

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE LITCHFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024 ~ 4:30 P.M.
IN PERSON AT TOWN OFFICE BUILDING, 74 WEST ST., LITCHFIELD**

Call to Order: First Selectman Denise Raap called the special meeting to order at 4:31 p.m. with Selectmen Jeffrey Zullo, Dan Morosani, John Bongiorno and Jodiann Tenney also present. Finance Director Amaechi Obi, Finance Assistant Stacey Dionne and Town Treasurer Alan Landau were also in attendance.

2024/25 Budget Review and Discussion

Board of Finance: D. Raap began with the Board of Finance that is asking for no increase. Under wages for the Finance Department, the estimated increase is 3%. Computer equipment increased \$7,000, or 28%, for cybersecurity, cloud storage and the Verizon subscription.

Tax Assessment: Under Tax Assessment, we will continue with C. Kelsey on a part-time basis unless we find an Assessor. A. Obi suggested raising the Assessor salary to \$90,000. D. Raap said they could raise it to \$95,000 and have an assistant at \$42,000 plus benefits for both. J. Zullo said he was comfortable with the status quo. J. Bongiorno said he saw no reason to change it. D. Morosani said it seems we are getting good results from the current staffing arrangement. J. Zullo clarified that the Assessor is always available if we have to contact him. J. Tenney added that our salary offering has to be competitive if we are going to attract an Assessor, but said she is happy with the current arrangement.

Planning & Zoning: J. Zullo questioned why the legal line has increased. D. Raap said it may be linked to possible work on a blight ordinance. It was agreed to keep the legal line at \$3,500 and keep more in the Board of Selectmen's budget to maintain oversight. They added \$1,000 (\$4,000 total) for a planning consultant. They agreed to increase the Land Use Administrator's hours to 40. Wetlands had no increase, and the Selectmen dropped the recording secretary budget to \$1,000. ZBA submitted a flat budget. Milton Historic District Commission's proposed nominal increase was accepted. D. Raap proposed cutting the Land Use Administrator fuel budget to \$500. There were questions about the Conservation Commission request, going from zero to \$8,500, so they reduced it by \$6,500 and D. Raap agreed to call the Chair in for the next meeting.

Building Department: The Building Official wants to hire a 20 hr/week position at \$45/hr. to handle the major projects that have come along this year. They will reinstate the \$46,800 into the budget. He also wants his assistant to work 40 hours next year. Telephone is brought down to \$500. Drone and cabinets are in the budget and \$11,000 for Perma-Link. There was a question about DataSoft, so they will confirm. New total budget will be \$227,147. There should be an escalator for the building fees ordinance.

Probate: They are billing us \$750 less based on an adjusted bill we have not yet received. We receive about \$16,600 rent. J. Zullo said we need to look at this and re-evaluate.

Selectmen's Budget: D. Raap said our electric is fixed until March of 2025. She thinks we should be safe at \$45,000. BOE electric will be gone from our budget next year. We went down \$7,000 on fuel oil and down on water. Legal will be left at \$65,000. Liability insurance went up 3%. Central services went down \$500.

Contingency: This will remain at \$75,000.

Police: The total now is \$280,095. After discussion, J. Bongiorno wanted to add another Resident State Trooper (\$150,000 est.) and overtime hours at \$75,000/year. The new budgeted total becomes \$509,846. J. Bongiorno would like a letter written to the Borough asking them to supply a parking enforcement officer. J. Zullo said we also have to look at the other elements such as speed cameras and LPRs.

Fire Marshal: They discussed the software that would significantly improve operations (\$11,000). LCD has had a per capita increase of \$2,942.00 that must be absorbed.

Public Works: There was a long discussion on tipping fees, but it was agreed to leave it as is with a 35% increase. The printing line item was reduced to \$900. The total waste disposal and recycling department budget is at \$446,710, or a 14.45% increase.

Social Services: Much income comes from grants to run programs and the bus.

