

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

#	Response
1	We all need a break with all this inflation happening
2	House prices have exploded in every state- except for CT. This is a dying state, running businesses away. Stop cutting expenses, house taxes are not your only revenue - actively recruit and grow businesses- to increase your revenue. I can buy a more expensive home anywhere else, with lower taxes. What?! Band aids
3	Our taxes are high. Let's not increase them.
4	We are here for the schools, no brainer. Education is top priority, however, change the retirement age/benefits in school system.
5	I understand and appreciate the challenges in budgeting, however the comparison of YoY mill rate change is an incorrect one, the only comparison that matters is the proposed mill rate relative to our peer towns. Using this metric we're failing. To be clear, I'm not pointing blame, but rather making an observation that every homebuyer makes. I believe this is how we should start thinking about the budget and identify the drivers that push our mill rate so far above our peers and develop strategies to target each of those issues. Not something that will be fixed with this budget, but a mindset change in order to not lose ground relative to the surrounding towns.
6	Reality check time: It is obscene to ask for more when inflation is through the roof, people have experienced severe reversals in income and employment all while federal funding via ESSER and Cares Act legislation funnelled unprecedented aid to Wilton like other districts...and our school enrollment continues to decrease. Budgets must be better aligned in recognition of that reality.
7	The BOE and its spending habits particularly Kevin Smith need to be reviewed with a fine tooth comb. The town was fortunate through Covid as an influx to people moved to town but not because jobs were created.
	We have lived in Wilton for 12 years and currently have three children (one in each school: Miller Driscoll, Cider Mill and Middlebrook). I am opposed to the proposed increase in the Board of Education budget. While I support the need for capital improvements to the school facilities, in terms of staffing and student educational outcomes, I do not feel that Wilton schools are performing at the level that they could be and our priorities are sometimes misplaced. The topics I would like the Board of Finance to address with the Board of Education: 1. Staffing: It has been well noted over the last 12 years we have lived here that each year there has been declining student enrollment (along with projected future declines). During that time period, Wilton Public Schools refused to reduce staffing levels stating there was no connection between declining enrollment and staff levels. Year-after-year many new school staff were welcomed each fall. I realize in the last few years there has been an increase in enrollment due to Covid-related moves into Wilton, however, it would be interesting to see an analysis of staffing levels in the last 5-10 years compared to student enrollment and broken down into categories (administrative staff, full-time teachers, instructional coaches, etc) . As payroll is the leading driver of expenses for any organization, an in-depth analysis of this line item should be evaluated.

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2. Educational outcomes: As the Wilton Public School budget has continued to grow over the years, the educational outcomes of students does not appear to be growing at the same trajectory. Most concerning are the continued poor results of Wilton students in the area of mathematics. Since the time my oldest child entered Miller Driscoll (8 years ago) I have listened to many presentations on how Wilton is planning to address the obvious deficiencies in the area of mathematics, yet the continued results illustrate that progress is not being made despite the addition of funding and resources that have been put into these programs (math instructional coaches, math interventionists, etc). I have seen first hand from my children's experiences how little math seems to be valued in Wilton schools. (For example, students at Cider Mill being told they only have to spend 10 minutes on math homework and do not need to finish it if they do not want to. Math at Miller Driscoll consistently seeming to be the last subject covered in a school day, or even skipped in a school day if there is not time). There are countless programs that are designed to engage and excite students about reading (Reading Rocks, read-a-thons, reading challenges, visiting authors, assigned reading homework), but nothing comparable in the area of math. It is extremely disappointing and unacceptable for a high performing school such as Wilton that this critical subject matter seems to be ignored.

When considering the extreme advances in technology and STEM careers that will develop in the next several decades, how will Wilton students rise to those challenges and make the most of themselves if they do not have a firm grasp on the foundational principles of mathematics? I draw your attention to the New Canaan Public Schools budget proposal this year and their educational outcomes as presented on slides 15 and 17 (link below). You will notice that within our DRG, Wilton ranks last in the area of mathematics, far below every other school. It is also interesting to note that New Canaan is also accomplishing these student outcomes at a per pupil cost that is less than Wilton (slide 22). When I mention our sometimes misplaced priorities, I am weighing these poor educational outcomes with activities I hear my children mention that take place in the classroom (or in these cases, that are not taking place in the classroom). Overall, I have truly felt that Wilton educators are fantastic and have given my children an excellent education. However, when my Middlebrook student tells me that her social studies teacher did not conduct class three times last week because she was managing a Zero-waste Kahoot in the cafeteria, or when her reading teacher mentions that she just traveled to California for a DEI conference, I question the use of my tax dollars. In these instances, was there not a member of the administrative staff who could have conducted the Zero-Waste Kahoot game so that my child did not miss three social studies lessons (60% of class time) in one week? Was there not a similar conference that was local, so as to not spend tax payer dollars for a cross-country journey? Again, I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts and I hope you will consider 8 the points I have raised. Thank you.

