

MIDDLEFIELD BOARD OF FINANCE
405 Main Street
Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Minutes of the April 8, 2021 Regular Meeting via Zoom

Jim Irish called the regular meeting to order at 7:06 pm.

Attendance:

Members

Others

X	Irish, Jim	X	Bailey, Ed
X	Kowal, Melissa		
X	Lowry, David		
X	Nick, Joel		
X	Skelps, Michael		
X	Wolak, Mary	X	Rusilowicz, Al

A=Absent

X=Present

Anne Olszewski, Tax Collector, was also present at the meeting.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of the Agenda

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Dave Lowry, to approve the agenda, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes from 3/11/21 Public Hearing and Regular Meeting

Mary Wolak made a motion, seconded by Dave Lowry, to approve the minutes from the 3/11/21 public hearing and regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

1. Discussion of the Tax Collector's Budget

Anne Olszewski explained that the only thing that has changed in her budget is the software. She noted that it worked very well last year to add the return envelope and cut down on the amount of people coming to the Town Hall.

2. Suspension List

Anne Olszewski explained that the suspense list she is presenting is for personal property, motor vehicle and motor vehicle supplement and is up by just a little over \$2,000 from last year. Mrs. Olszewski stated that she never knows who will pay and who will not. This list is from the 2018 Grand List which would have been due in July, 2019.

Al Rusilowicz added that the state allowed people to register their cars without paying their taxes this year, due to COVID. Anne Olszewski did not believe that that was extended beyond last summer. She also noted that a lot of people do not pay their motor vehicle taxes until it is time to register their vehicles and motor vehicle registrations are now every three years, rather than every two years.

Melissa Kowal stated that Jimmy D's Antiques is still on the list and Mrs. Olszewski explained that he is not going to pay those taxes and has told her so. She cannot put a lien on the property as it is not the same name as the business. Mrs. Kowal asked if they could publish the unpaid tax list in the newspaper and Mrs. Olszewski stated that they could. Mrs. Kowal was upset that people are doing business in town and not paying their taxes. Anne Olszewski added that she could get a collection agency, but they cannot collect from people who have moved out of state and very rarely can get anything from businesses that have gone out of business. Al Rusilowicz stated that the Town of Durham posts their list on the wall at Town Hall. Ed Bailey added that they could post it in the Town Hall and on the website as well. Mrs. Kowal felt that they should for all of the honest people who are working hard to pay their taxes.

Anne Olszewski reminded everyone that they will have to post all delinquent taxes, including real estate. Melissa Kowal then suggested they put an announcement in the Town Times that the list is posted on the website. Mrs. Olszewski felt that would create a problem because seniors and other people who are having problems because of COVID and are coming in every month with money. She would not want to embarrass those people who are trying. Mrs. Kowal then explained that she was just wanting the suspension list posted. Mrs. Olszewski agreed to do that and explained that that list would not include real estate.

Anne Olszewski also explained that she also continues to try to collect the money owed that is on the tax suspension list and this does not mean that the taxes are forgiven. Al Rusilowicz added that the town doesn't really have any recourse against personal property as the town does not normally put liens on assets. He felt that business owners know that personal property taxes will be written off and they will not pay. He also felt that the same names have appeared on the list for the past 10 years. Anne Olszewski stated that she does have to live in town, but she will not frequent a business that has not paid their taxes.

Jim Irish asked if they would be able to post a list for suspension for unpaid motor vehicle taxes or if it would have to include personal property as well. Anne Olszewski would not want to do that. At this point, Melissa Kowal felt it wasn't worth picking and choosing if they weren't going to include personal property. Al Rusilowicz added that one person makes up over 50 percent of the personal property list and

that could be turned over to collections. Mrs. Olszewski stated that she would put them all with a collections agency and not pick and choose. She has had collections agencies tell her that there's not enough on the list to make it worth it. Mr. Irish felt it would be entirely reasonable to pick and choose, but Mrs. Olszewski reiterated that it would be all or nothing. Al Rusilowicz stated that it did not have to be all or nothing and that they could have a policy that anything over \$1,000 goes to a collections agency. Mrs. Olszewski stated that she would need that in writing.

