



**Beacon Falls Board of Selectmen
Beacon Falls Board of Finance
10 Maple Avenue
Beacon Falls, CT 06403**

**BEACON FALLS BOARD OF SELECTMEN
BEACON FALLS BOARD OF FINANCE
Budget Workshop
April 20, 2021, MINUTES
(Subject to Revision)**

1. **Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance:** G. Smith and T. Pratt called their respective meetings to order at 7:00 PM and led the assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members Present: G. Smith, M. Krenesky, C. Bielick, T. Pratt, S. Leeper, J. Carroll, W. Hopkinson, K. Brennan

Members Absent: D. Fennell

Public Present: Region 16 Superintendent Michael Yamin, Region 16 Finance Director Anthony DiLeone, Finance Manager N. Nau, J. Betkoski (EDC), B. Cosme from Novus, D Salazar from Novus, and Hazel Salazar. Sarah DePeters from McInnis, Inc. (7:35 PM), Conservation Commissioners Kristen Jabanoski and Andrew Keane (8:00 PM).

2. **Region 16:** Superintendent M. Yamin introduced his Finance Director A. DiLeone. He planned to focus on pages 5, 6, 7, 12, 23 and 24 of the Region 16 Budget Presentation, dated 3/31/21 and answer any questions. This is a fiscally responsible budget.
 - Page 5 shows the district coherent plans and Academic Improvement goals. Region 16 has been working toward achieving the goals of the district coherent plan for our DERG and we are now in the top third of the DERG. We have maintained minimal increases in the budget over the last 5 years, while expanding programs such as creating STEM pathways at the high school in both manufacturing and health care.
 - Page 6 shows the budget being presented this year which has a minimal .62% overall increase for a total budget of \$40,985,059. We start with a \$0 budget which allows for only a 1% carry over to the Non-Recurring Capital Fund. Increases are due to contractual salary increases, healthcare increases, and changes to the bus contract which no longer allows Region 16 to purchase buses (for tax savings to All-Star). The bus contract increased by \$100,000 this year because of these state-mandated changes. These 3 items represent a \$2.5M budget increase over last year's budget from the onset.
 - Page 7 shows Budget Highlight items that the Region is working towards, some of which have been delayed by COVID. They are implementing new K-5 Math Curriculum and will be

introducing new Math curriculum for high school and middle school. Math learning has suffered in the hybrid/remote learning model. Social emotional learning from K-12, supporting small class sizes, investments in technology are all program highlights. The school buildings are in great shape. Region 16 will have \$1M - \$1.4M to be bonded for the high school track and gym floor in 2023. Bond rates are at a good place and are healthy.

- Page 12 shows per pupil expenditure for the Region and we are below State average. A good school system is evaluated by the high school, and Woodland's track record of SAT scores and paths taken by graduating seniors speaks to their success.
- Pages 23 – A. DiLeone spoke on the Budget figures represented on Page 23, explaining a Total Budget of \$40,985,059 less State Grant revenue, interest and fees results in net expenses to the towns of \$40,432,331.
- Page 24 – This Net carry to Page 24 where average daily membership in the schools is calculated. This shows a decrease to the Town of Beacon Falls to 35%, while Prospect is at 65% of the school population. The Proportioned Net Expenses to the Member Towns shows a total cost to Beacon Falls of \$14,151,316, less projected ECS grant revenue of \$3,946,560, resulting in a net cost of \$10,204,756 for Beacon Falls. This is a 5.75% decrease to the Town of Beacon Falls.

