

Ross Tartell Questions

BOS Budget Review

2/9/2022

Budget Questions 1st Selectwoman's Office

p. 177 001-0100100.40305 Salaries part time. Community Affairs. Is part of this responsibility to support the work of the Economics Development Commission? (Are there enough resources for what the position needs to do?)

Part of the work is to support economic development through events and other means. This includes working with the Wilton Chamber, Wilton Library, Parks and Recreation, the Economic Commission and others. The position is currently coordinating with all of the above on summer events. In response to a request, at their last meeting the Commission indicated they did not plan to sponsor events.

This position also provides support to boards and commissions through the Guide to Serving on Board and Commissions, answering questions about process or FOIA and conducting Survey Monkey surveys. In this regard, the position has provided frequent guidance to the EDC.

p.178 001-01-0100.47805 Tree Warden and Deputy Tree Warden. With the increasing demands for trails and the town's 24 open spaces do they have enough time to support what needs to be done? What else do they need to do?

The role of the Tree Warden is defined by CT state statutes. They have responsibilities for trees in the town-owned right of way and public spaces, meaning they must approve the removal of a tree. Tree Warden and Deputy Tree Warden primarily work with DPW. Logistically, either DPW or a resident uses SeeClickFix to identify a tree for possible removal. It is routed to either the Tree Warden or Deputy Tree Warden for examination. When required, they provide guidance to the town departments on a tree removal. Tree removals are contracted to an outside contractor, by the department, not the Tree Warden.

The Tree Warden position had historically been paid a stipend and the Deputy Tree Warden no stipend. In recognition of the workload, a few years ago the deputy was paid a stipend. That appears to have addressed the situation, though it continues to be monitored.

First Selectwoman's office

No questions on salary line.

Human Resources

p. 183 – In the section on risk, it may be useful to add key “man” risk because it is a department of one and it is not clear for the timing of the hiring of the new HR Labor relations specialist

The specialist position has been posted and a number of applications received. It should be filled within a month or so.

Town clerk

P.484 The ongoing digitization of town records ties to several overall town strategies. I was unsure where the funding for this effort was listed.

The Town Clerk's records were the first area to be digitized with previous funding. Current efforts are funded through an fund balance assignment previously approved by the BOS from prior year savings.

Finance, Tax Collector, Assessor

p.205 Might it be useful to say something about maintaining staffing levels and building knowledge in the area.

That is what is meant by employee training towards certification.

001-05-0700.33005 Why is there so much variability in interest-investments?

The town is very limited in what we can invest in, not much higher than bank savings rates. Interest rates plummeted at the start of the pandemic. Since then, rates that we have been earning have remained relatively flat, though we should have a pickup with the just recent increase in rates. We may revise the FY2022 forecast and FY2023 budget as part of the March and early April projections provided to the BOF in advance of their meeting to set the budgets and the proposed mill rate.

p.211 Department Request – Lower salaries reflect reorg. That occurred at the start of 2022. Can you review the reorganization and what it achieved?

This refers to the combination of the tax and assessor functions into one department managed by the Manager of Assessment and Taxation. This had been expected to occur in FY2023 with the retirement of the former Tax Collector. Instead the tax collector retired at the end of FY2021. As such the reorganization wasn't budgeted for FY2022.

Land use

p.225 You might consider adding a risk – variable level of volunteer commitment in support of public-private initiatives.

The one department in land use that partners, environmental affairs, has strong long-standing partnerships with well-organized groups, including the Mianus Chapter of Trout Unlimited, NRVT, the Fairfield County Chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association (FCNEMBA) and the local boy scout organizations in Wilton and Weston. All of these partnerships involve residents of Wilton and surrounding towns, meaning the volunteer pool is greater than Wilton itself.

Environmental affairs

p.241 There are ARPA funds available to help with trail maintenance. Is there enough money to respond to the increased interest and demand for the town's trails? What resources are available for trail

maintenance? A related question is do you have enough people and resources to meet the apparent increase in demand?

As shared, at a March meeting we will prioritize spending for the ARPA monies remaining, after first funding the emergency radio system and WHS complex mitigation, and prioritize the 1+ million in the BOS infrastructure fund. Funding for trail improvements was shared as an item to be prioritized. Mike Conklin will be presenting his request for such at the February 22nd BOS meeting. This will include incremental spending for FY2023.

Maintenance work is currently performed in-house, contracted outside or through volunteer groups like FCNEMBA.

In 2021 we changed the Inland Wetlands fee structure. How is it working? Is it easier to administer and more equitable? How has it been communicated to the community?

In response to a concern raised by Mike Conklin, in 2021 the Board of Selectmen eliminated the additional activity fee which was charge a in addition to other wetland fees. At the time, Mike identified the fee as inconsistent with surrounding towns and thus put investors and residents at a disadvantage. See excerpt below from Mike's email.

We also noted the high rate of the additional fee could act as a deterrent to speaking with the department or properly filing for an Inland Wetlands permit before performing work.

When we eliminated the fee, we were also communicating through the media and Town e-alerts about the need to speak with the Environmental Affairs Dept before starting work to determine if a permit was needed. As such it is hard to say which had the greater impact, the reduction or the increased communication. Mike can address this further on the 22nd.

We still charge fees, so there wasn't an administrative benefit.

*Wilton's wetland fee schedule is mostly comparable to other towns' fees with one exception. The "Additional Fees for Subdivisions, Other Residential Developments, Commercial Development & Significant Regulated Activity" are charged on top of the regular fees and are calculated using the following formula: **Activity Fee + \$200/1,000 square feet of disturbed land in the regulated area**. This calculation is doubled for "Corrective Actions" which are a result of a violation: **Activity Fee + \$400/1,000 square feet of disturbed land in the regulated area**. This portion of the fee schedule has led to the unusually high permit fees for the projects listed in the 2020 Additional Fee Chart.*