Ambulance: LVA is now showing a 3% increase, or \$10,000. Northfield is certified to make EMS calls, and they have a flat budget.

Donations to services that serve our community were listed. Chore is asking for \$8,000. Prevention, the COG and Greenwoods are given funds from the opioid fund.

Cemeteries: Bantam Cemetery went up, from \$2,200 to \$3,500, for increased maintenance, a 58% increase. After discussion it was brought down to \$2,500.

Libraries: J. Zullo defended the OWL and said they deserve more. He suggested \$425,000, a \$17,000 increase. J. Bongiorno said he thought they should be cut, as they answer to no one with their money. They live off of an endowment, and they are \$400,000 deep in taxpayer money. They do not answer to the \$800,000 in salaries they pay. J. Zullo said they are drawing unsustainably from their endowments.

Motion: J. Zullo moved to increase the OWL budget to \$425,000. D. Morosani seconded the motion. J. Tenney argued against giving them more than they asked for. D. Morosani cited the unimpeachable data that was presented. Keeping their budget intact at \$408,450 is advisable per D. Raap. Town Treasurer Alan Landau was invited to speak and said we should look at the level their budget has increased and that we are at a lower level of contribution. J. Tenney questioned the 26% increase in one year in payroll benefits and asked to see their budget pre-Covid. J. Zullo argued this is a non-municipal entity that we support because they supply a huge service to the community. D. Morosani would like to have Ann Marie White come back for a continued Q&A.

Withdrawn Motion: J. Zullo withdrew his motion in order to bring Ann Marie back. D. Morosani withdrew his second. J. Bongiorno asked for a detailed operating budget from OWL. Ms White will be invited to the next meeting. J. Tenney asked for their budget two years prior to Covid.

Recreation: D. Raap said something should come out of the Fund 22 programming overages. That number should be closer to \$50,000, rather than \$80,000. A. Obi suggested we pay a seasonal person out of that fund, \$9,600. All agreed.

Historical Society: J. Tenney felt it would set a bad precedent among nonprofits to agree to a \$10,000 request for the Historical Society. J. Bongiorno said no as well.

Motion: J. Zullo moved to provide the Historical Society with \$10,000 in the budget as requested. D. Morosani seconded the motion. He then said the historical nature of our town is one of its biggest drivers, and we should fund it. J. Tenney would like to see what other towns are doing with their historical societies. J. Zullo said they are using the funds to hire students from the high school as front line staff, thus providing them with opportunities in town. D. Morosani suggested having them come in to speak along with the library.

Withdrawn Motion: J. Zullo withdrew his motion and D. Morosani his second. J. Zullo said we will invite Jessica in to present and explain the use of the funds.

EDC: J. Bongiorno said \$1,000 seems light, but D. Raap said there are grants that support their work and their social media person at about \$1,300/month. Their grant money will expire soon and although they got the budget letter, they have not responded asking for more.

Beautification: No increase.

Debt Service: J. Zullo questioned that our debt service is only going down from \$3.673 million to \$3.411 million with Region 20 taking on our remaining school debt on 7/1/24. They will pay us off \$2 million (principle) and we will hold it in escrow and pay it down. J. Zullo said there are other factors, as we have to factor in ECS money, etc. There is nothing written, so we have to talk to Town Counsel Mike Rybak and get a note from Region 20. We cannot transfer this property without a note with that \$2 million on it and a payment schedule. A. Obi will get a spreadsheet with a breakdown for the meeting Tuesday. J. Zullo said it will be a nontrivial number to think about in the \$3.411 million, and we want to give the taxpayers the benefit of that in the next year.

Fringe Benefits: These rates are all negotiated.

Annex: Fuel had a mistake and had to be reduced by \$35,000.

The budget will be acted on at the February 20th meeting or on March 5th.

Adjournment: **Motion:** D. Morosani moved and J. Bongiorno seconded a motion to adjourn at 7:55 p.m. All voted aye and the motion carried.



Denise Raap
First Selectman