

BOF Budget Review Questions
3/15/22

Stewart Koenigsberg

1. Can you provide specifics on spending to make the Town more attractive to current and potential residents, including your thoughts on which projects mentioned in the Good Morning Wilton article might go forward, including more recreational areas on Schenck's island, fields, a "bubble covered" turf field, zip line at Schenck's, etc.? A number of amenities are being considered as part of the decision making on the spending of ARPA grant monies and approximately \$1.5million of BOS Infrastructure Fund monies. On Tuesday night, we'll provide information on where the BOS is in that process, recommendations made to-date and the recommendations we are awaiting.

As to the FY2023 budget, there are a number of examples of funding in the budget that contribute to make the Town attractive to current and potential residents. By the use of the word "more", I assume you are seeking new initiatives. New initiatives will be funded as above.

2. For a number of years you have managed to keep expense growth well under 1%. Your union raises are not significantly lower than the Board of Education's. I have not compared the GWI increases and the step increases for BOS union employees to BOE union employees so I don't know whether or not the increases in wages are significantly lower.

Are there any recommendations that you can make on how you are able to do so, and are there any best practices that you can share? The culture of Wilton's municipal department managers is to always seek the lowest cost possible and seek ways to reduce costs. As a position becomes vacant, the position is reconsidered. Positions have been eliminated and or consolidated. Managers embrace technology as a means of reducing operating costs. Employees spend as if they are spending their own money and are generally frugal. Early in my term, the Health Department requested a new replacement vehicle. I proposed instead they be given a police vehicle scheduled to be turned in. The reaction was that it was a great idea and Barry later told me how excited his department was to receive the used police vehicle. That's our culture.

3. What is your overall sense as to the timing for bringing the Police station proposal forward given commodity shortages and other issues currently? The BOS will vote at our first meeting in April, though all members have expressed their support. The cost estimate was prepared in January, we have asked the architects to revisit in light for any necessary adjustments. If you haven't already watched the architects' presentation, it is available here starting at 32 minutes: <https://vimeo.com/674728580/e1e5acc00b>

4. Can you describe the savings achieved by moving the employee base to the state medical plan? How is it that it is cost effective for the town, yet the Board of Education believes it to be more expensive than their current plan? What are the potential differences that drive different conclusions? Under the self-insurance plan, Anthem provided the Town with allocation rates, essentially premium rates, which were the basis of the Town's group insurance budget. Budgeted amount was net of employee contributions. The same happens for the BOE. The BOE allocation rates were lower than that of the BOS rates, as the BOE had lower experience rates. Are the savings materializing? Is it too soon to tell? Yes we have had savings. For FY2021, the premiums for the State Partnership Plan were approximately \$600,000 less than what we would have otherwise paid if we stayed with our self-insured plan. We budgeted savings of \$300,000 in

FY2021 because at the time the budget was approved, negotiations to move to the plan were still ongoing. For FY2022, we budgeted a 3% premium increase. The actual premium increase was 1%. Both were lower than our historical rate increases. The FY2021 2% savings has been used to fund the higher than budgeted public safety overtime due to Omicron.

We asked the Board of Education on February 9th why the state plan doesn't work for them. Through today March 11th, we haven't heard back on the answer to that question. Is there someone at the BOS offices or Finance that might be able to help them respond? CFO Dawn Norton began her employment on March 14th.

5. What are your expectations with respect to the grand list and expenses for next year's budget? The uptick in potential investment experienced in 2019, fell off during the pandemic, delaying the expected pipeline of projects. We have seen a significant increase in activity during the first quarter of this calendar year. Commercial properties for sale are quickly going under binder. The October 1, 2022 grand list is approximately 6 months from now.

200 Danbury Road should be complete. Same for 2 Hollyhock. Although, these two projects won't result in significant growth. The approved 173-unit apartment building at 141 Danbury Road won't contribute to the October 1, 2022 grand list.

We have joined with many other municipalities to support the legislature giving us the option to postpone the 2022 revaluations. Based on the volatility in vehicle pricing, we would likely choose to postpone.

Based on the number of projects being discussed with P&Z or with Michael Wrinn and/or me and the number of buildings under binder, we are optimistic about future growth, with the caution that these projects take a few years to complete. As a reminder 300 Danbury Road has been approved and shovel ready for a new buyer.

Is a one-year deferral of the revaluation likely? Yes.

Do we have any rough estimates as to the potential decrease in the commercial property revenues given vacancies in offices, offset by some apartment projects coming on-line by then?

No, rental data is reviewed at the time of revaluation.

