

**TOWN OF WALPOLE  
TOWN BUDGET HEARING  
FEBRUARY 8, 2024**

Selectboard Present: Peggy Pschirrer, Chair; Cheryl Mayberry and Steven Dalessio

Staff Present: Sarah Downing, Manager of Administration; Ahmad Esfahani, Recording Secretary, Rich Kreissle, Manager of Finance; Mike Symonds, Road Agent; Justin Sanctuary, Police Chief; Ben Hoy, Recycling Dept. Manager; Jane Malmberg, Library Director; Meghan Hansson, Town Clerk and Tax Collector and Kraig Harlow, Recreation Director.

Others Present: Steve Varone, Treasurer; Paul Looney, Walpole Community Power Chair and over 35 members of the public.

**CALL TO ORDER:** Mrs. Pschirrer called this meeting to order at 5:30 PM in the main meeting room of the Town Hall.

**PRESENTATION:** Mrs. Pschirrer discussed the format of the Budget Hearing, and noted how she would be calling on department managers to speak on their respective budgets. She informed those in attendance of the 3/16/2024 Town Meeting, wherein the warrants will be voted upon. Mrs. Pschirrer explained the process of working on the 2024 budget beginning the previous September, with meetings with department managers in December. Mrs. Pschirrer called attention to the 2024 budget being \$4,766,717, up 3.84% from the previous year. She explained how health care costs increased by 15.6%, and that the general salary increase for Town staff is 3%.

Mrs. Pschirrer spoke in relation to a warrant article that asks permission to buy 2.6 +/- acres of land for \$200,000 coming from the unassigned fund balance. The land would be the site of a new police station.

Chief Sanctuary introduced himself to those in attendance. He briefly discussed the history of exploring the relocation of the Walpole Police Station. He commented that the most affordable option was to purchase land and build a new police station. Chief Sanctuary explained how the station would be centrally located and would assist in overall police response to calls for service. The land to be purchased has access to Upper Walpole Valley Road. Mr. Aldrich asked for further details. Mr. Dalessio stated that a building study committee was formed prior to COVID, and after reconvening and detailed discussions, it was determined that a new building was required. Mr. Dalessio commented that land is scarce in Walpole where the Town would want to build a new police station. Mr. Boas asked the Town about the rate per acre the Town is paying in comparison to what Dunkin Donuts paid. Mr. Dalessio responded that the Town wants to do borings on the site to ensure that a police station can be built upon that site. It was explained that the \$200,000 is not the amount to be paid for the property alone. It also covers additional costs associated with the purchase of the land for a new station. Ms. Bowry asked what was going to go in the building under discussion. Mr. Dalessio stated that potentially in September information will be available to share. Mr. Dalessio stated that architect Michael Petrovick has been hired to do a space study and conceptual drawings.

Mr. Basora asked if there would be net proceeds from selling the existing station. Mr. Dalessio commented that the building may be contaminated, and that questions must be answered before any decision can be made on selling the current building. Mr. Aldrich stated his concerns that he has never called the police in the 46 years he has lived in Town and wondered if a new station was needed. Chief Sanctuary stated that he would allow interested people to tour the station and go for a ride-a-long with an

officer. Mr. Therrien commented that he has called the police since moving to Town and they were very helpful.

Ms. Andros asked about the design of the building, and asked if there are any designs. Chief Sanctuary stated that a design has not been created, but needs for the building have been identified. Mrs. Pschirrer clarified that at the Women of Walpole (WOW) that Ms. Andros attended, observations of necessary design elements were discussed, but not actual specific designs.

Mrs. Sommer stated that people are hearing about a wish-list and that this is troubling people. Mr. Dalessio stated that if there are questions or concerns, he would make time to meet with residents.

Mrs. Pschirrer then began discussions on Town Hall repairs to the west side of the building. Mrs. Downing spoke to Warrant Article #5. She stated that the Town received two quotes. The best quote was from Jancewicz and Son which is a Walpole based contractor. Mr. Tom Aldrich stated that he was concerned about the term "raise" in the warrant's wording. Mrs. Pschirrer clarified that warrant articles are sent to the State for review, and that bureaucratic protocols of appropriate language must be followed.

