

Investing in our Future: Infrastructure is a Key Component of our Budget

Winchester is full of potential and has been making great, positive strides toward having a reinvigorated local economy in the past several years, and we're reaching a pivotal moment in the Town's redevelopment. On May 28, 2022, registered voters and property owners in Winchester voted to increase our investment in our local infrastructure - our local roadways, sidewalks, drainage systems, and fire department apparatus.

The adopted Infrastructure Investment Plan will invest up to \$18.3 million Town dollars into Winchester roadways, as well as another \$6.4+ million state and federal dollars. The Town estimates that this plan will take at least five years to execute, and Town officials and advisors will be working diligently to ensure that the projects move forward in a way that gets the most for our money in these difficult economic times. The list of road and bridge projects that were approved as part of this plan can be found online at townofwinchester.org/subpages/2022-infrastructure-investment-plan.



In addition to the bond package increasing our investment in our local infrastructure, voters also approved to bond the renovation of Hinsdale Elementary School on September 7, 2019. Originally, \$10 million was authorized in borrowing for the Hinsdale renovation project. Thanks to the very, very hard work of School and Town staff, we have been able to lower the amount needed to be bonded to just \$4.1 million. That's a massive savings that will help us keep the town tax rate lower!

Both of these important investments in our town and the associated bonding packages will be a key component of the upcoming and future budgets, and we appreciate your understanding and support as we continue working to revitalize our community.

Reminder: Temporary W Wakefield Blvd Bridge Closure

As a reminder, the Town will be reconstructing the bridge over Taylor Brook on West Wakefield Boulevard. The bridge is in poor condition. This bridge is at the southern end of Highland Lake, about ¼ mile from the intersection with Mountain Rd.

Bids were received from contractors on 12/20/22. The results were favorable and Dayton Construction has submitted to low bid of \$619,315.00. This is a project included in the Infrastructure Improvement Plan that was voted on and passed referendum in May 2022. The work is partially funded by CT DOT's Local Bridge Program. The CT DOT must give authorization before we can proceed. We have submitted a request for "authorization to award" the bid and begin construction.

The project is expected to begin in late March or early April and be completed by June 15th to comply with permit requirements from the State. In order to meet this aggressive time schedule and reduce the cost of construction, we will be closing West Wakefield Boulevard to traffic during construction. The actual dates that the road is closed will be determined when the contractor has provided a schedule for construction. We expect to have this schedule in the near future.

Please check back on our website regularly to see the schedule for closing the road. Our goal is to minimize the time that the road is closed. We understand that this will be an inconvenience. The completed road will be safer for residents and the public to use. We appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions about the project, please email us at jrollins@townofwinchester.org.



CITIZEN'S GUIDE To the Winchester Town Budget

Learn More - Get Involved

In Winchester, the method we use to determine our town budget is an open process. Every adult citizen who either lives in Town or who owns more than \$1,000 in assessed property value in town is welcome to participate in determining the Town's annual budget.

This is where your involvement is important because your voice and your vote really do count. What you think makes a difference, right here in your home town. Please take the time to become informed and vote on your town's budget.

How the Budget Works

December: Town employees review programs and services to estimate the Town's operating costs in the next fiscal year (July 1 - June 30). The Board of Ed staff does the same for their operations.

March & April: On March 15, the Town Manager's Proposed Budget is published. The Board of Selectmen examines the budget and conducts budget hearings for both the Board of Education and the Town proposed budgets. The public is welcome to attend these meetings, and they are also livestreamed online when possible.

May: The Annual Town Meeting is held for the public to learn about and act on the Selectmen's Proposed Budget. Line item reductions may be made at this meeting. 14-21 days later, the budget referendum is held.

June & July: After the referendum, the Selectmen adopt a mill rate sufficient to meet the budget's needs. The mill rate fluctuates depending on the value of the Grand List. Due to the recent revaluation, the mill rate will be lowered. So long as a budget is adopted by then, the new budget goes into effect on July 1st.

KEY DATES TO REMEMBER

Wednesday, March 15, 2023: Town Manager submits proposed budget to Board of Selectmen and posts proposal online.

Monday, March 20 at 7 PM: Board of Selectmen Public Hearing on the proposed Town budget in the Hicks Room at Town Hall.

Monday, March 27 at 7 PM: Board of Selectmen Public Hearing on the proposed Board of Education budget at Pearson School (2 Wetmore Ave).

Friday, April 21: the last day for the Board of Selectmen to adopt a proposed budget.

Monday, May 8 at 7 PM: Annual Town Budget Meeting at the Gilbert School (200 Williams Ave).

Saturday, May 27 from 8 AM to 8 PM: Budget Referendum at Pearson School (this is an ESTIMATED date; this will be formally decided at the May 8 meeting and is subject to change).