Has there been interest in converting office properties into multifamily properties, in addition to the Melissa & Doug property? Yes, discussions have been held with P&Z about 64 Danbury Road. New multifamily is in discussion for 3 Hubbard and 19 Cannon Rd. Other nonpublic discussions are being held with Michael Wrinn and/or me.

6. Has the defined benefit pension been replaced by 401k for all new town employees? All new hires other than Fire are hired with a defined contribution plan.

How much is the annual savings, and how has it impacted ability to attract talent vs. other towns who still have a defined benefit plan? This has been in place for some employee groups for more than 10 years. We don't prepare annual estimates of how much we think have saved. At the time the decision was made, an evaluation of savings was made.

The change to a defined benefit plan has negatively impacted Police recruitment, particularly now when there are few candidates and we are competing with towns that offer defined benefit plans and the State Police, which do so also.

Which other towns have made the switch from defined benefit? We are currently performing a review of our contracts versus those of area towns.

7. What is the current thinking on timing and cost of a Town Administrator? The total budget for wages and benefits is \$259,000. Would the position also have capacity to help the School system

on administrative matters? **That would need to be assessed by the BOE.**

If the administrator will not have the capacity to handle both, what are your thoughts on any assistance they might need on administrative matters? **I haven't had a discussion with Kevin Smith about any needs, but as with any other Town employee, we are always willing to help when asked.**

Some feel that in order to maintain the focus on teaching excellence, that adding a BOE administrator could be extremely helpful in strategic planning, more rigor in spending plans and overall management of the work force...making it highly cost effective. Based on your past consolidation of administrative functions with the BOE, what are your thoughts? **I haven't investigated this, so I don't have a basis for an opinion.**

8. Is there a problem with our road salt dispensers? **No.**

Many residents actually complain that significant quantities of salt are over distributed, particularly at and near stop signs and lights. It seems that a very large quantity of salt is being wasted and potentially reducing the life span of local roads, not to mention that residents with dogs can't take them out in the streets sometimes. I have seen, literally, piles of salt near street corners. **If you or residents see a such a problem, please report it in real time on SeeClickFix and DPW Director Frank Smeriglio will address it. It is hard to respond when we don't have any details.**

9. The town of Weston has always had a relationship with Westport in order to get access to their public beach parking. Any idea whether there is any option for the residents of Wilton to get similar access, and can we trade access to our Town facilities in return? Not sure we have anything they would want... access to sports fields? tennis courts? **Westport has no interest. They have increased their parking fees to non-residents, including a significant increase to Weston residents. There is a bill proposed for this session, which would prohibit towns from charging parking fees in order to make beaches and other water recreation available to anyone.**

<https://connecticut.news12.com/new-connecticut-beach-access-bill-meets-tidal-wave-of-opposition>

Norwalk offers passes to Calf Beach. We all pay for "free" access to Sherwood Island and other State beaches through a DPW add-on to the car registration fee.

10. Has there been demand for building more tennis courts on route 7? **No.**

Have the calls for pickle ball courts continued? **No.**

If yes, is there any contemplation of adding them at any time? Cost? **Not applicable.**

11. Can you provide details on major assumptions for commodity prices in this budget. Can you also provide sensitivities on major commodity usage that might adversely or positively impact the budget. What would a 26 % and 50% change in either direction on a) fuel, b) electricity, c) road salt, d) other major commodities. **Chris and Frank are in the process of reevaluating the amounts budgeted. We'll provide you with that.**

12. Which labor contracts are coming up for renewal and when?

Police-beginning with FY2022-in negotiations.

Fire-beginning with FY2023-just opening.

Teamsters-beginning with FY2023-opening soon.

AFSCME Town Hall-beginning with FY2024.

Fire Pension-in protracted negotiations.

13. Would it be possible to change process to allow for a “fast track” for commercial development. I realize that the board, Town expertise and process is better for a variety of reasons including having Mike Wrinn join in 2018, but the normal P & Z meeting schedule and process, while vastly improved, is potentially subject to further speed and process improvement opportunities. **CT State statutes set the time line. The following is on the P&Z website:**

Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes, applications that require a public hearing are administered in three distinct phases. It is important to recognize that public comment, either written or oral communication, cannot be received by the Commission once a public hearing is closed.