9 Reduce the tax rate.

We already have a. Dry high mill rate. I'm fine with adding resources to town upkeep as the town grounds are really poorly kept. However, we need to see significant improvements for this cost to make sense. In addition, the town administrator is not something that directly benefits the community from what I 10 understand and has incredibly high cost.

Several items in the Board of Selectman's budget could be reduced by relying on private organizations, such as Wilton Go Green and empowering them to take on the projects rather than them being owned by the 11 town.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

12	While I understand the BOE has unfunded mandates and the Board of finance and selectman have no oversight of how they use funds, I think it is pertinent for the BOE to live within their SET budget just as households have to. Otherwise this will be a game of cat and mouse year over year and breed hostility between the two or three parties involved. More money does not have a direct correlation to better schools, test scores, etc. We are due for an economic awakening and this is the time to be more fiscally conservative and responsible to prepare for what many are not expecting or prepared for. If this holds true many will be unable to pay taxes and we will be FORCED to do more with less. Might as well start now.
13	You guys NEVER talk about finding efficiencies. You let the board of ed dominate everything and use scare tactics to keep spending our money. But our stats haven't changed in years. More money doesn't solve every problem
14	We are in the midst of an inflationary period that appears to be long lasting. BOE increases of the magnitude proposed are just too high to substantiate while we are under this inflationary period and experiencing significant cost increases just to maintain our everyday expenses.
15	Increasing taxes has historically driven people from CT. We have to find a solution besides that like cutting expenses.
16	Students in Wilton public schools has decreased over the past decade yes the education budget increases, cost per student is excessive.
17	Prior BOE budget increases are not currently translating into assistance in core education areas.
18	With the uncertainty in our world today, lets focus on keeping residents in town. That means keeping mil rate and taxes low. Extras like parks and sports etc should be low on the priority list. Stop lining pockets of the left in this town.
19	Stop the huge and hideous apartment buildings being proposed in town from going up. I'd support a mill rate increase to fund lobbying/litigation for this matter.
20	I applaud the efforts of the BOF and BOS, but the BOE is out of control. Just look at the skewed % of our taxes that go to BOE.
21	Student population is down, a slew of new sales have occurred reestablishing the grand list. I see no reason for an increase in the BOE budget nor do I approve of a pay increase for the administrators given the academic performance of the past two years.
22	Wilton's taxes are already very high comparative to other similar towns with good schools. While I can understand the need to maintain the status quo we have to start worrying about taxing our town too much and find other ways like commercial investment to come to town and lessen the burden on residents . The only way to change it is to restrict the spending. The mill rate needs to stay the same so that people can get a breather and so inflation does not destroy our ability to pay these high taxes. The increased values of our homes will easily offset the lack of increasing the mill rate.
23	I think the 2023 budget, like most town budgets of the last 30 years, is concerned with having "shiny things" that other towns have, and hiring more town employees. It's completely unsustainable. I miss the blue-haired Yankee ladies of yesteryear, who would get up at town meetings and scold the BOE for wanting new carpet at the high school. Soon we will be as taxed as Westchester... but our family will hopefully have moved on by then...
24	As more and more commercial property goes on short sale the burden shifts to residential property owners and we already pay enough tax as it is and will pay even more. We must bring more businesses to Wilton to fill up all this vacant space.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

