

**BOARD OF FINANCE
REGULAR MEETING – OCTOBER 20, 2015
MEETING ROOM B TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Warren Serenbetz, Lynne Vanderslice, Richard Creeth, Al Alper, Jeff Rutishauser,
John Kalamarides

Others Present: Rich McArdle, Controller; Barry Bogle, Director of Health, Capt. Tom Conlan, Wilton Police Department, Kendra Baker, reporter for the Wilton Bulletin, and a member of the public, Walter Kress

Call to Order

Chairman Warren Serenbetz called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Approval of Minutes of the Regular Meeting September 15, 2015

Lynne Vanderslice suggested one change to the FY15 Status Report – Update; second paragraph. She recommended that the second sentence referring to the dollar amount in the fund balance be deleted as it was not an accurate amount. Richard Creeth had a question on the section entitled FY17 Operating Budget Guidance for BOS section, the second paragraph wording about further research on the percentage range. He felt this read as he would be the one doing the research. Mr. Serenbetz said it meant the Board in general, and suggested wording be changed to “so the Board could further research”, to which all agreed.

Mr. Serenbetz then asked for a motion to approve the minutes as amended; Lynne Vanderslice so moved, Richard Creeth seconded and the motion carried 5-1, with John Kalamarides abstaining since he did not attend the September meeting.

Lead Poisoning Prevention Grant

Barry Bogle, Director of Health, gave an overview of this, saying it was not much different than last year’s except for being \$27.00 less. He stated last year was very productive, with five new renovator/renewal contractors trained to handle lead projects effectively consistent with the EPA’s guidelines. One of his staff members has also been trained as a Certified Lead Inspector Risk Assessor. This fiscal year the hope is to move forward with more community outreach. Mr. Alper asked if the kiosk and the website were separate or tied in together. Mr. Bogle said they are separate. The kiosk is used in community outreach and will change according to pamphlets and literature. It is located at the Health Department offices. He did agree to look into the possible integration of the two, although some of the data for the kiosk might be too much data for the website. Motion made by Al Alper to approve the Grant; John Kalamarides seconded and the motion carried 6-0.

Comprehensive DUI Grant FY 16

Capt. Tom Conlan, Wilton PD, briefed the Board on this yearly State grant, explaining its objectives to reduce the number of crashes, injuries and fatalities from impaired driving through increased high

visibility DUI enforcement activities, as well as increased driver awareness of the risks and consequences of such impaired driving. Capt. Conlan told the Board enforcement techniques used included extra DUI patrols and annual DUI sobriety checkpoints. The State allows certain days of the year to complete the project. The WPD selects 45 nights with high likelihood of DUI drivers, such as the big holidays, as well as individual ones such as the Super Bowl, St. Patrick's Day, and Cinco de Mayo. The State will refund up to 75% of the Department's personnel cost, with Wilton assuming the balance. The amount of the Grant totals \$60,600. Capt. Conlan informed the Board that the PD has been able to keep DUI crashes down during the 7 p.m. – 3 a.m. time (the greatest times for these offenses). Lynne Vanderslice made a motion to approve the Grant; Richard Creeth seconded, and the motion passed 6-0.

FY17 Operating Budget Guidance - BOS

Mr. Serenbetz referenced the last meeting, where the guidance was set for the BOE. The BOF had decided then to defer a decision for the BOS until the October meeting, as they felt they were not prepared to make a decision at that time. He recommended trying to set the guidance at this time. Mr. Alper interjected since "we're weeks away" from the election; i.e., the public being heard, that he would prefer to wait until the November meeting. He feels the two First Selectman candidates have an absolute difference between them on this particular topic. Since the voters will be voting on a position, not a [budget] number, he felt strongly about waiting until November. John Kalamarides disagreed stating that he felt both candidates are quite aware, not absolutely different on this, to which Mr. Creeth agreed. John felt that a decision could be done at this meeting; whereas Mr. Creeth had reservations on guidance. Mr. Creeth said to set the tone was fine, but he agreed with waiting to see which direction the new First Selectman would go. Mr. Kalamarides further felt that the greater issue was how much the State would be actually giving to communities, since the State is cutting back. It's a biennial budget that means next year would also see cutbacks. Mr. Serenbetz also felt it was best to wait to hear what the voters say before setting this guidance, to which Mr. Rutishauser agreed. To conclude this discussion, Mr. Alper moved to defer the guidance until the November meeting; John Kalamarides seconded. The motion passed 5-1, with Richard Creeth voting no. Since the departmental budgets are being rolled out shortly, Mr. Serenbetz's recommendation to Rich McArdle was for him to instruct the departments to budget as tightly as possible. Mr. McArdle responded that the majority do this and are very cost conscious.

FY15 Status Report - Update

Rich McArdle gave the update on behalf of Ms. Dennies, who was unable to attend. A few highlights were that the Tax Collector informed him that the foreclosure was not imminent. There is on-going discussion among family members as to who is required to pay the taxes on the property and is not yet resolved. In Expenditures the Georgetown Fire bill has been paid in full. Swimming Collection Rate will drive up the percentage once next May and June are recorded. Al Alper asked if there was decision on a fee increase. Mr. McArdle responded Mr. Alper would need to speak to Steve Pierce and the P & R Commission for that. Richard Creeth asked about the Paramedic Services item. Mr. McArdle explained this was a monthly payment to Norwalk Hospital for paramedic services. The encumbrance amount goes down as payments are made during the fiscal year. Mr. Rutishauser questioned a Building Department amount. A new vehicle was purchased, but when the invoice was submitted to Finance the purchase order in the system was not referenced. This extra amount will be reversed on next month's report. There were no further questions for Mr. McArdle.