- 1. Application Receipt Phase: An application to the Commission is considered “received” at the first regularly-scheduled meeting of the Commission following submittal of the application to the town offices or thirty-five days; whichever date occurs first. The public hearing must open within sixty-five (65) days following the application receipt date.**
- 2. Public Hearing Phase: Once opened, a public hearing must be heard and close within thirty-five (35) days. This stage is when the applicant presents the application to the Commission and interested parties are allowed to comment on the application. Again, public comment cannot be received once the hearing is closed.**
- 3. Deliberations Phase: Once a public hearing closes, the Commission is provided sixty-five (65) days to deliberate the merits of an application and render a decision. Though public comment is not taken at this point, these meetings are open to the public.**

Time Extensions: Note, the Connecticut General Statutes provides up to sixty-five (65) days of additional extension time which can be applied to any of the three referenced phases. This is to encourage a complete and thorough review of applications before the Commission and to allow for full public participation.

The time line is often driven by the quality of the application and the experience of the applicant and the applicant’s advisors. The recently adopted pre-application process is resulting in better applications.

14. What is the progress on shared services in town and with other towns? **We are currently working on a shared firing range. The Wooster Range is now no longer available to municipalities, which has caused a number of new towns to join our effort. With the assistance of WestCOG, we are pursuing a grant. What is under consideration currently? Is there a list of areas for future consideration? Commodity purchase consolidation within the DRG or other CT towns? The State of CT and the Capital Region COG bid these purchases. The pricing is available to all municipalities. We also belong to other purchasing groups. We just joined one in Texas to obtain a better price on the ladder truck.**

15. What are your thoughts on reaching out to the surrounding towns, potentially the DRG, and discussing how town governments can work together in evaluating and negotiating union contracts, both for Town services and for the Board of Education. As I have learned more about the processes, it seems that the unions have the benefit of collective bargaining, and in the case of the Teachers’ union contracts, our town is under extreme pressure and is almost forced by Hartford to use the raises and terms agreed to by other surrounding towns, effectively giving all local towns very little true ability to negotiate any efficiencies, or any consequences for significantly underperforming employees.

I was wondering if all the towns in the DRG can and should discuss ways to reward better performers, and give our leaders some ability to manage performance and costs better.

What are your thoughts? **CT mandates the worse CB arbitration method, known as last best offer. Last time I checked there was only one other state that mandated last best offer. We can discuss the process at Tuesday night’s meeting.**

With that said, the Town been able to negotiate beneficial changes, the move to the State partnership plan for medical benefits and the defined contribution plan for new employees are two examples.

The area first selectmen regularly collaborate, both inside and outside of WestCOG.

Matt Raimondi

Note: all references to 'rows' refer to the excel document shared by Anthony DeFelice on March 3, 2021. Any pages refer to the Approve BOS Budget presentation

- 1) Generally, how are these revenue forecasts developed? Is there any downside or upside to these figures? The FY2022 forecast is based on actual amounts through the date of submission and expected collections based on historical trends or specific facts in hand. There is both upside and downside. As I think I shared, I am watching conveyance and building permits very closely. Collection of back taxes and associated interest has potential upside. We have a few foreclosures we hope will settle this year and residents with deferrals under senior relief have indicated possible payoffs. We reexamine forecasted revenues just before your April deliberations.

The FY2023 is based on what we know about FY2022 and historical trends and if there is anything unique about FY2023.

- 2) Questions on Expenses

- a. Generally, can you describe what positions are being eliminated or consolidated? Consolidations occurred between Assessor, Town Clerk and Tax earlier this fiscal year. No consolidations are budgeted in the FY2023 budget.
It was listed as a risk, but do you have concerns on employee burnout? Yes. It could result in earlier than expected retirements. Fortunately, other than Police, in the last two months we have been able to fill vacant positions. A Parks and Grounds crewman and Dawn Norton started on March 14th. The administrative assistant for health starts on the 21st.
Row 363: why is the Reserve a negative number (-\$226.7k)? Is this effectively a contra account for positions that are currently vacant? There are a couple of components, wage increases for open contracts, draw-down in reserves and other expected savings. Happy to discuss in further detail in executive session due to the wages for open contracts.
- b. P.14: it's surprising to me that utilities are forecast with 2.6% growth vs last year, while the Board of Educations' budget called for an ~8% increase (p.7 of Superintendents budget; ~\$121k increase). Understanding that the Board of Selectman did not prepare the Board of Education budget, would you know what drives the discrepancy in forecasting? Chris Burney is taking another look at utilities. We'll provide that.
- c. Row 1705: what is being paid for with the 6% / \$172.8k increase for the Library? Is this just the roll-off and replacement of PPP funding? Pretty much.
- d. Row 1721: Trackside expenses has decreased from \$98k to \$15k expected for this year. What has driven that? About 5 years ago, the BOS worked with the Board of Trackside to develop a plan to phase out the Town's grant. At the same time, we were reducing our grant, the BOE began renting the facility for the Genesis Program.

