

The February 23, 2021, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen was convened by First Selectmen Beth Heller at 5:03 p.m. via WebEx. Ms. Heller called the roll and the following were present: First Selectmen Beth Heller, Deputy First Selectman Mica Cardozo, Joseph J. Crisco, Joseph S. Dey, III, Dwight C. Rowland, and Sandra T. Stein

Present for staff: Administrative Officer/Director of Finance Anthony Genovese, Town Counsel Gerald Weiner, Budget Analyst Karen Crosby, and Mrs. Shaw, Clerk

Ms. Heller noted that in accordance with Governor Lamont's executive order #7b. Section 1, which suspends the open meeting requirements of in-person participation, audio and video of this regular meeting will be simultaneously televised on Channel 79 and youtube@wgatv 79 in order to allow the public to view and listen to the meeting. In person attendance will not be permitted.

ADOPT CERTIFIED RESOLUTION FOR SENIOR CENTER STEAP GRANT

Ms. Heller read, and the Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** (Stein – Rowland) to adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, pursuant to section 4-66g(d) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development is authorized to extend financial assistance for economic development projects; and

WHEREAS, it is desirable and in the public interest that the Town of Woodbridge make an application to the State for \$128,205.00 in order to undertake the Senior Center Renovation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE Town of Woodbridge Board of Selectmen

1. That it is cognizant of the conditions and prerequisites for the state financial assistance imposed by C.G.S. section 4-66g(d)
2. That the filing of an application for State financial assistance by the Town of Woodbridge in an amount not to exceed \$128,205.00 is hereby approved and that First Selectman Beth Heller is directed to execute and file such application with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, to provide such additional information, to execute such other documents as may be required, to execute an Assistance Agreement with the State of Connecticut for State financial assistance if such an agreement is offered, to execute any amendments, decisions, and revisions thereto, and to act as the authorized representative of the Town of Woodbridge Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Heller mentioned that the \$128,205.00 will not cover the planned renovations at the Senior Center and that it is anticipated the balance required will be included in a proposed bond issue.

DISCUSSION ON PROJECTS CONSIDERED FOR BONDING - FIRST SELECTMAN'S REMARKS

Ms. Heller made the following remarks: *"We are here tonight before we begin our FY22 budget discussions to, I hope, finally move forward on several projects that have been pending for many years. First is the proposed renovations to our Senior Center. The Center Building was erected in 1929 as the Center School. The building served in that capacity until the second wave of students moved to Beecher Road School in 1977. The Senior Center, left in its original condition for over 40 years, has long been in need of a facelift. Much has been accomplished but much more needs to be addressed to complete the long overdue renovation. The currently planned upgrade is necessary to meet the evolving needs of Woodbridge's expanding senior population. 750 Woodbridge seniors over the age of 75 are "aging in place" and living independently in their homes. Providing services for this demographic is crucial to the Town's finances as our senior citizens lower costs by not adding to the school age population.*

Accomplishing the long identified and generally accepted need to upgrade the Senior Center makes it possible for these seniors to remain in Town, with the Human Services staff providing a lifeline of vital services. The current institutional state of the facility lacks the warm and inviting setting Woodbridge seniors deserve. An upgrade is definitely necessary to provide proper services in today's world. Just look inside the town's beautiful library and compare that facility to what is available for local seniors. Over the past several years through state and local grants/fundraising efforts, the Human Services Staff and Human Services Commission have worked very hard to reach this goal. Our Town can be proud of the new handicapped accessible bathroom, the urgently needed new ramp, the freshly painted walls and carpeting in the lounge, but without town funds; a welcoming reception area, proper lighting, a crucial air handling system, equipment cabinets and other necessary items are not possible. Currently, the Town has a newly awarded STEAP grant of \$128,50.00 to begin this renovation. To complete this project, we will need \$250,000.00 in borrowed funds.

