

**BOARD OF FINANCE  
PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES  
APRIL 4, 2022**

**I. CHAIR BOARD OF FINANCE: Catherine Salchert**

- a. Board of Finance Chair Catherine Salchert called the Public Hearing to order at 7:03 p.m. via GoToMeeting.
- b. Ms. Salchert advised the audience of the order of presentation

**II. CHAIR, TOWN COUNCIL: Dan Polhamus**

Town Council Chair Dan Polhamus introduced the members of the Town Council in attendance: Heather Maguire, Anthony Weber, Barbara Ausiello and Jason Indomenico.

Mr. Polhamus guided the audience through a Power Point Presentation of the Town Council, Sewer, Debt Service and Capital Improvement Budget for FY 2022/2023. The slides are on the town website.

**III. SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS: Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla**

Board of Education Chair Debra Chute introduced the members of the Board of Education in attendance: Jacqueline Blea, Debra Chute, Jeffrey Fleischman, Jay Spivak, Laura Young, Lisa Seminara, Lynn Katz and Thej Singh.

Superintendent Dr. Carnemolla guided the audience through a Google Slide Presentation of the Board of Education Budget for FY 2022/2023. The slides are on the town website.

**IV. CHAIR, BOARD OF FINANCE: Catherine Salchert**

Board of Finance Chair Catherine Salchert introduced the members of the Board of Finance in attendance: Margaret Bratton, Ellen Retelle, Carl Gisnarian, Charles Harvell, Houston Putnam Lowry, Brian Loveless and Clerk Christine Pescatore.

Ms. Salchert guided the audience through a Power Point Presentation of The Board of Finance Overview. The slides are on the town website.

**V. CHAIR, BOARD OF FINANCE: Catherine Salchert**

Ms. Salchert called upon the audience for questions and comments on the Town Council, Board of Education, and Board of Finance budget presentations.

**James Fitzgerald of Buckingham Village**

I know that you had responded to the e-mail that I sent off to you and most of your fellow board members as well as The Town Council. So, the only, big issue that I have really, is the process and the process being that the voters (Taxpayers) really don't have a say in this budget.

Very early, your chair of the Town Council said, everybody get out and vote. You know, as I put in that e-mail, a lot of people are just saying, it doesn't matter what you do, you're going to do what they want. I think I raised a very important fact that, you know, just imagine if, you know, you lost your elective seat because 9% didn't show up. No, 8.9 showed up, or 6% showed up. You won, but you really didn't win.

So you imagine how it feels, regardless of what happens in the other towns, whether it's Kent or West Hartford or anybody else, how they do it.

You know, a majority is a majority, and I know that there are special interests, everybody has special interest, there are special interest on the education budget, and they have special interests on the recreation and special interest on the part towns and the roads.

To sit there and say that, the rationale is just because if you had 49 people that said yes, and 51, people said no, you automatically said that the No's, that special interests probably voted that way, because they had no clue what was really going on going on with the budget, will look at it from the other side. What about the people that know, the 49 that did vote yes?

What makes you think that they knew what was going on with the budget?

Is very undemocratic, yes? No, no. It's a majority, and the last referendum, it was voted down, and it should have been recognized as such, and gone back to the board of finance to rework the budget and bring it back to another referendum. So, you know, that's where I'm coming from.

And I live over here in Buckingham Village, which is an age restricted community, 56 houses.

And unfortunately, the roads are private, but yet, the people here, majority of them are fixed income, and they don't have the money and these budgets continue to increase.

Yet we get zero services from the town. So why should 56 houses pay the same that everybody else is paying? When we don't get any plowing, we don't get any cleaning no road repair, no nothing.

So it's unfortunate, and I think that the residents in this community there should be some type of relationship with this association where the taxes for these

residential properties are reduced by at least a minimum of \$2500 a year, because we don't get any services unless it's an emergency, and we make a phone call.

Our roads are used and abused by everybody else in the community, and they're not taken care of by the town.

So, it's a very unfortunate situation, that's my opinion, you know, maybe there's something else that can be done or worked out.

I understand that two thirds of the town council can make a change and rescind that, issue with the charter, so the people can vote.

Everybody should vote and their votes should count, because you definitely would not like to go home realizing that you won the election, but you lost because 8.9% showed up.

Also, you had special interests when you did the thing for the lights, for the turf, for the communication system. So was it, you know, a minimum requirement of 9% there?

I mean, I don't know, I just think that it should be that simple majority based on what the turnout is of the vote, and that's why people don't care anymore.

In response, Ms. Salchert clarified Mr. Fitzgerald was referring to the language in Charter §9.4, which basically states the budget is automatically approved regardless of the actual vote totals if fewer than 9% of the residents vote. Therefore, it is important for everyone to vote. The Avon Town Charter cannot be unilaterally changed by the Town Council.

To change the Charter, we would need a charter review commission and follow that process.

**Jim Speich of 14 Yorkshire Lane.**

I just wanted to just say a couple of things. First thing is, I'm glad to see the funds being used for road maintenance, much needed, and the grand list increase is great, so it makes the town council's job a little bit easier this year on the budget; congratulations on that. As for the schools, how much did you get for ARPA this year and how did you use it to decrease your budgets?