<p>I am tired of seeing a BOE budget that is presented to see what sticks, and then are able to shrink it down and still meet expectations. The schools are great but can, and historically have, operated on reduced approved budget dollars without compromising quality. We are spending a lot more on fewer students every year but regardless of increased value of housing which could start to slip, and commercial inventory, 25 there is not a lot value to dig into as there may be in surrounding towns.</p>
<p>Please stop asking what maximum increase is supported and if we're willing to "accept peeling paint, fewer police/teachers, and sub-par programs. I want value for the \$ spent and BOE fails every year. Dr Smith's performance is disgraceful and every year we "round the corner" and hear it's "complicated". Math program is a failure, parents spend a fortune on tutors, students leave unprepared. The coaching DOES NOT WORK. We need to set standards, see improvement or terminate him. Teachers, administrative and custodial staff witness his incompetence and see him as a joke. Not always how much we spend it's how well we use it. Manage the budget, ensure value and then I'll support it. Having or not having children currently enrolled is 26 NOT impacting my decisions.</p>
<p>The Board of Education is over inflated and someone needs to look into how this budget is being 27 managed!!!!</p>
<p>Taxes and government spending must be reduced. Food and gas prices are way up- families don't have extra cash for increased taxes too. The Superintendent has failed to reduce costs despite lower student 28 enrollment. I ask the BOE to reduce Wilton spending at both the BOE and BOS.</p>
<p>BOE needs to get headcount of staff down. Enrollment declines have not been matched with appropriate 29 staffing consolidation. Too much overhead, non-student facing staff.</p>
<p>The BOE should have line item veto on BOE budget. The current practice eliminates proper oversight of the 30 BOE budget. How did this even happen?</p>
<p>due to the expected high rise in inflation, all building and extraneous projects should be put on hold until it 31 settles down</p>
<p>BOS continues to do a good job as does Finance at vetting every number and continuing a strong framework of appropriate balance. Ed does not operate with the same level of discipline. I support math and science initiatives. But it remains fully illogical to see staff grown as the number of students plateaus or goes down. I also strongly endorse scrutinizing their capital budgets more closely. The whole factor of useful life and 32 adding value (which can be financed) is much misinterpreted/</p>
<p>I don't understand why our taxes are so high yet our buildings and grounds aren't maintained. Also, our Math program seems to be lacking for too long despite the BOE budget being on par with surrounding 33 districts.</p>
<p>Budgets are almost right however still a bit too high. Cuts need to be made. We are among one of the more 34 expensive towns tax-wise in the state-that needs to change</p>
<p>The last few years have been hard on everyone, and the current rate of inflation is making it exponentially worse. Now is not the time to ask Wilton families to pay more taxes. Finding a way to hold the budget flat is 35 more appropriate in view of what is happening economically right now.</p>
<p>Families are still recovering from The financial burden and loss of income during Covid. Now the current 36 inflation, increase gas prices... I do not have an appetite for increase taxes</p>

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

37 CUT TAXES

Once again the Board of Ed is reaching. Their budget already in excess of \$80million is sufficient. They need to be more fiscally responsible. Especially with declining enrollment over time. MANY people (taxpayers) in town are still pained & suffering from the 2008 financial crisis. Adding more recent events, many are in even worse financial positions. Wilton being a "wealthy" town is relative & definitely subjective reality. With approximately 75% + of every tax dollar collected in Wilton going to the school district either directly or indirectly, it is only the Board of Finance that stands to buffer the town from the BOE budget. It should be noted, in contrast the BOS budget tends to show the restraint taxpayers deserve. Too often, almost every year, taxpayers stand aside... they don't attend meetings, don't keep up with the events unfolding in town, budgets for sure, and then worst of all... THEY DON'T VOTE! With a 15% electorate turnout required, any less than a 15% turnout and the budgets put before the town at the Town Meeting pass. This makes the ultimate responsibility of the BOF extraordinarily important... keeping the reigns of fiscal responsibility taught.

38 Particularly where the BOE budget is concerned.

Stop spending. Spending more on schools has no correlation to performance. Take a breath. Figure out how to maximize what you have.

The BOE budget does not seem to match the need; most importantly does not, for most part, highlight contract services, which are significant - also includes money for furniture - there is historic waste in this area

Why is education budget increasing while school population is decreasing - and less teachers are needed (they can retire) for less students! Prior years Miller Driscoll was remodeled, increased, having too, too many class rooms-which remained empty! Our mill rate is higher than the surrounding towns, thus buyers prefer to purchase a home that has lower taxes. If our taxes are lower, home prices would increase. Raising our taxes is forcing our senior citizens to move out of the homes and town we love!

I am a senior with no children -- Wilton should consider taxing those who never had children in the system at a lower level

One of the biggest draws to Wilton is the excellent public education. It's what brings new families into town. Prioritizing the education of our youth and working on closing the educational gap from the pandemic and supporting social/emotional health should be the main priority. The other issues are important for the quality of life of all residents and should be ranked according to priority.

I do not support an ever increasing mill rate I do not support the ever increasing cost for non teaching staff in our education system

Too many expensive and unnecessary administrators in WPS. Cut out the unnecessary school administrator positions. Allow some class sizes to increase (enrollment is flat or down and Covid risk is over/minimal). As teachers retire or leave, do not replace.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

Wilton schools need to focus on providing more value and differentiated learning in math and reading/writing. A majority of families pay for extracurricular programs in these subjects because the school doesn't keep pace with our children's needs. A district with this much money should pay more attention to providing a first class education to all students, all of the increases are around aides and other support for special needs and completely ignore gifted students. This also will continue to decline our test scores as the
46 resources are unfairly weighted to children who are average/below average.

