

Board of Finance / Board of Selectmen
Budget Work Session
3/9/10

Attending

BoF Members: Al Alper, Warren Serenbetz, Lynne Vanderslice, Jim Meinhold, Andy Pforzheimer and Gail Lavielle

BoS Members: Ted Hoffstatter, Susan Bruschi, Richard Creeth, Hal Clark and Bill Brennan

Wilton Town Employees: Sandy Dennies, CFO, Paul Milositz- Fire Chief, Steven Schole - Director of Health, Tom Thurkettle - Director of DPW, Sandy Taffel- Director of HR, Bob Nerney - Director - Planning of Land Use Management, Patricia Sesto- Director of Environmental Affairs, Richard McArdle - Controller, Bob Crosby - Wilton Police, Marilyn Gould-P&Z,

Wilton Citizens: Chris Welden - Wilton Police Commission, Joan Lounds - Wilton Bulletin, Jerry Holdridge, Christian Camerota - Wilton Patch

Call to Order

Chairman Serenbetz called the meeting to order at 7:30pm. He declared the purpose of the meeting was to review the BoS budget presented on March 5th to the BoF. There was no opportunity for public comment at this meeting. Mr. Serenbetz thanked everyone involved for their time and effort in preparing the BoS budget.

First Selectman Bill Brennan called the BoS meeting to order. He appreciated the opportunity to present the budget and reminded the BoF members every line item and related rationale is detailed in the binder.

Mr. Brennan declared all department heads were involved with the budget and the town continues to be in a lean mode. The heads were requested to present a flat budget if possible. The BoS objective is to manage the town government efficiently by maintaining essential services while managing operating costs. He stressed the importance of not deferring necessary capital expenditures indefinitely as it will cost more in the long run.

BoS Budget

The town budget presented is \$29.3 million, a 2.67% increase over last year. The increase in capital expenditures is \$200,000 for a total of \$1.3 million, which Mr. Brennan indicated is a consistent level of spending, not excessive.

The largest number in operating expenses is \$12.3 million for employee compensation (44% of expenses) and \$6.8 million (24%) for employee benefits. This total accounts for 68% of the entire budget, compared to 66% of the budget last year. This increase is due to employee wage increases and contractual obligations with the 4 unions and the non-unions and related increased employee benefit costs, many of which the town can't control. (Currently, contract negotiations are underway with 2 of the unions and next year the other two union contracts will be up for negotiation.)

The operating capital plan includes vehicle and truck replacement, road pavement, police car and fire truck replacement and information systems, both hardware and software replacement.

Questions / Answers

The BoF members took turns asking specific questions regarding the BoS budget. These questions included the size / need of the dump truck fleet, other town properties and repair costs, paving frequency, building department growth, Parks and Rec self sustaining programs, sprinklers for Miller / Driscoll and the increasing trend of pension as a percentage of salaries.

Mr. Meinhold and Mrs. Vanderslice had specific questions regarding Trackside including measures of success in place to predict its' long term viability. Mr. Brennan assured the BoF the Trackside board has been told it needs to show revenues or can't be maintained. He believes Trackside continues to improve and all area towns with successful teen centers confirm it could be up to 10 years before the facility truly hits its' stride. Mrs. Vanderslice stressed Trackside needs to proactively increase its' fundraising.

Mr. Alper stated "there was no fat on the bone" of the budget and complimented the library on its' flat budget. He inquired why IT hardware maintenance increased 50% from 2 years ago compared to the private sector

where costs like these are decreasing. Ms. Dennies and Mr. Brennan will get back with the answer.

Several departments showed an increase in legal expense reserves. The suggestion was made to possibly combine all the reserves into one pool and use as needed or unless a specific case is known, budget the reserve at \$0 and if needed use the funds from the Charter Authority reserves.

Salaries for non-contractual employees are up approx. 3.3% compared to union employees receiving just under a 3% increase. Approximately 80% of the town employees are union members. Several BoF members commented on the public sector salary increases, which are across the board higher compared to the private sector.

Several members of the BoF asked if the recession continues and taxpayers are willing to forego some town services in exchange for not paying increased taxes, what areas could see cutbacks. Ultimately there would be lay-offs, which would translate to a reduction in services. Mr. Brennan responded Wilton is currently on the fine line if we decrease services, safety could be an issue.

Wilton is working in several areas to regionalize services and reduce costs. There is movement to make emergency call centers more centralized and Wilton is trying to take advantage of a State grant program for this service. There was consensus by everyone in the room that multi-town services could be a positive way to reduce costs and should be pursued as much as possible.

Considering both the BoE and BoS budgets as presented, the mill rate would increase by 5.1%. Mr. Serenbetz posed the question “what if” this increase was put to the town for a vote? The overwhelming consensus from everyone in the room was “no”. Mr. Brennan believes the community would vote down such a large increase. Mr. Creeth commented people’s incomes are not going up 5.1% so a large increase is not sustainable.

Final comments included Mr. Brennan saying other towns are not seeing flat budgets, rather an increase over last year of approximately 3%. Ms. Dennies stated all the departments delivered a bare bones budget and she is proud to be the CFO of Wilton. She expressed concerned a staff reduction could cause problems for State mandates requiring certain procedures be followed.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amy Roberts
Recording Secretary