M. Krenesky asked about COVID impact on student preparedness. M. Yamin noted that this year using universal assessments, (iReady for Fall, Winter and Spring and Smarter Balance at the State level) Region 16 will have access to data on what students need intervention. There has been a big push from guidance counselors to move students from remote to in-school learning. The Region will know at the end of May/early June as to what percentage of students will need remediation. M. Yamin expects this rate will be higher, but he is hopeful it will be less than 20%. Summer school is being offered and he may need to hire additional reading and math interventionists in the fall to provide support. COVID has had serious impact on students both academically and socially. COVID funding is leveling off. A. DiLeone added that Region 16 is leveraging the state and federal resources available to the Region. There is \$75,000 in Contingency for COVID expenses and there is \$100,000 in ESSER2 funding remaining for remediation. 3 teachers were hired to reduce class sizes at Prospect Elementary and Laurel Ledge from the ESSER2 funds this year.

T. Pratt thanked M. Yamin, the BOE, and the entire staff for a phenomenal job during this pandemic. The values that they have brought to the table have been outstanding and everyone has stepped up.

M. Yamin noted that Capital Non-Recurring has been controversial, but this fund has saved this Region in the past, when air conditioning units in the middle and high school needed to be replaced mid-year. There is a lot of value in having the Capital Non-Recurring funds available when managing our budgets. The Fund currently has \$130,000 and there is an \$80,000 drainage problem with the swimming pool, which will require use of these funds.

Since coming on board, M. Yamin noted that Region 16 is no longer \$1M over budget. Surpluses have been reasonable in recent years. N. Nau added that reinvesting in the infrastructure of the schools is particularly important, regarding the Capital Fund, the Town was looking for reporting on this fund which A. DiLeone provided. G. Smith thanked M. Yamin and A. DiLeone for coming.

3. **Novus Insight/IT:** D. Salazar/CEO and B. Cosme/Support Specialist introduced themselves and provided some background on Novus Insight, which has been working with governments as a specialty. Novus provided a multi-year plan for IT improvements for the town which improve security and utilize cloud-based services. Accomplishments over the last year including migration off a small server to Microsoft 365 cloud system, which also serves as a security platform. The older server is nearly decommissioned. A new firewall was installed with security services, and new wireless has been installed in the Town Hall.

For FY2022 – Additional Office 365 licenses will be added to cover additional personnel in town as well as commission chairs. FOIA requests have been a concern, and Office 365 does not allow deletion of files and will retain records. As staff becomes more familiar with Microsoft 365, they are identifying the benefits of the new system.

Additionally, this year to avoid server failure, Novus moved the QDS software to a hosted service from a 2011 server. The IQS server for the Town Clerk will be migrated at the end of the current contract in 2023. Virtual hosting solutions have monthly costs, but D. Salazar noted they level the budget, and eliminate large capital request for replacement servers. There is also less need for infrastructure and space, such as air conditioning to cool physical servers.

The desktop and laptop replacement cycle will be tackled in FY2022 so that the town has a steady replacement cycle. Older laptops can be kept as backups. This year there are 11 hardware replacements recommended. N. Nau explained that we are hoping to buy 6 computers with FY2021 operating funds and then there will be 5 replacements next year.

G. Smith asked about workstations, laptops and desktops referenced on the quote and what can the town expect for useful life. B. Cosme noted that workstation costs are labor costs for installation. We should expect a full 5 years from these desktops and laptops. Component failures begin to occur at 5 years, and this timeline also lines up with accounting, as computers are depreciated over 5 years. Switches which interconnect the network also need to be replaced in FY2022.

D. Salazar noted after the 3rd year, the town is on a sustainable repetitive path. The budget becomes a steady stable budget, with moderate expected increases to Microsoft licenses. He noted there are always some surprises when dealing with IT, and subscription services for licensing, firewalls, etc. are the trend. N. Nau noted that the Town currently does not have the ability to do fillable forms, so we are adding costs for Adobe Pro – minimizing the cost by user.

T. Pratt asked about the IT Closet in Town Hall, as heat is an issue, what are the risks in that closet. B. Cosme noted that this is common, and one of the main things he sees with clients. B. Cosme will be removing some of the decommissioned equipment from the closet, managing the cables, and the door is always locked. He checks the temperature when he is onsite, and the A/C is functioning well.

M. Krenesky asked Novus to investigate the Registrar of Voters connection to the Secretary of State which was lost when the desktops were swapped out.