47 Reduce bloated school budget by significant staff and program reductions

48 As a senior citizen, it is getting increasing difficult to remain here.

I reviewed the BOE budget in detail. It was surprising to see how much is spent on Administrators. I am also displeased to see such a focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. I would prefer a hyper-focus on Reading, Writing, Math, and Science. Fifty to Seventy-Five years ago DEI didn't exist, and public schools did a much better job educating children. Now we focus too much on the 'soft stuff' at the detriment of the 'hard stuff'. (aka Actual Learning) As for the Mill Rate, I understand that our schools are very good (although Miller Driscoll's MAP scores were alarmingly average) and I'm okay paying for that. But the taxes in this town are already quite high, and other than the schools it's hard to see what we're paying for. (No garbage pick-up, no town water, etc.) If our school ranking were to move ahead of New Canaan, Darien, and Westport, I
49 would happily pay more in taxes. But until that happens we have work to do.

Declining enrollment should result in declining BOE budgets...the proposed increase is unfortunate. The Police need a new HQ but the price is too high (compare to the new building costs at the Sharp Hill intersection. The Town should backfill existing empty space at other Town owned facilities (MD, Cider Mill) or purchase existing commercial space to house town offices and sell, redevelop the current facility. Consider the 60,000 square foot Class A building across from the Chevy dealer that sold for 19 million...enough space for all Town Hall services and excess space can be rented out until and did needed.

50 Thanks for your efforts to contain spending

The BOE budget presentation is a 345 page eyechart with no executive summary or analytics like the BOS
51 presented. I can't get behind something I can't understand.

Seniors who live in this town and have had paid into the school budget for years with never having had a child go they the system should be exempt from this part of the budget. So little is done for seniors in this
52 town

Many of our Town's citizens have experienced financial downturns and the Town has continued to spend
53 without concern for the citizens financial pain.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

I really appreciate the thoughtful engagement of all the Boards in Wilton. I am a new resident and have learned a lot listening to the various meetings. Thank you. Revenue -- what else can the town do to raise income? Education -- student #s down 20%+ but expense keeps rising? Values -- homes, bldgs, car values up, can mill rate be flat? I hear a lot of comments from the various Boards about negative comparisons to New Canaan, Darien and Westport (maybe Ridgefield as well), but I have not heard much about a broader strategy of how Wilton tries to position itself as an attractive alternative -- attracting new businesses, developing new affordable housing, improving retail venues, better fields and parks (heard a great debate on this) or relaxing zoning restrictions. Again, I really appreciate the capable engagement of the Boards.

54 Wilton is fortunate and I am happy to be here.

Stop spending so much on getting new businesses to locate here. We are a small town and would like to remain like that, not to increase to the size of a city.

Yes there are very little in the way of eliminating the fat. Contracted increases is a disaster with the bloated staff. I mean teacher Coaches, instructional leaders ect Kevin Smith continues to talk about the Quality of our teachers. Than why do you need so many "Coaches". We have some incredible educators in District. If the hires that need this type of assistance are not up to par, we should be spending good money after bad decision making.

These are tough times. Covid, inflation and now war has affected the price of food, gas and basic necessities. While I think the budget request are reasonable, this is NOT the year for an increase in the mill rate. Familiar are having a tough enough time as it is.

Senior residents have a hard enough time getting by with the loss of the property tax deduction and the rising price of everything. Also not everyone's income has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Times are still tough so please keep that in mind.

59 It is hard to understand why the school budget keeps increasing while the school population decreases.

60 Do not touch our school budget!

Keep up the good work. I am concerned about the BOE union negotiations that are coming up. Please participate and help the BOE members who do not have a good understanding of finance.

62 bd of ed should consider staff reductions

I feel trackside teen center is a huge benefit to the children in this town. Particularly at this time when so many are suffering from mental health issues. I would love to see stronger support (financially) from the town

64 Education Budget Should remain as is

This Town charges a great deal in taxes and gives you nothing. If it wasn't for COVID and finding a house difficult we would have never moved to this town.

Where has all the state and federal monies gone? Use them to reduce property taxes and start thoughtfully growing the commercial tax base. Homeowners can support tax increases of these levels year after year!

I simply think we do not invest enough in the BS arenas of infrastructure and open space and recreational resources, and we invest too much in the BE ever-escalating budget increases per pupil for vacillating but not growing student populations.