The second proposal for this bond project includes final plans for the "old firehouse" to become a Community Center for multiple uses for all town residents. As a bit of history, in 2003, a Building Committee was formed by First Selectman Amey Marella to work with an architect, to develop space needs for a proposed new Fire Station. The Fire Department was at the time running its operations from the current "old firehouse." In July 2004, the then Building Committee recommended to the Board of Selectmen, that a new Fire Station totaling 25,426 SF was needed. After many months of discussion, the Board of Selectmen voted to reduce the size of the new Fire Station from 25,000 to 20,000 SF and allowed the Fire Department use of the "old firehouse" for the additional 5,000 SF of storage they requested, which included use of Bay 1 and Bay 2. The formal charge for the New Fire Station Building Committee was approved by the Board of Selectmen on April 13, 2005 for the construction of a 20,000 SF facility. There was a fire at the "old firehouse" on October 07, 2006. Following the approval of a Referendum, construction of the new 20,000 SF Fire Station began in January 2008 and was completed and dedicated in March 2009. Final uses of the "old firehouse" have been discussed since the fire in 2006!

Phase I of the Restoration of the "old firehouse" included replacement of all exterior windows and a new copper roof. This began in 2010 and this work was completed by early 2011. In 2011, the Town entered into a Contract with A. Urbano Construction. \$180,000 was allocated by the BOS for the entire project. Unfortunately, it cost \$150,000 for the foundation. The understanding was ALWAYS that the Fire Department would still retain use of two bays at the "old firehouse." That work was completed in 2013. There were subsequent conversations about the storage shed, including the Town possibly purchasing the materials to build it on the concrete foundation, and having volunteer Fire Department personnel construct it, which was later deemed not feasible due to insurance liability, etc.

We then completed the performance of various work at the "old firehouse" in mid - 2019 for approx. \$500,000 following award of a State STEAP Grant. This grant was used to upgrade the electrical system, add new roofs on Bays 2 & 3, and install new mechanical units for Bays 2 & 3. Work was completed in early 2020. From 2012 thru present day, there have been numerous options presented for the Phase II renovations of the "old firehouse" which is essentially interior work along with further mechanical / electrical upgrades), an ADA compliant elevator, in consultation with Silver / Petrucelli Architects.

We now have an option this evening for the Town to have sole use of the ENTIRE "old firehouse" for a new Community Center (including Bay 1 and Bay 2) and for the fire department to have a Shed behind the current Fire Station to house additional apparatus, equipment and supplies. The Fire Department would have all operations in one area, and the Town would use the entire "old firehouse" for Town use. The estimated cost is \$500,000 for the shed. The Town would borrow \$370,000 and use \$30,000 remaining from the previous shed project, and the Woodbridge Volunteer Fire Association has agreed to contribute \$100,000 to complete the project. I thank them for this generous donation! The estimated cost for the Community Center is \$1.7 million, including soft costs.

Lastly, the proposed Beecher Road School roof refurbishment project is designed to encompass three roofs: (1) the D-wing roof; (2) the K-wing roof; and (c) the Library Media Center roof. All were constructed circa 1997, and all continue to have intermittent leaks. This project is designed to refurbish, rather than replace, the roofs; roof refurbishments cost approximately \$15 per square foot, whereas roof replacements cost approximately \$25 per square foot. Total estimated project costs, including contingencies, are \$573,650. These three roofs are the most necessary to address; the other roofs were either replaced during the 2015 Beecher building renovation (A-wing, B-wing, & C-wing) or were inspected prior to the 2013 solar panel installation and deemed adequate (S-wing).

As Tony has reminded us, borrowing rates are at historic lows with rates for a 20-year bond for a AAA rated community at or about 1.5%. In addition, annual direct debt service payments decline 20% in FY22 and are the lowest in 10 years primarily due to the payoff in recent years of open space purchases from 1998 & 2000, library renovation from 1998, and Beecher renovation from 1998. In my opinion, this is the best time to do these projects. Thank you”.