Jim Irish asked the board members for input on these issues. Anne Olszewski felt that a collections agency would not touch just one or two cases. Al Rusilowicz asked if the town could file a lien on the two that are over \$1,000, but Mrs. Olszewski stated that there was nothing to lien. She could take these people to Small Claims Court and win, but there is no way to force them to pay.

Joel Nick felt that it would be a good idea to have a policy in place to allow collections to take place. He does believe it's a bit murky to post people's names. Michael Skelps added that this is a typical amount and asked how the collections agency works. Anne Olszewski explained that it doesn't cost the town anything, but the taxpayer has to pay an extra 15 percent. She has warned everyone that their bill may go to collections. Mrs. Olszewski added that once they went to credit card payments, a lot of people cleaned up their old bills.

Mary Wolak agreed that it would probably not help to shame someone into paying. Mrs. Wolak felt that they would recoup some of the motor vehicle, but it would be good to have a policy for personal property. She did not feel it would be a good idea to post names on the website. Anne Olszewski suggested a glass enclosed unit outside the door of the Town Hall where she can post the names.

Melissa Kowal added that she felt it was a shame that they are worried about the feelings of the people who are not paying their taxes. Mrs. Olszewski stated that she has no feelings for a business who is still doing business. Mrs. Kowal felt it was 100 percent legal for the town to post the people who haven't paid their taxes, but would not want to make Mrs. Olszewski feel uncomfortable. Mrs. Olszewski has spent hours researching to see if companies are still in business and found many were out of business. She also added that there is an ordinance that a permit cannot be issued if the person has delinquent taxes.

Jim Irish summarized that motor vehicle taxes will not be posted, but personal property will be, especially if there is a policy. It is a long list, but very few have any appreciable amounts. Joel Nick felt it would be okay to hassle the people who are not paying their personal property taxes. Michael Skelps added that they would need to set a threshold for the policy. Mrs. Olszewski noted that there is only one on the list over \$500. Jim Irish felt that they should continue with the practice that has been followed in the past and everyone agreed.

Jim Irish made a motion, seconded by Mary Wolak, to approve the suspense list as presented by Tax Collector Anne Olszewski, consisting of \$5,651.81 Personal Property and \$21,704.80 Motor Vehicle, for a total of \$27,356.61. Motion carried unanimously.

Anne Olszewski then noted that she has a foreclosure going to auction in September, a whole bunch of properties at the top of Kickapoo that are going May 1st and five more (two are on the market, two got paid up and one is still pending). She believes there are about 90 properties that will go to lien.

3. Budgetary Changes to Fiscal 2022 Budget

Al Rusilowicz had prepared five different attachments which were forwarded to the board members. He reviewed proposed changes highlighted in yellow. Health insurance now reflects the increase at 14.5 percent increase instead of 16.5 percent. Dental insurance increased 7.2 percent this year and will not increase next year. Town Clerk's Special Projects has a placeholder for \$1.00 and Al Rusilowicz did speak to Donna Golub about that. Mary Wolak clarified that any expense in that line item would be for personnel and be paid from contingency. Lake Beseck line item has been reduced by \$560 as a result of mowing proposals.

The original budget did not include a line item for the Fire House Building committee and that now has \$1.00 as a placeholder, primarily for minutes of their meetings. Monitoring was removed from capital and moved into the Lake Beseck Ad Hoc committee general fund budget. Changes made to the Capital budget include \$5,000 for a brush truck, \$12,000 for design review guidelines under Building and Land Use and \$30,000 additional for tank removal at the Community Center. A check has been received from Eversource for the LED project rebate which went back into Capital.

Mr. Rusilowicz also added \$1,500 to Levi Coe for a part-time employee. Valley Shore has confirmed that there will be no increase this year, resulting in a reduction of \$2,974. Regional District 13 updated their budget proposals, resulting in a reduction of \$133,040 to Middlefield. The overall town budget has gone down \$113,115 as of today. Jim Irish explained that the board will review all of these changes and more at future meetings.