W Hopkinson asked about training within Town Hall on cybersecurity. D. Salazar mentioned multi-factor authentication and a program called "KnowBe4", which is a campaign which send phishing emails as a training tool. All agreed that training is needed, and a culture of security is important and will be discussed further. Office 365's security platform is a built-in feature as well. Thanks to Novus Insights for coming this evening.

- 4. McInnis – FY2021-2022** – Sarah DePeters introduced herself and presented the Human Resources Proposed Budget at \$38,680 which is a \$6,000 increase over last year's budget. She has taken over several items for the Town, such as the Employee Handbook, performance evaluations, drug and alcohol testing, Sexual Harassment Training, Workers Compensation claims, as well as hiring and on boarding. G. Smith added that some of the increases in the HR budget are because he has initiated many of these items and placed them with the Human Resources consultant, as primary point of contact.

T. Pratt asked about the Employee Handbook, which has been on hold for a while and will add value to the municipality. The handbook process started in 2018 and G. Smith is trying to close it out.

W. Hopkinson asked if diversity training is that being considered. G. Smith has not yet focused on diversity training, as his focus has been on getting the state-mandated training completed. CIRMA, our insurer, has many courses available and Sarah will investigate what is available for the town through them. This is something the town will look at moving forward, especially if it is legislated. Thanks to Sarah for presenting tonight.

- 5. EDC:** Jack Betkoski, EDC Chairman, spoke to the group about EDC plans and goals. Their hope is to join the Naugatuck Valley Regional Development Corporation, which has legislation pending in Hartford to regionalize and gain members. This new regionalization of EDC within the State will have dollars attached to it. This group is also affiliated with the NVCOG, Naugatuck and Waterbury are trial members, and it would be a home run for the town to be included.

EDC spent some time negotiating with the Naugatuck EDC on a partnership, which did not come to fruition. The CT Economic Resource Center was a valuable partner, but the State changed their direction, so EDC is always changing and there are some viable alternatives for the Town to partner with.

Another EDC goal is to put together a meeting with 75% of businesses in Town to hear their concerns, especially coming out of COVID. The revitalization of North Main Street is a continued focus. N. Nau put together a \$600,000 grant application for Main Street which was declined. The application will be paired down and resubmitted. EDC continues to work to have vacant business spaces filled. G. Smith encouraged EDC to work with Keith Rosenfeld, Town Planner who is a valuable resource.

EDC is also working with Land Use to streamline applications, and this is something Lisa Daigle as Land Use Administrator is spearheading. She is a singular point of contact to streamline the process. G. Smith expects this process will be in place in 30 days.

Finally, EDC maintains a list of commercial properties available for development, with the goal of bringing in business which is good for the town and increases the tax base. EDC has presented a flat operating budget.

K Brennan asked at one point will the Town pursue the State property at the Industrial Park, which is prime real estate, as the State has no plans to develop into a Fire School. C. Bielik noted that he had asked this question in the past and Beacon Hose was opposed. G. Smith agreed that to pursue this land with the State, the town would need support from the Firehouse, so we are not fighting ourselves. Without buy-in from the Fire Department, it is a dead issue. It is agreed that this is valuable piece of property would jumpstart the industrial park. J. Betkoski added that Rivers Edge will reopen on May 3rd.

W. Hopkinson asked EDC to remind existing businesses and new businesses that BFCC offers welcome bags to new residents, so this is an effective way to advertise. Thanks to Jack Betkoski.

- 6. Conservation:** Kristen Jabanoski from the Conservation Commissions spoke regarding the Operating Budget for the commission, which has not changed. Their regular expense line will be used for community engagement and outreach, town wide clean up and they also hope to take part in CT Trails Day. Conservation hopes to increase communication and encourage outdoor activity.

Open Space Maintenance –This is a \$5,000 line for continued tree work at Lantern Ridge. The commission hopes to continue improving Lantern Ridge, so community can continue to use it.