FOIC Lawsuit – Pre-Trial Hearing

Mr. Serenbetz informed the Board that the FOIC pre-trial hearing is scheduled for October 30th at 2 p.m. in New Britain. As Chairman of the BOF, he will be going. He made a motion that the BOF give him authority to accept the settlement in this case as it is recommended by the Town's attorneys or if he deems it in our best interest to do so. Ms. Vanderslice moved to expand the motion to make all decisions on behalf of the Board. Mr. Serenbetz then withdrew his motion so that Ms. Vanderslice could put forth the motion that Warren Serenbetz be authorized to make all decisions on behalf of the Board of Finance in regard to this particular matter. Mr. Alper seconded. The motion passed unanimously. As brief summary, Mr. Serenbetz explained the reason for the lawsuit and how the BOF became involved.

Committee Reports

Richard Creeth:

Operations Committee (of BOE) – Mr. Creeth reported that a lot was going on, lots of meetings. He asked Jeff Rutishauser if he wanted to recommend a replacement on this committee, since Jeff is unable to attend meetings due to his new work schedule. A person was suggested, but will need to be approached to determine his interest. He reported that the BOE was looking hard at how to come in with an official budget.

Comstock Building Committee – Mr. Creeth reported that Phase I is officially complete. Phase II (the East Wing) work has started and is scheduled to be completed January 22nd. They hope to come in on budget.

BOF Email Mailbox; Transparency – As Clerk of the Board, Mr. Creeth receives the emails sent. He stated the tone of them is accusatory and not pleasant. He feels it's important to provide total transparency to encourage people to ask questions in a more collaborative way. An example is if citizens could view the Town Budget with prior fiscal year actuals, the new fiscal year budget and comparisons, along with an explanation of any significant variances. This information should be just off the home page of the website. He thinks this would answer quite a few of the questions from citizens.

Mr. Alper agrees with transparency but stated there is a fine line with providing more, as it can generate more questions. He believes those asking the questions are looking for "demons", convinced of corruption; thus the tone of the emails sent. He reiterated that the town employees work on behalf of the citizenry, not for them and don't report to them, but through their elected officials. Mr. Alper feels we should not be encumbering their days with that level of detail. At some point transparency becomes a cost, because someone has to do the work to provide the answers. When they're doing that work, they're not doing the Town's work. Al Alper offered to get examples from other New England towns as to their approach to transparency to present at the next meeting.

Jeff Rutishauser brought another approach. Lots of citizens are unsure of the process – was the right one used; if it's a large contract it should be multiply sourced, etc. If the process was shown to be correct, it would resolve some questions. He feels we may need to spend more on transparency to get information out quickly to deter rumors and to show we aren't hiding things and are honest. Mr. Creeth responded that there is a process in place, as well as internal controls but this message needs to be more effectively conveyed. He reiterated the manner in which budget should be presented with last year's actuals and variances. Mr. Rutishauser agreed. More discussion followed about the recent request and all that was involved in responding to it.

Mr. Rutishauser also said that IT in general is opaque to people. He cited all the different systems projects, maintenance vs. new, operating vs. capital; fiber optic project, New World Systems. He believes it would be beneficial to have John Savarese come to BOF meetings occasionally to provide updates on Systems as far as budgets, projects, and maintenance. Mr. Creeth felt these questions should be asked at budget time. Mr. Alper reminded all this has been presented before and to do so annually is irresponsible of the BOF of the Finance/IT department's time. Ms. Vanderslice thinks it's reasonable to have status updates every so often. Mr. Serenbetz noted all agreed to invite John Savarese to the November meeting for a systems update. A list of questions will be prepared ahead of time to forward to him.

Other Business

Fraud Risk Assessment – Mr. Serenbetz deferred discussion of this until November when Ms. Dennies could attend. He will circulate the departmental responses to the rest of the BOF so they can review prior to November.

Warren will follow-up on a status report from Parks & Rec.

Budget Calendar – Warren had reviewed a draft of it and suggested moving some meetings around so as to balance the amount of meetings in certain weeks. He also brought up whether or not this calendar should be published prior to the new Board of Selectmen being in place, as they may have some different ideas as to when to hold certain meetings. If the Board agrees, Warren would go back to Ms. Dennies to suggest waiting to publish it. Ms. Vanderslice agreed with this. There were no comments from other members.

Mr. Serenbetz informed the Board that the BOF would meet with the BOE on December 17th to have a discussion prior to publishing their budget.

Ms. Vanderslice inquired about the timing of the Audit Report. Warren brought up the fact that the persons who sign the Audit are leaving November 30th, so if it is not ready until after that date, then someone else will need to sign it; i.e., the Controller. Further, since there is no designated Second Selectman; then the most senior member on the BOS who was there during the Audit is Dick Dubow. Ms. Vanderslice asked how the auditors felt about this, to which Warren replied they were fine with it. Mr. McArdle was then so informed of his responsibility. Mr. Dubow will also be notified. Mr. McArdle told the Board the audit is going fine; the auditors will be in again next week. The closing is going smoother than last year.

Public Participation

None.

Having no further business, Mr. Serenbetz adjourned the meeting at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kris Fager
(from video recording)