- e. Row 1911:1914: vehicle expenses. Can you discuss what drives these expenses? Are these one time costs in nature (at least until they need to be replaced)? **These are the costs to purchase the actual dump trucks and attached sanders.**
- 3) Regarding the Town Administrator, can you discuss: i) what the responsibilities are for this new position and the First Selectperson under this new organizational construct, ii) how the salary for the Town Admin / reduction in salary for First Selectwoman was determined, and iii) any update on recruiting? **The direct reports of the First Selectperson would be Town Administrator, the Fire Chief, the Construction Manager and the Community Affairs Coordinator and the shared Administrative Executive Assistant. The Chief of Police does not report to the First Selectperson, but would continue to have the same relationship as now. The following departments would report to the Town Administrator: Finance and all direct reports, HR and all direct reports, DPW and all direct reports, Land Use and all direct reports and IS.**
- The First Selectperson would focus on State and regional issues, strategies, regional/shared services and economic development.**
- The Town Administrator would focus on the day-to-day management, cost reductions and identifying obtaining and managing grants. With trillions of dollars of grants funds available through the Federal government, we need additional staff with knowledge to help us obtain some of those monies. We would be pennywise, pound foolish to let this unique opportunity pass us by.**
- 4) Following up on Stewart's question on the Police station, where will our police officers work while the building is under construction? Will we need to rent space? Can we share with other towns if so? **The current headquarters will remain operational until the new headquarters is complete. Then it will be removed.**
- 5) Separately, given it's on the same 'campus', do you have a sense for how much longer the 'useful life' is for Town Hall? **The roof on Town Hall was recently replaced. Chris will present requests for ARPA and Infrastructure funds, those are expected to include new windows, new front steps and pillars, insulation of walls not insulated. The Bonded Capital Plan includes monies to replace the electrical system. The space utilization is highly inefficient and even more so since the number of full-time employees has decreased. Tecton Architects have developed plans for more efficient use of space. Those plans haven't yet been costed out or discussed with the BOS. The Town Hall needs improvements, but still has lots of life.**
- 6) How many employees work in each department, and how has that trended 2016 to 2023B? **We'll provide you with a list of employees by department with their wage and benefit information as requested by another members. We'll provide you with the comparative numbers.**
- 7) A member of the Wilton Historical Society has written to the Board of Finance about a proposed \$200k expenditure on the "Yellow House" at Ambler Farm. Has that been included in this budget? Why or why not? The entire Ambler Farm budget is ~\$24k so I wanted to confirm. **The resident was referring to funds being considered for ARPA or infrastructure primarily for lead abatement.**

- 8) Following up on Stewart's second question, the Town has exhibited commendable fiscal responsibility the last several years. The line item explanation in the Board of Selectman's budget presentation was especially helpful and transparent. Can you describe the process which the Town uses to build their budget? **Department heads use a zero-based budget approach when developing their budget. Budget review meetings are held with the First Selectwoman, the CFO and the Manager of Financial Reporting and Planning.**

Rich Santosky

1. The information provided to the BOF is summary data, not a detailed budget. Tagging on to Matt's question #5 asking how many employees work in each department, the BOF is only provided summary costs without context to the count of staff or job description of the employee. This is contrary to other municipalities and agencies with which I have been involved. In all other cases individual government employees' salaries, wages and benefits have been detailed and published as it is "public information". **The BOF and the BOS have historically not reviewed down to that level, so the information wasn't provided. We will provide you a report by department by employee which includes wages and benefits.**
2. Additionally, the full employee costs is difficult to derive as these costs are categorized in multiple places: a)Salaries, OT and Longevity, b)Benefits (SS, Defined Contribution & Group Ins) c)Sick Leave, d)Unemployment, e) W/C. **We'll provide you with a report including all those costs.**

Can the detailed budget be provided? **As above**

3. Other than hiring one new employee, what is being done to address concerns over the maintenance and general upkeep of the Town's grounds? **We have been down one employee due to injury for a good part of a year. One new hire started on March 14th. When the other starts, comparatively, it will be as if we have two, not one, additional employees. One of the projects being considered for the ARPA and Infrastructure funding is irrigation and drainage of fields. The five fields at Middlebrook have been identified as the highest priority. We can discuss other concerns at the meeting on the 15th.**
4. Following up on Stewart's first question, what is the plan for the Town to provide the much talked about recreation facilities such as field house and turf? **We'll discuss at the meeting on the 15th.**
5. New Development Revenues:
 - a. Under P&Z the previous two years saw actuals of \$627k and \$550K. The projected is \$600k. Are we not expecting an increase in Building permits for the pending multi-family developments? **We are expecting a fee for 141 Danbury Road. It could be in FY2022 or FY2023, more likely FY2023. There is uncertainty as to the other projects currently in discussion. The BOS recommends revenues, the BOF decides the budget. On April 4th,**

we will discuss where we are and the BOF can decide the level of risk they want to assume in the budgets.