Open Space Acquisition Fund –This is a \$1,000 line which is put in the Open Space Maintenance Fund. The commission continues to work on Open Space inventory, developing Open Space criteria, planning and acquisitions. They are working with other towns and with the Town Planner.

A.Keane added that Conservation is responsible for keeping Open Space inventory, establishing criteria for Open Spaces, monitoring spaces set aside for subdivisions. They have taken criteria from other towns and tailored it Beacon Falls; ranking current space and identifying potential parcels to acquire which may be contiguous with parks, agriculture, or state and community parcels.

G. Smith asked how do other towns fund Open Space? A. Keane stated that there is an Open Space Watershed and Acquisitions Grant from the State of CT which is a large pool of money for this purpose and there is some land in Beacon Falls which qualifies for this grant. The State has an established goal for Open Space. G. Smith encouraged them to talk to the Town Planner as a resource in putting this information together. M. Krenesky asked about our Open Space percentage and 24% of the local space or 26.3% including State Forest land.

T. Pratt asked about maintenance and their vision for the clean-up, trails of Lantern Ridge as forestry will continue to fall on that open land. Kristen Jabanoski stated that Lantern Ridge is not intended to be a fully manicured system. It is meant to be a more rugged trail and the work is for safety, not for grooming purposes. The Girl Scouts are doing volunteer trail maintenance. The professionals are hired to keep the property safe. She added that Beacon Falls has a great outdoor recreation community, and some of the upkeep has been a direct result of that community, thanks to residents that use Lantern ridge and other parks in town. C. Blelik added that the wording with Open Space is that it is available for passive use, not designed to create anything that will interfere with nature. Thanks to Kristen and Andrew for attending.

7. **Budget Discussion:** N. Nau noted that we do not have a third draft of the budget yet. A third draft will reflect the results of the conversation tonight, and the Finance Office we will be ready to post the budget when the BOS/BOF agree. She asked if there are questions on the expenditure and capital side of the budget draft.

T. Pratt noted that the Parks & Rec budget has been shifted, so that Parks & Rec Department 71, is Recreation based and the maintenance lines are now in Department 59 under Public Works. In addition, N. Nau noted she will be moving the Town Garage (Department 61) into the Public Works Department 59.

Under Non-Recurring Capital, the Capital project for the Road Saw will be moved out of the FY2022 budget requests and funded with FY2021 monies. The Dump Trailer was budgeted for this year and that project will not move forward, however the funds for this trailer can be used to purchase the Excavator trailer.

T. Pratt has been working on additional maintenance projects for the Town which may be considered as new Capital Project requests, as maintenance is an issue with this town. They include:

- Lampposts on the Streetscape which continue to sustain damage from trucks coming from the industrial park. He has a quote for Base Guards which can be fabricated to protect the lampposts for \$9,000. Truck traffic has increased and there is a need to protect the lighting.
- Paved Path at Pent Road – The walking path has significant cracking, and he asked the boards to consider taking a portion of that path and removing the asphalt and replacing it with stone dust, to gauge public reaction. Stone dust would be less expensive than repaving the path but would need to be replenished each year.
- N. Nau added that she will be submitting a K. Matthies Grant to support 9 more benches at Pent Road to replace all the old decrepit benches.
- Carport for Police Station – In an effort to protect our assets, T. Pratt is proposing a 20x20 carport. Project would be \$10-\$13,000. N> Nau added that the police department was looking forward at the possibility of solar panels for the carport, as the trend is towards electric vehicles for police stations.

T. Pratt also would like to see a downward adjustment of the mill rate if possible. Adjusting the Tax Collection rate can achieve downward movement in the mill rate. N. Nau noted that the collection rate for last fiscal year was 97.74%. The FY2022 budget currently shows the collection rate at 96%. An increase in the collection rate to 98% would reduce the mill rate.