68 The record high inflation rate is a very big problem for us all.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

Board of Ed should not adopt the 'teachers' coaches' system, and should not be adopting any other new program. No more empire building. New programs should be initiated inly where they demonstrate costs savings. And the overall BOE budget should be based on rise/fall in number of student, plus something for inflation - so a significant decrease in student population should trigger a reduction in staff head count and
69 lower overall budget.

The BOF should continue to press the BOE and BOS for line item explanations and advocate for taxpayers in
70 Wilton. The 2021 elections sent a clear mandate for responsible stewardship.

Tax increases drive prospective residents and current residents to consider other lower tax municipalities
71 (Greenwich, Darien, New Canaan, etc).

72 The BOE has not sufficiently demonstrated the need for its recommended increases.

73 give empty nesters a reason to stay in town

Economic/business development in Wilton is sorely needed. Between them & Zoning the twin should be making it easier, not harder, for small business to come to Wilton. I also think a limited number of more main stream franchises should be allowed in town to bring more revenue /tax base to town. Taxes are
74 already too high.

75 Taxes are killing economic growth in CT

Every time I pass the tennis courts I am floored by the amount of student vehicles parked there. Have we examined the impact of these self-drivers on the school bus schedules? I know we need the buses but with
76 so fewer students taking the bus, I am sure the needs for the buses have decreased.

It seems counter intuitive to raise mil rate when you are looking to increase population and bring businesses and families into our town. As I understand it the town has money waiting to be spent so unless the town can VERY clearly justify to its citizens where an increase in mail rate would positively effect them, it seems
77 very hard to justify considering there are many other areas for improvement within the town.

In the 20 years that we have been living in Wilton our property taxes almost doubled. I am afraid that if these increases continue Wilton will become unaffordable for families like us (middle class). Before the pandemic the Wilton property market was stale and property values were declining. A lot of that had to do with the affordability. Let's keep Wilton affordable for all families, not just a recent influx of people from NY
78 city.

There is very little consideration given to the impact of budget increases and mill rate increases on senior citizens. The tax burden on senior citizens in Connecticut is driving them to leave the state and move to
79 areas of the U.S. where taxes are lower. I hear this all the time while I am participating in volunteer work.

80 Seniors cannot continue to pay the spiraling cost of living in Wilton due to the high property taxes.

I think a closer look needs to be taken at where we can be more efficient as a whole. Combine jobs/salaries, monitor the time it takes to for road maintenance and tree pruning, landscaping & lawn cutting. Look at
81 administrative salaries and remove dead weight and unnecessary positions.

Comments from Respondents Against Proposed Mill Rate Change

<p>We are not doing an effective job of luring businesses to Wilton. The town continues to be difficult to deal with whether it's zoning or subjective building design issues. If we could lure real businesses here we could increase the business tax take and keep the mill rate down for residents. We've been hearing about a 10 year plan for 12 years and while I'm sure the meetings are fun, we have little to show for it. The housing in Wilton was SAVED by the pandemic and the town has/had a huge opportunity with remote work becoming real - making Wilton a "commutable" town. There is a massive opportunity for any town like ours to seize the moment and yet I fear our town leadership is asleep at the wheel trying to figure out how to slide in</p> <p>82 another retirement home.</p>
<p>I do not need fancy amenities. I am not a hedge fund manager, just a working person. Please cut back on</p> <p>83 spending that I am asked to pay for.</p>
<p>the majority of the town's budget goes to the board of ed and the majority of the board of ed budget is FTE costs. You must get control of the education labor costs to have any hope for long term budget success. This means you need to take control and be involved in the union negotiations. Paying teachers cause they got a</p> <p>84 grad degree or have stayed another year is a poorly designed program.</p>
<p>BOE needs to find way to be more efficient in their spending. They talk about how much more they need to spend than last year but I never hear them look into if any expenditures are necessary or things can be combined to reduce costs. And when they are forced to cut their budget they always cut the items that</p> <p>85 people will complain the most about being cut so that the public screams don't cut the budget.</p>
<p>I support the schools but the vast majority of spend doesn't go to kids and is wasteful. Giving them an</p> <p>86 increase only serves to perpetuate the problem</p>
<p>87 School costs are too high. Are kids 3.26% smarter this year? Are their test scores 3.36% higher?</p>
<p>Everyone focuses on the headline Board of Education budget numbers, but ignores that PER STUDENT costs continue to climb materially. It is a verifiable fact that we pay more for teachers than surrounding towns, and continue to add resources (like teacher coaches) that do not improve educational outcomes for our</p> <p>88 children, that do not provide sufficient value.</p>