To begin the discussion Ms. Heller **MOVED** and Ms. Stein **SECONDED** that Tony Genovese is authorized to begin discussions with Bond Counsel for the preparation of documents and resolutions in order to call a special town meeting pursuant to Section 6-4 of the charter for purposes of undertaking the following projects:

1-Authorize expenditures for Senior Center renovations and improvements in the approximate amount of \$250,000

2-Authorize expenditures for the construction a storage shed on property of the Town Firehouse in the approximate amount of \$ 370,000

3-Authorize expenditures for roof refurbishment and repair at Beecher Road School in the approximate amount of \$573,650

4-Authorize expenditures for conversion and renovation of the "Old Firehouse" into a Town Community Center in the approximate amount of \$1.7 million

Mr. Genovese shall report back to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance with the results of his discussions with Bond Counsel for purposes of scheduling a Special Town meeting to authorize the above expenditures.

Discussion and vote

The Board members agreed that it was important to move forward. Ms. Stein recommended that the term “storage shed” be changed to storage facility; Mr. Dey questioned the four projects being presented as one. Mr. Weiner explained that Bond Counsel would opine to the validity of presenting a single project for the bond issue referendum, or having the residents vote on bonding four separate projects. The Board agreed to defer to Bond Counsel’s recommendation.

ACTION ON THE MOTION

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED UNANIMOUSLY** on the motion as put forth by Ms. Heller.

Additional projects - It was the **UNANIMOUS CONCENSUS** of the Board that Mr. Genovese should look into the costs of demolition of the former Country Club of Woodbridge clubhouse and the addition of sidewalks on the Town Center Campus as additional projects for the bond issue.

DISCUSSION OF 2022 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS TO FILE WITH THE BOARD OF FINANCE

Mr. Genovese presented five documents for the Board's budget review: 1) Budget Summary – which included grafts showing the history of budget expense by category from FY2015 through FY2021; Mill Rate calculation sheet; Detailed line-item budget; Revised revenue estimates; and the Capital Improvement Program six-year summary.

He presented slides showing the history of budget expense by category (departments) from FY2015 through FY2021. Mr. Genovese said, and the Board agreed, that the Town departments have reduced staff and programs to the point where further cuts would reduce services and programs. The rise in department budgets is generally attributed to salary and benefits (contracted services). Operating and programs has remained flat.

The Board also agreed that to maintain the Town services, and school system, the Grand List, which has had a very little growth over the past years, must be improved with new commercial revenue. Continued increase in residential property taxes cannot be sustained.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM SIX-YEAR SUMMARY

The Selectmen reviewed the Capital Budget to be funded from the operating budget. The original department requests for FY2022 were \$2,203,392.00 with the Board recommending \$1,209,586.00. The reduction is achieved by moving some items out a year, funding some from this year and seeking donations for others.

OPERATING BUDGET FOR FY2022

Mr. Genovese presented the budget for FY2022. Department expenditures requests totaled \$53,845,254.00. He said that the budget he presented includes changes to the requested for a total of \$52,263,999. The Board reviewed the changes from the requested budget, the estimated revenue, and the tax calculations sheet. The Board agreed that, because the Deputy Police Chief's position is vacant – the salary should not reflect the contacted increase.

ACTION ON CAPITAL BUDGET

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED** (Heller – Stein) to recommend to the Board of Finance the Capital Improvement Program Six Year Summary for FY2022-2027 in the amount of \$1,209,586.00 for FY2022.

VOTE: Aye – Ms. Heller, Ms. Stein, Mr. Cardozo, Mr. Crisco, Mr. Rowland

Nay – Mr. Dey

Abstentions - None

Ms. Heller declared the motion was approved on a 5 to 4 vote.

ACTION ON OPERATING BUDGET

The Board of Selectmen **VOTED** (Heller – Stein) to recommend to the Board of Finance an expenditure budget for FY2022 in the amount \$52,367,970 which reflects any changes made this evening.

VOTE: Aye – Ms. Heller, Ms. Stein, Mr. Cardozo, Mr. Crisco, Mr. Rowland

Nay – Mr. Dey

Abstentions – None

ADJOURNMENT

On a non-debatable motion by Ms. Heller, seconded by Mr. Crisco, the meeting adjourned at 6:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Geraldine S. Shaw, Clerk