- b. Same question for Environmental which is projected flat. The Board of Selectmen eliminated a punitive fee, which in our opinions discouraged residents from doing the right thing by filing an application. For example, a resident was charged a fee of \$70,000 to dredge a pond. Dredging the pond was a good thing environmentally. The fee was also inconsistent with surrounding towns, which didn't have the fee.
6. Comstock only generates \$5,000 in Revenue? Residents don't pay a fee to use space at Comstock. The only fee is if the use is outside of hours and the cost of the building monitor is reimbursed. Since its renovation, Comstock has been come very busy, leaving little available time for businesses or nonresidents to rent.
7. Information systems costs \$900k+ and each department separately budgets software and computers. What is the total town cost of IT/Computers/Software for the town? We'll provide you with a report.
8. What does the \$70k Auditor/Accountant for the BOF do? The Board of Finance hires the auditors to perform the annual audit and the required federal and state audit letters.
9. What is causing the change in the Property & Casualty premiums? Pending information/detail.
10. What falls under the \$796.9k Administration budget? DPW Administration: Director/Town Engineer, Asst DPW/Facilities, Field Engineer, Mgr of Admin, Clerk. Will be on reported provide in answer to #1.
11. Where are major road repairs budgeted? Who performs these repairs? Performed by the Highway employees. Materials and any equipment rentals budgeted in Highway.
12. What is Equipment -Trees? This is a poorly labeled account. This is the cost of an outside contractor to remove and trim trees.
13. What is the difference between Road Maintenance – Materials and Pavement Management? The \$316,218 budgeted in FY2023 is paving costs which are funded by the State's Town Road Aid grant. You will see a corresponding amount in Highway revenues-Town Aid Roads. Otherwise, road paving is bonded. Road Maintenance-Materials, as above
14. Does the highway department have \$4,400 per year in towing? Pending information/detail.
15. Who does the vehicle maintenance for town vehicles? Mechanics within the Highway Department.

16. What is the \$250,000 Transfer Station Oper? **The Transfer Station is an enterprise fund and should be operating at breakeven. It hasn't since 2013 following the consolidation of hauling industry and the number of haulers using our transfer station cut in half. It was made worse when recycled materials when from a revenue source to a cost to dispose. The BOS has made changes, including reduced hours, joining HRRRA and are in discussions regarding shared costs.**
17. Is the police professional liability a separate policy? Do fire and EMS have similar coverage? **Pending information/detail.**
18. Where are Police, Fire and other building fuel carried? **Consolidated under Town-wide utilities**
19. Where is police vehicle fuel carried? **Consolidated under town wide utilities**
20. For all departments, where is vehicle replacement budgeted? **The operating capital budgets**
21. What road striping and signs do police do? **The police make the decision on what roads should be striped. Responsible for striping following paving and any new striping. Police determine if new traffic signs are required, for example those bright yellow road crossing signs in Wilton Center or a warning about a curve, etc.**
22. Several departments have "Educational Assistance". What is this? **Union contracts provide reimbursement of employment related tuition. Same for non-union.**
23. What is the town \$133,000 Swimming program? **Merwin Meadows.**
24. How is the library \$2.9M allocated? **Under a public/private partnership, the Town pays approximately 75% of the Library's operating expenses.**
25. Why does the town find Nursing and home Care at \$973k? **\$786,000 is the cost for the WPS nurses. \$151,000 is the cost of mandated public health nurses.**
26. What is construction management at \$158k? **Chris Burney is returning to his original role of Facilities Manager at reduced hours to manage the Police HQ project, rather than hiring an outside consultant. Plus he will be Chris Burney to finish up a couple of open projects. There is also a part-time employee to perform some the management work of the open projects, such as the Fire headquarters kitchen replacement.**
27. Why are Police, Fire and other departments carried in multiple locations? **We assume this questions is because you are now looking at the operating capital section of the budget? Operating Capital is budgeted separately from operating expenses.**

28. What is 9031 – Public Works \$462k? The detail of what makes up the \$462,000 is provided, both on lines 1911 through 1927 of the excel file and pages 210 and 211 of the more detailed reports by department. Begins with dump trucks and ends with plows.

As an FYI, more detailed department budget report, "the book" has the line items explanations, including many of your questions. Not sure if you saw the book.