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

Response

I appreciate the thinking and work behind the BOS and BOE budgets. In analyzing the information, I try and take into consideration all perspectives. I appreciate the BOF's comments that the BOE should analyze its budget like the BOS did, looking for cost savings. As a resident, I appreciate cost savings. But, I also recognize the school system is not the same as a business or municipality. We are very fortunate to have experienced, dedicated people on our BOE and I trust their guidance and recommendations, as I do the teaching and administrative staff. They've earned this trust by what I've seen after having two children in the district and the experience they both have had. The increase in the BOE budget is a smart investment in my opinion. From a BOS budget standpoint, I agree with what BOS has set out, but I do think we need to consider climate resiliency into our future projects. There are a lot of opportunities for federal and state funding for resilient 1 building (e.g., BRIC program), which can help reduce costly impacts from climate change in the future.

As a new resident who chose Wilton because of the excellent school systems, and having reviewed the budget proposal, I believe it is perfectly reasonable to expect a modest mill rate increase if it helps support our teachers, education programs and students. The last two years have seen significant stresses on our education system and impacted our children, and the coming years will require investment and focus to help our children make up for the lost time during COVID. Now is certainly NOT the time to be cutting our 2 education budget - our children and our educators need our full support.

People like me move here specifically for the schools. It is what drives people to Wilton besides the small town community and 2 acres. Keep them at the top notch levels that they are. Just a heads up though, the Wilton High School will need to be redone sooner rather than later and I am sorry to have to point that out, but it's just a fact. Moms joke that it is the same as when they went there in the late 80's - 90's. Not only does it need a face lift, but when you tour it - obviously compared to other nearby towns, it is in sad shape and does not reflect the caliber of the other schools in town whatsoever. Sorry - I feel bad for saying this, but it's 100% going to need to be renovated. Don't waste money trying to band-aid it either.:(It's time to 3 start these conversations... sorry.

4 Schools are the heartbeat of this community. Its why we moved here so pls give them what they need

Our family moved here for the schools and we fully support whatever budget increase is necessary to 5 maintain the high quality of education Wilton is known for

I'd support a larger mill rate increase (or not) depending on what it was going towards. Hard to answer that 6 question without more details.

Of all the increases in budget, the BOE increase is the most crucial to support. Our children have encountered so much difficulty during COVID-19 with both learning and emotional challenges for which additional support will be needed for years to offset. In addition, our culture faces continued and increasing online dangers, including addition and bullying while drugs also become increasingly available. Our schools are strong in their excellence and are a primary reason for this town's population growth as well as a 7 community cornerstone.

I would support higher than 5% if value was there. Budgets that have been too lean too long have resulted in 8 a degradation of Wilton town services, amenities and education in the last 15 years.

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

9 We should bring more employers, businesses, and restaurants to Wilton

We greatly appreciate your request for feedback. The surrounding towns which compete with Wilton to attract new families are all proposing significant to very high budget increases for the Board of Education (New Canaan 8.6% and Ridgefield 4.98% to name just two), which comes on the back of prior year increases. We believe a similar increase to the Wilton Board of Education budget will provide Wilton schools with the 10 resources needed to educate Wilton's students to maintain their academic excellence.

I believe it's imperative to reinvest in our community at a higher sustained rate than the past years. 11 Decisions should be based on the current situation not in anticipation of what is down the road.

The BOF must support the BOED budget as proposed in order to continue and promote the quality of Education provided by Wilton Public Schools. The WPS are the main reason we moved to Wilton! The BOF 12 must support the proposed BOED!

I would like to know if the classes that were added to the high school the last few years have been successful from the point of view of the administration, teachers and the students. Are we able to find the correct match of teachers to teach these new dynamic classes and are the students interested in the classes being 13 added??

I think the Board of Finance should have a more active role in the salary negotiations for all Teachers and administrators employed by Wilton. They do a great job and are well paid comparing their salary and 14 benefits to those of surrounding towns.

Other local towns offset cost increase with corporate taxes - what is Wilton doing to better leverage our open office space to increase this tax base? Would appreciate a similar survey (to this and a few years ago) 15 with a focus on economic development and the town's opinions of the efforts to date on that front.

16 Education is the primary driver of new residents to Wilton. I consider my taxes to be mostly "tuition"

The BOE budget is the product of a lot of hard work to keep the numbers as low as possible. I 17 wholeheartedly support it.

