NF BOF Receives Steady, Positive News on Medical Funding

By Sarah Opdahl

NEW FAIRFIELD - On the evening of Wednesday, November 18, New Fairfield's Board of Finance (BOF) met to discuss a variety of topics, including the overarchingly positive medical news this fiscal year, despite there being high claims in the summertime. Board Chair Mr. Wes Marsh encouraged, "all the numbers here are positive numbers; they are not negative numbers. So, take that as a win, right?" in reviewing a new chart the board will use to analyze and track medical funding. He fielded comments on the chart, which he will revise a bit more.

Marsh explained that the heights the medical claims were hitting in summer are understandable as many school staff would opt for their months off to have non-urgent procedures performed, and the seasonal highs have now balanced out. In fact, Marsh said the Town's Medical Consultant Mr. Tom Kowalchik noted that New Fairfield is "doing a lot better than any of his other clients, as far as our claims and our costs."

BOF members voted to approve an additional appropriation of $83,334 from the General Fund Unreserved to Paramedic Capital. This move helps to shore up funding that is needed for a new ambulance. It is also the agreed-upon plan to best use the Town's remaining surplus funds from the previous fiscal year; previously, 55% of surplus monies were approved for transfer to the Medical Reserve Fund. The funding approval for both will now go to a Town meeting. First Selectman Ms. Pat Del Monaco spoke regarding the choice of funding, explaining that the Board of Selectmen is casting a wide net to accrue funds for the pricey ambulance. While a grant request is being prepared for The Hinman Trust, the Town is simultaneously working to show that it will happily supplement/be ready to match grant funds.

BOF member Mr. John Arizzi met with members of the New Fairfield Volunteer Fire Department (NFVFD) to walk through the Apparatus Reserve Fund and discuss research he has completed on the possibility of leasing vehicles rather than saving for straight purchases. Arizzi praised the NFVFD for their management of equipment and upkeep, for their work to determine best practices to extend the life of equipment, and more. His interest and concern about this channel of need stems from the possible high taxpayer dollars that may be needed in the next decade or more. He would like to help determine how best to mitigate the impacts of those needs including managing expectations by extrapolating out inflation increases while budget planning. He felt the meeting was productive and he will meet with them again when they hold their budget-planning meeting in December.

One specific possible action item that came out of Arizzi's NFVFD meeting is his recommendation that they consider entering into contract for a Tanker 18 replacement in the new year, which is slated to be replaced in three years. He said the NFVFD "confirmed that if they were to enter into an order for a truck now and sign a contract…with at least one of the manufacturers, the pricing gets locked, as opposed to floating." There will be more discussion on this topic in the future as not all parties agree on a best course of action.

Following up on the dissolution of their public comment policy at the last BOF meeting, board members reviewed a list of flexible bullet-point "ground rules" that they believe will better serve the meetings and interactions with the public. In the bulleted list there are agreements to limit meetings to three hours—partially in reaction to an absurdist 8-hour meeting that was held a few years ago—and assurance that the BOF wants comments from members of the public, "and we want everybody to be passionate about it but be civil and respectful to people." There was also a suggestion that people should feel free to write to the BOF with concerns if their comments are lengthy or if they would like the board members to be able to react to or reply with their thoughts.

The next regular New Fairfield Board of Finance meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 16, 7:00pm.

NF Inlands/Wetlands Accept Application to Consider Modification for 8-30g Affordable Housing Project

By Sarah Opdahl

NEW FAIRFIELD - At the Tuesday, November 17 New Fairfield Conservation Inlands/Wetlands meeting, the commission held a lengthy meeting during which a modification to an approved wetlands application was considered. There are many eyes on the property in question at Hoover Place/Coolidge Street, as it makes its way through approvals under 8-30g, Connecticut's Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals law.

Engineer Mr. Mike Mazzucco presented on the modification that is being requested to the current approval. The revisions—which were created in reaction to Town Engineer Mr. Tony Iadarola's feedback—were primarily made to the size and design of the detention basin, which addressed how it might perform in bigger storms. Initially the project application had included a 25-year storm plan, but the revised version now includes plans for 50- and 100-year storms. Mazzucco said, "what that did was increase the size of the baseline." Illustrating the changes on a watershed map, he shared that in modifying the plan, they moved both the well locations and the outlet.

Mazzucco further explained, "In addition to the redesign of the basin… we designed a filter system…underneath the entire bottom of the basin," which will help it to drain. The plans now also include a culled-out easement to Westview Trail, "that was something the Town Engineer and the Fire Marshal asked us to do…just an easement to say that you can't put anything there in case in the future they were able to or needed to get access out to Westview Trail." Mazzucco also noted, "we are getting test wells done…there is still a long process to go, so we will just see how that goes." There is also a revised planting plan, especially near a "watercourse," which involves "managing vegetation to catch the storm events." There were in-depth follow-up questions about the outlet structure, the size of the orifice, and the sand-soil mix.

There was a brief explanation of demarcation that would be used to indicate any wetlands areas to make sure residents know to avoid them. It was noted that signage can also be used and information could be given to the future Homeowners Association.

The application was accepted for review at the next commission meeting, but the permit approval was not granted. Commissioners were offered the opportunity to walk the property again before their December 15 meeting. They will spend time discussing the wetlands crossing and the wetlands restoration.

A series of neighboring owners to the Coolidge/Hoover property spoke out against the project as they are concerned about potential runoff, well ramifications, wetland restoration timing, and upkeep on basin maintenance. There was agreement that further discussion is needed regarding bonding.

The next regular Conservation Inlands/Wetlands meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 15, 7:15pm.

Continued on next column

HOLIDAY GREETING

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