this budget.

The Board voted unanimously to fund \$1,000,000 towards the high school roof repair, Line 159.

The Board reviewed the final budget figures with the adjustments from this meeting and arrived at a potential mill rate of 17.82.

Mr. Johnson proposed a \$100,000 addition to Capital Improvements, specifically for climate mitigation.

Mr. Sternberg disagreed due to a lack of specifics as to how these funds would be spent.

Ms. Chesebrough provided further clarification that many items which were removed from the Capital Improvements budget would fall under this title and a number of issues can arise that cannot be planned for.

Ms. Young expressed concern over encumbering funds and losing their flexibility, however maintained that the Board can be approached when funds are needed for these types of projects.

Chairman O'Brien agreed that he would rather see funds with more specifically designated purposes but if funds are requested then they will have a 30-hour turnover.

Chairman O'Brien, Mr. Brown, Ms. Young, and Mr. Sternberg opposed Mr. Johnson's proposal.

Ms. Young made a motion to move roughly \$1,510,000 from the excess fund account in order to maintain the mill rate of 17.45.

Mr. Fauerbach, Ms. Norman, Mr. Sternberg, Mr. Brown, and Chairman O'Brien all approved this motion. Mr. Johnson did not approve.

When asked, Mr. Johnson cited the importance of addressing climate change items as well as a disagreement with the process that resulted in maintaining the mill rate of 17.45.

Mr. Fauerbach made a motion to approve the final budget as:

General Operation:	\$28,371,514
Education:	\$43,515,988
Debt:	\$7,100,156
Capital Improv.:	<u>\$7,630,909</u>

Total: \$86,618,567

**Use of fund balance: \$7,886,200*

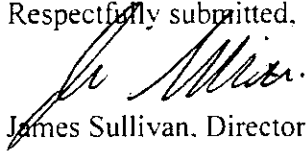
**Amount to be raised by taxes: \$70,405,221*

**Resulting mill rate: 17.45*

Mr. Sternberg seconded the motion. Chairman O'Brien, Ms. Norman, Ms. Young, and Mr. Brown also approved. Mr. Johnson abstained.

The Chairman adjourned the meeting at 10:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Sullivan", is written over the printed name.

James Sullivan, Director of Finance