The reason people move here is our schools. It is imperative that the BOE budget be approved. Keeping class size down by retaining all teachers (and hiring new ones due to increased children in K and 1) are crucial. The heart of a town is its schools. Investing in our children is the most important thing a town can 18 do.

First I would like to thank the BOS and BOF for their continued hard work. I recognize how difficult it is to balance the needs and desires of the Wilton population. I do support the budget increase (as much as I do not want my taxes to increase) and would like the new police HQ to be approved. While I have not had the opportunity to visit it, I have seen pictures, read reports and understand that it has been quite delayed. Having the proper infrastructure is critical to support our first responders. My question concerns absentee voting - I am out of town on May 7th. While I will try to attend the meeting on May 3rd to cast my vote, is 19 there an opportunity for absentee voting?

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

<p>We need to be as fiscally prudent as possible as people are struggling financially due to covid and inflation. I do support the Board of Ed Budget, even though I do think it is high, because the children have suffered so much with virtual learning and have a lot of catching up to do and the inflation rate is so high at present.</p>
20 But let us make sure there is not padding in the budget please!
<p>It's time our police officers get a new station. I have not looked at the details of the proposal and suspect some adjustments might be needed to keep the cost from running up too far given the economic environment</p>
21 but still support building a new station.
22 Inflation continues to increase, this is not the time to extend spending but rather minimize.
23 Qualified people are doing the planning. They have the best perspective for the community
<p>the BOE budget has changed since this survey was posted. Thanks to all who helped in the budget process -</p>
24 BOF, BOE, BOS.
25 Please provide funds for the Yellow House at Ambler Farm, as that is a Town of Wilton responsibility.
<p>I believe Wilton in general does a very good job at managing the budget. Inflation is crazy at this time yet the town and the school board is still managing it effectively. I lived in NJ over a decade ago and the small</p>
26 tax increases Wilton does compare nothing to the out of control tax increases I faced in NJ.
<p>The Board of Education budget cannot be cut. What these kids have suffered through during the pandemic, is immeasurable, and there needs to be greater support for mental health services, special education</p>
<p>services, intervention services, social emotional learning in general and smaller class sizes. The burnout of</p>
27 teachers and support staff is very apparent, and more needs to be done for them as well.
<p>If we do not, as a town, invest in the town infrastructure and amenities, then the only advantage Wilton has</p>
28 over surrounding towns is our education system. This must remain our top priority for spending.
29 Fund our schools fully, it's why the majority of people move to this town.
<p>Grow the commercial tax base, give residents a break. Stop comparing Wilton to Darien and New Canaan, Westport compare us to Weston, Easton, Redding and Ridgefield. If we had enough money we would be</p>
<p>living in Darien, New Canaan or Westport for the amenities. We don't have enough money, we are here. We love the schools, the country feel, the open spaces, the outdoors. Play to our strengths, and bring people</p>
<p>into town based on those values. We could be playing up our history, our environmentalism, our great outdoors. We need to give newcomers a sense that we are a welcoming, progressive town that takes care of</p>
30 all its citizens.
<p>Are there any unimportant expenses that can be cut. These would be non-critical expenses like upgrades to</p>
31 playing fields that are nice to have but not necessary?
<p>I support the proposed BOE budget. We have dedicated teachers and staff who need our support. Please do</p>
32 not cut the BOE budget.
<p>board of ed budget keeps increasing staff and enrollment continues to drop. there needs to be a change. we are no longer one of the top schools in the state as we were in previous years but yet they keep</p>
33 increasing budget requests