Superintendent Carnemolla, responded ARPA goes to the town, not to the schools. ESSER goes directly to the schools. Susan Russo (the Board of Education business manager) reported the ESSER allocation is \$748,132.00.

Mr. Speich asked what that was used for.

Ms. Russo explained it was used for additional teaching assistants in K through 4, for an English as a second language teacher, an interventionist, for a lunch monitor and building substitutes and a counselor at Avon High School for next year for fiscal year 22/23.

It was also used for professional development to address the learning needs and the learning loss directly related to the pandemic, software licenses to support those efforts, intervention-instructional materials, as well as environmental, health and safety upgrades to meet the Covid regulations to have schools open. Additional funds are not expected in 2022.

The grant requires the district to certify they will not use any funds to supplant the current budget and must be used for new things in the budget. It must align with the Connecticut State Department of Education priority goals. Avon must have measurable smart goals to meet those requirements, and if funds are used for needs, other than to address learning loss or address social emotional needs, it must directly support the CDC and the Connecticut State Department of Education Covid-19 related policies related to returning to in person instruction.

When the Board of Education tries to maximize the grant fund usage, they looked for ways to be able to utilize it in the way that the grant was intended, that would meet those requirements. It's not a 1 for 1 reduction of the budget because that's not allowed.

**Valerie Nejad of 11 Cotswold Way**

I'm a new resident, and, so, I'm very new to the budget process, so if you can just bear with me.

So, I saw that last year there was already a \$1.40 increase to property taxes or around there?

This year, you're asking for another, I believe, what is it, another \$.40 your mill rate?

I guess my question if I'm allowed to ask questions because, again, I'm new to this is what's the long term plan here for the town of Avon? Because I just heard in this presentation about, the road system needing significant upgrades, which would be valued at approximately one point eight million dollars over the next five years. I know that there was just a new contract with employees of the school system, which is a three year contract, with increases over the next three years. I've seen in the budget \$10 million request for building a new fire house. So I'm seeing a lot of things, and I'm just curious if there's a long term plan here that doesn't include raising taxes consistently.

Ms. Salchert apologized for allowing Jim Spiech (a former member of The Town Council) to ask questions. This is not really supposed to be a question and answer session (this response was corrected below).

**Mark Gantner - Entered a couple of questions in the chat.**

Ms. Salchert read Mark Gantner's chat comment:

Just a couple of questions about what in the CIP budget, what is \$540,000 for?

Ms. Salchert thought this referred to the countryside park. It will be either a renovation or a rebuild.

Ms. Salchert read the second chat comment:

Another question that's related to Countryside Park, where can we find the details of the \$5,291,836?

Assistant Town Manager Grace Tiezzi explained the total CIP budget can be found on the town's website.

**Diane Hornaday of 515 Huckleberry Hill Rd.**

Frankly, Chairman Salchert, I was shocked to hear you say that this is not a question and answer session.

The Board of Finance Hearing has always been for the members of the public to be able to ask questions about the budget and get answers.

The next meeting is, you already made clear, and has always been, the case that the budget workshop is not an open session meeting for public input. The Final Town meeting, were always told, no changes can be made to the budget.

So, what Mr. Fitzgerald brought up has more weight than I might have thought, even if the time I'm really appalled that there's no open process but the residents of this community to ask some questions, should know how their money is being spent, and to indicate other issues that they might have that they would like to be consider.

As I have nothing further than that, just say, I thought the presentations were well done, and that requested increase is not shocking, but I think this process is a little lacking.

Ms. Salchert explained she might have been misinformed. She thought this was a traditional public hearing. In the future, questions will be accepted and answers will be provided live (to the extent they can be). If answers cannot be provided live, the questions and the responses will be posted on the town website after the necessary research is done.

**VI. CHAIR, BOARD OF FINANCE: Catherine Salchert**

There being no further discussion, the Public Hearing is adjourned to the Budget Workshop to be held on Wednesday, April 6 at 7:00 p.m. via GoToMeeting [<https://meet.goto.com/946745365>]. At the Budget Workshop, the Board of Finance shall make those revisions in the budget as the Board of Finance deems desirable and shall recommend the budget so revised to the Annual Budget Meeting to be held on Monday, May 2, 2022 at 7:00 p.m., with the location to be determined no later than April 14<sup>th</sup>. The recommended budget will be submitted to vote at

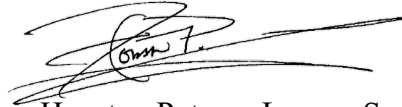
Referendum on May 11, 2022, at the Avon Senior Center Community Room, 635 West Avon Road, Avon, CT, between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

**VII. ADJOURN**

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

***Minutes are official only after approval by the Board of Finance, usually at its next meeting.***

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Putnam Lowry", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Houston Putnam Lowry, Secretary

Attest: Christine Pescatore, Clerk

All referenced material is available to the public in the Town Manager's Office.