Moving to Capital, Al Rusilowicz reviewed the items and explained that the net increase this year is \$13,979.

The Selectman's proposed budget had a mill rate of 31.66 which has now changed to 31.85, which is a decrease of about a half a mill. The decrease in the Grand List is a result of the solar panel project which was lowered by \$2.6 million. Ed Bailey explained that that adjustment came from the Board of Assessment Appeals. Mr. Rusilowicz added that the mill rate includes using \$350,000 of fund balance to subsidize the budget.

Al Rusilowicz contacted the Martin Heft, Under Secretary at OPM about the spending cap. The town is currently at 2.96 percent, but the cap is 2.5 percent and is very difficult to achieve. Mr. Heft explained that this is not statute, but was enacted by the legislature and there is no enforcement. OPM has tried to have the legislature repeal the cap, but they are not entertaining it. Mr. Rusilowicz was told not to worry about it and there would be no penalties. Ed Bailey added that the legislature is looking at putting more teeth into the cap, but he wasn't sure it would go anywhere. Jim Irish felt that this cap doesn't even allow to keep up with inflation and is a senseless limit.

New Business

1. Confirmation of the Remaining Budget Calendar

Dave Lowry left the meeting at this point. Jim Irish explained that they have a meeting with DMIAAB next Tuesday and a capital discussion on Thursday. They had originally planned to have a public hearing on April 22nd, but Ed Bailey had reported that there is a new executive order from the Governor to extend municipal budgets out to June 30th. Mr. Bailey would like to have an in-person town meeting for the budget and asked to have that time line extended out, to possibly Monday, May 24th or Monday, June 7th. The public hearing would be backed up to line up with those dates, at either Thursday, May 6th or Thursday, May 20th. Al Rusilowicz added that it may also be possible that the state budget would be

available before the town meeting as well. Jim Irish also stated that it gives them more time to understand the American Recovery Act and the economic development person's coverage from that. Ed Bailey felt that they should have some guidance from the federal government in the next few weeks. He also felt that it would be a good thing to have a state budget prior to finalizing the town's budget.

Mary Wolak asked what the plan was for the public hearing and Jim Irish explained that they would have to hold it outdoors or by Zoom which he felt would be easier for people to understand. Ed Bailey confirmed that the town meeting will be held outdoors. Anne Olszewski stated that a lot of people don't have computers and the ability to do Zoom. She doesn't know if those same people would actually attend a public hearing in person, but she wanted to let the board know there may be some push-back. Jim Irish stated that the proposed public hearing budget would be posted in time for people to review it prior to the hearing and again after the public hearing. Mary Wolak asked if there would be a way to get questions or concerns other than electronically. Mr. Irish stated that the email process last year was totally unsuccessful. Al Rusilowicz suggested that when the budget is posted on the website, they can add a note that any written questions or comments can be submitted to the First Selectman's office. Mrs. Wolak asked that they publish that in the Town Times as well. She also asked if they will be able to do a Powerpoint presentation outside under the pavilion and Mr. Bailey stated that they could have a screen and projector as well as handouts.

Anne Olszewski added that there is a box outside the door of the Town Hall where people can submit their questions. Ed Bailey would like to have the Town Meeting on June 7th and Anne Olszewski stated that would be okay as long as she has the mill rate that night. The public hearing would then be held on May 20th. Mr. Bailey will bring the dates to the Board of Selectmen for a decision.

Mr. Irish encouraged everyone to be animated at next week's meeting with DMIAAB but to be respectful of the fact that Mr. DelVecchio is a volunteer. Mr. Irish has sent some questions and comments to DMIAAB prior to next week's meeting. Mrs. Kowal felt that DMIAAB does not hear the board when they voice their concerns and doesn't answer questions that they ask.

Adjournment

Melissa Kowal made a motion, seconded by Joel Nick, to adjourn the meeting. Motion was carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debi Waz

Debi Waz
Alwaz First