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

Investing in our schools is crucial and I am all in favor of giving what the Board of Ed needs. However funds have to be spent wisely. People move to Wilton because of the school system so we have to continue to invest in the schools. However, when a 40 year old, unrenovated 2500 square foot 4bedroom is taxed at over \$15k per year, something is not right. Invest in the schools wisely but mindful of how much you are 34 requiring a typical family to pay in real estate taxes.
My wife and I fully support additional expenses related to improving the conditions for our schools to ensure they are safe and well maintained. Other initiatives such as the installation of artificial turf and lighting to a second sports field or building a new sports complex should only be considered if there is a budget surplus 35 without an increase to the mill rate.
As a parent with three children in WPS, I fully support increasing the education budget in order to continue to provide the best possible staff and services to school children in our town. They have shown incredible resilience and flexibility during the past two years and we cannot drop the ball in supporting them as best 36 we can.
The Wilton Pre-K, especially for kids with special needs is incredible, please give them whatever they need! I'm fine with the mill rate being increased as needed. I understand it needs to be increased this year. I'd 37 expect the rate to be decreased once property values are adjusted related to this recent housing market.
BOE need to define and implement a higher level of overall financial stewardship and cost containment management by defining appropriate variance reporting and KPIs with monthly reviews where results are explained and discussed. Greater accountability through monitoring and transparency is a must. It is 38 subpar.
I think the Board should show Inflation adjust numbers to better communicate how much is spending more 39 and EXPANDING programs vs just keeping up with inflation to maintain what we already have/ 40 Both seem reasonable
There's been a lot of value added to many homes, with new buildings, home additions and home sales. Time for a revaluation. Also need to increase business and commercial real estate. Stop being so afraid of 41 commercial signs--they are hard to read and prevent people from knowing what's there.
42 I strongly support the Board of Education's budget.
Our BOE has been working with a flat budget for years. parents are having to make up the difference and we are starting to NOT be competitive with surrounding towns, yet demand the same outcome from the 43 children's result. Please consider higher interest the BOE budget this year.
We have to ensure that the work necessary on Middlebrook and WHS gets done. The cost of not doing them could lead to health and safety issues and lawsuits - overall risks that we should not be taking. Hopefully these will be bonded projects and not questioned. Finally, it is my hope that the budget process can be transformed one day so that there is greater partnership between the town boards building the budgets 44 together rather than the build-inquire-approve/knock cycle down that has been in place.
From the last question, whatever the BOF decides, dependent on the approval of the requested budgets. To 45 the extent we can improve and vary sources of income, this can also help the town's budget and mill rate.

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

The BOE budget is very lean while still meeting the most basic needs of our students. Any further cuts would
46 be detrimental and not in the best interests of our students, our schools, and our town.

If you increase our mill rate, I would expect to see immediate use of the money. We need updated Parks and
47 Rec amenities asap and commercial growth in Wilton.

Residents always ask for more town services. Well, shockingly that comes at a cost. It's time to pay up or
48 shut up!! Thanks for all you do.

Our BOE budget barely covers what our schools need. If we want to continue to be a district that people
actively seek out and move to bc of our good schools (which increases our home values!), we must invest in
them! Our schools sometimes feel like inner city schools, with an incredible amount of basic things that
cannot be funded in the budget or that the PTAs are asked to cover instead. Staplers. Paper. Books. Repairs
to district owned musical instruments. We have entire departments who share one stapler. We have musical
instruments that are years beyond their useful life, being repaired with tape, etc. in attempts to extend their
use another year or five. Entire classes and curriculums without any textbooks (French). The list is never
49 ending. We need to invest in our schools. Not just in our pensions, salaries, and insurance. In our STUDENTS.

Please adopt the BOE proposed scheme for managing capital projects. That will keep them from being cut if
50 operating budgets are reduced in the future.

It is important to keep the schools competitive with Westport, New Canaan and Darien. I am concerned we
51 are falling behind. We are retired.

52 I think it is vital we continue to invest in our schools and our town infrastructure in general

53 I don't think the re-assessment should be delayed another year.

We've done very well through COVID Times by not running scared in budgeting — with the BOF acting wisely
and farsightedly. We need to continue with that same approach now as our town, and especially our
schools, deal with all of the consequences of COVID Times on top of everything else they would normally
54 face. Please continue with that farsighted approach that has paid real dividends for us.

With inflation running at 7+%, I think we are going to see a lot higher increases in the future...overall I feel
55 that the town is well run.

This year's budget increases have to be viewed in context of the pandemic and prior small increases. A
strong school system is central to Wilton's culture--and also home values. Schools have been coping with
very disruptive period. If we need a higher budget to get back on track, I support it (within reason). I
56 commend the BOF for its thoughtful approach to this task.

Wilton is in a fantastic position to attract new residents as we emerge into a "new normal" where part-time
remote work is permitted and even encouraged; we have a beautiful town with fantastic schools that's
maybe a bit too far for many daily commuters to NYC but is a perfectly reasonable distance for going into
the city once or twice a week. Investing in our schools and amenities now will pay enormous long-term
dividends, and probably even end up saving the average Wilton resident money on their taxes in the long
57 run as new residents help grow our property tax base.

Comments from Respondents in Favor of Proposed Mill Rate Change

As a newcomer to Wilton, I am in favor of spending what needs to be spent to keep Wilton a attractive place to live. Education, parks and rec, transportation and safety should always be fully funded. Attracting new business and development will keep the mill rate low and there should be less barriers for those companies who want to do business in Wilton. Take the issue with Rise doughnuts and the communication with the town committees. There should be a more streamlined process to entice these type of businesses that
58 attract people.