K. Brennan noted that the Tax Collector has already collected over 100% of the FY2021 budgeted number, so we can expect continued high collections from the Tax Department. The collection rate is based on the total amount billed, rather than total amount budgeted, but we have been able to meet our budgeted numbers, so a mill rate reduction is feasible.

J. Carroll also noted that the Grand List is increasing and when you include Prorations from recent Chatfield Farms sales, this should allow the Town to adjust the mill rate down by .5 comfortably. Chatfield Farms residents pay over \$2.5M in taxes to the Town and they do not utilize many of the town's services. With new construction continuing, the town would not be taking a substantial risk reducing the mill rate, and we still can accomplish all the items put forth in this budget. He encouraged Finance to obtain the April prorations from the Assessor and add them to the Grand List calculation and he recommends a .5 mill rate reduction.

Revaluation will change things next year, but home values are up. G. Smith noted that he has doubled Legal/Attorney Fees in the FY2022 budget to \$150,000 in anticipation of more legal activity. After debate, the boards agreed to put the Legal/Attorney line at \$100,000. G. Smith noted that Engineering has also been increased due to all the work being completed.

The Fire Marshal Vehicle, which is in Non-Recurring Projects, can be changed from \$25,000 to \$28,000. T. Pratt advised they should consider a leased truck. The board determined that \$28,000 is the ceiling and if they cannot get a new vehicle with those funds, then the used option is available.

T. Pratt noted that the 2012 Dodge Ambulance has been quoted with \$32,000 worth of repairs, \$25,000 for the suspension and the ambulance did not pass inspection with a \$7,000 worth of repairs. G. Smith will not support the \$25,000 suspension repair on the vehicle. The 2012 Dodge Ambulance is 9 years old and should last 2 more years before it is scheduled for replacement. G. Smith would like to figure out a less expensive solution to fix the suspension.

8. **Set Meeting Dates:** The board agreed to two more budget workshops: April 27 and May 4. Discussion continued regarding available dates for the Public Hearing and Town Meeting:

S. Leeper made a motion to set the Public Hearing on the FY2022 Town Budget for May 19th at 7:00 PM at Senior Center. J Carroll seconded the motion. All ayes.

M. Krenesky made a motion to set the Town Meeting for the vote on the FY2022 Budget for May 26th at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center. C. Bielik seconded the motion. All ayes.

9. **Adjournment:** **C. Bielik made a motion to adjourn BOS at 9:22 PM. M.Krenesky seconded the motion. All ayes.** The Board of Selectmen left the meeting at 9:22 PM

T. Pratt turned the discussion to elected officials' wages. The Registrars of Voters have requested a raise. He proposed instead of a salary increase, paying the ROV for the hours that they would on primary or election day. So, if they work 10 hours @ \$22.00/hour, they will earn an additional \$220.00 per election and be paid for additional work. W. Hopkinson asked he is not proposing a salary increase and it is because their salaries are already on the higher end of comparable towns. N/ Nau noted that she researched comparably sized towns and ran the CCM reporting on ROV wages. W. Hopkinson noted that this request for wage increases has been ongoing, and she hopes that the ROV understand their salaries are high for their positions, so these requests do not continue. This solution allows for them to earn more for working the additional hours

required for elections. The members agreed to add \$1,000 to the ROV salary line to allow for additional hours for elections.

The BOF moved the discussion to the First Selectman's salary. K. Brennan noted that past years the discussion was to bring the salary up to \$62,000 at the next election. The BOF agreed that this was the figure discussed. The salary would be prorated to go into effect after the November election.

K. Brennan proposed adding \$250.00 to the Selectman salaries bringing them up to \$13,750, also prorated. When asked about the Treasurer's salary, N. Nau noted how much the Treasurer does for the Finance Office and proposed that the Treasurer also receive the \$13,750 salary. The prorated numbers will be added to the next draft of the budget.

Adjournment: K. Brennan motion to adjourn the Board of Finance meeting at 9:40 PM. W. Hopkinson seconded the motion. All ayes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Erin A. Schwarz

Finance Office