The Budget is About Choices

In making budget choices, the Board of Selectmen has to weigh certain realities against its obligation to continue the Town's upward trajectory. At the same time, we must respect and be aware of our residents' ability and willingness to pay for services. There are new services that we may like the Town to provide, or we may decide that we are not able to afford new services or other services that were enjoyed in the past.

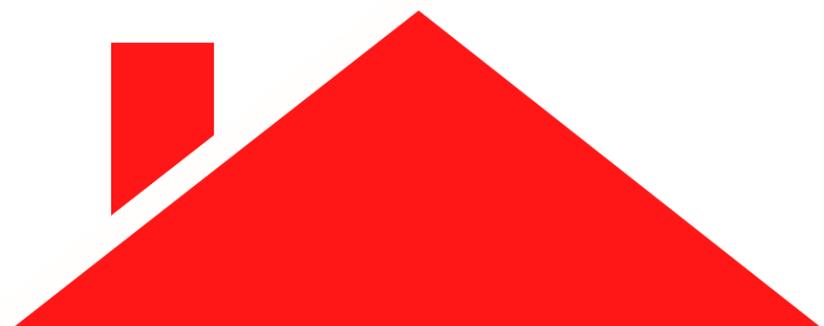
There are certain expenses that must be included in the budget at some level. For instance, we must have police services and schools. This is a question of the level of service delivery that our residents have a right to expect. If we choose to reduce what we are willing to pay for these and other essential services too far, our town will change in ways that none of us want.

There are other "fixed" costs in the Town's budget that continue to rise that the Town is obligated to absorb. High on the list are fuel costs, electrical costs, salaries mandated by contracts, and health insurance costs for Town and school employees.

The Budget is About Fiscal Responsibility & Looking Ahead

The reality is that the choices we make as to how much income we can expect and how much we can spend this year have an effect on future years as well. If, for instance, we elected to reduce the size of our public works department to the point where it could no longer maintain or improve one or more of our parks, town buildings, or roads, we would be placing the extra costs associated with reclaiming that infrastructure on some future year's budget.

The reverse is also true. If we include a new service in our budget now, we could be obligating ourselves as a community to continue it in future years.



The Town's Household Budget

Your Household	The Town
Mortgage or rent	Debt service
Taxes	Mandates, required services
Utilities, food, gas	Utilities, gas, salaries, benefits
Savings account	Fund balance, reserves
Maintenance projects	Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
Phone, cable, internet	Technology, replacement equipment
"Nice to have" items	Enhanced services/programs

The taxes we pay on real estate, automobiles, and other personal property have a long-term influence on the Town. We must be aware of our residents' ability and willingness to pay for services. If our tax rate is perceived as being too high, residents living on fixed incomes will move away, those shopping for new homes will avoid us, and businesses may relocate to areas where they can operate more cheaply. We must also continue to be aware of how much investment is needed to keep the Town headed in a positive direction, as a failure to demonstrate clear improvements to our roads, parks, schools, services, and other offerings may also scare off residents, prospective residents, and businesses. Finding the right balance between these extremes is of paramount importance.



Like any household or business, the Town is careful about what it borrows. We must repay money that we, as a community, made a decision to borrow in the past. The money used to renovate the Hinsdale School is a good example of this.

Also like any family, we need to maintain a savings account. For the town, that's call our Fund Balance and it represents revenues that we have collected over time that have not been spent. It is tempting to dip into those savings to cover our ongoing expenses, but that may not be fiscally responsible because the size of our Fund Balance is closely watched by the financial community and various government agencies. If our Fund Balance gets too low, our credit rating will be affected and it will cost us more to borrow in the future.

After the Town Manager presents his proposed budget to the Board of Selectmen in March, the Board will hold meetings between then and Friday, April 21st to further discuss the budget. The public is always welcome at these meetings.

The Town's website, townofwinchester.org, is a great resource for learning more about the budget. You can read meeting minutes, watch regular Board meetings on YouTube, and stay updated on meeting schedules to keep pace with the process.

The choices on the budget, ultimately, are up to you!

SENIORS & VETERANS

You may be eligible for reduced taxes...

The Assessor's Office has information about the different kinds of exemptions and benefits available to individuals meeting income and/or age guidelines as determined by State regulations. To learn more, visit their page on the website or call the Town Assessor's Office at 860-379-5461.

CONNECT WITH THE TOWN

Visit the Town's website at townofwinchester.org.

You can also find us on...

- Facebook: facebook.com/TownWinchesterCT
- Instagram: @Winchester_CT
- Twitter: @Winchester_CT
- LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/winchesterct/
- YouTube: Search "Town of Winchester CT"
- Nextdoor: Create an account at your home location in Winchester/Winsted.

You can email the Town Manager's Office at townmanager@townofwinchester.org or call at 860-379-2713.

To contact our Communications Coordinator, please email communications@townofwinchester.org.