Mr. Kreissle introduced himself to those in attendance and explained the nature of the unassigned fund balance as being: 1. Revenue generated by taxation and 2. Subtract the actual amount of the budget, and the excess goes towards the unassigned fund balance. Mr. Kreissle stated that the present unassigned fund balance is \$2,173,455.

Mr. Walters asked if we should try to lower our tax rate if the unassigned fund balance is high. Mr. Walters stated that the cost of his property tax per month is more than his mortgage. Increased property taxes are a hardship for his family. Mr. Walters asked how much more revenue was generated. Mr. Kreissle stated that the average collection rate is about 96-97%. Mr. Kreissle explained the use of the unassigned fund balance for road repairs after the floods in recent years. Mr. Therrien commented that the value of the houses increased 65%, which affected property tax bills. Mr. Kreissle stated that in the finance budget, there is a separate budget for the tax collector.

Mrs. Pschirrer invited Mike Symonds to speak to a Highway Block Grant. Mr. Symonds introduced himself as the Road Agent for Walpole. He stated that the highway department would like to mill a section of Main Street from the entrance of the school to the entrance of Agway. Main Street is showing wear. Mr. Symonds stated that the Town has not line painted in two years. Sidewalks within town also need repair. Ms. Epstein asked if there was a date chosen for School Street drainage work. Mr. Dalessio responded that he has just seen the plans for the School Street work, and that it will be discussed in the upcoming Selectboard meeting. Mrs. Pschirrer asked Mr. Symonds if any other streets in Town would be paved. Mr. Symonds identified work to be done on Valley Road, Green Road of North Walpole, Hooper Road, and Alice Smith Road.

Mr. Paul Looney, chair of the Walpole Community Power Committee, and Mr. Hoy of the Recycling Center spoke about the proposal to add solar panels at the Recycling Center. Mr. Looney discussed the process of putting solar panels on the new storage building. Mr. Looney stated that the 80 panels would generate 40,000 kilowatt hours per year, which would be shared with the Walpole Town Hall. He stated that the vendor with the lowest cost was chosen. Based on estimates, the system will pay for itself in 6.5 years. He commented that the ability for a panel to generate power becomes reduced at 25 years. Mr. Hoy stated that the new storage building's roof was adjusted for the installation of solar panels. Mr. Varone asked for dollar value savings per year from this installation. Mr. Looney answered with approximately \$8,000 a year. Mr. Varone asked for further calculations to include the cost of decommissioning and disposal of the panels. Mr. Varone stated that using the concept of opportunity costs, the estimates presented may need to be looked at. Mr. Hoy explained that the Town of Walpole takes recycling

seriously. Mr. Palmiotto added that there is the environmental benefit from adding solar panels. They will produce clean energy.

Mrs. Pschirrer explained the Town balances of the municipal, highway, police, town wide assessment, and recycling capital reserve funds. She spoke to how much the Town will be asking residents to consider increasing each reserve fund balance. Every five years the Town must complete a town-wide assessment, and a new capital reserve fund has been put forward for consideration.

Mrs. Pschirrer spoke of the importance of attending the upcoming town meeting.

Mr. Wes Vickers asked if discussion of Article #11 could take place. He suggested that the Selectboard speak to the Town attorney about the overcharging that was disclosed in the previous night's school district deliberative session. Can the Town seek a refund after the fiscal year has ended? Mr. Vickers stated that the Town has zero control over Walpole Elementary School. He highly recommends that the Town establish this preliminary committee to explore alternative options to the present school structure. The school district does plan on changing the articles of agreement. Mr. Varone stated that this discussion is about doing what is best for Walpole and having local control and autonomy in decision-making. Mr. Varone spoke about the options eligible for consideration if the committee were to be formed.

Mrs. Pschirrer briefly commented upon a petition warrant concerning removing electronic voting machines and moving to solely hand counting paper ballots.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Mrs. Pschirrer declared the meeting adjourned at 6:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ahmad Esfahani, Recording Secretary

  
Peggy L. Pschirrer, Chair

  
Cheryl Mayberry

  
Steven Dalessio

(Note: These are unapproved Minutes. Corrections will be found in the Minutes of the February 8, 2024, Selectboard meeting.)