

OPC Meeting Minutes

March 8, 2023 / Room 206

Attendance: First Selectman, Monica McNally; Board of Finance Chairman, Jim Palen; Planning and Zoning Vice-Chairman, George Reilly; RTM Moderator, Seth Morton; and Board of Education Chairman, Duke Dineen. Also in Attendance: Town Administrator Kate Buch and State Representative Tracy Marra.

Mrs. McNally called the meeting to order at 8:30 am.

Ms. McNally called for a motion to approve of the OPC Minutes of February 8, 2023. Mr. Palen moved, Mr. Morton seconded and the motion passed. Mr. Reilly abstained.

First Selectman Ms. McNally provided updates on:

- The Town will close on Great Island on May 5, 2023. The final purchase price was reduced to \$85 million from \$103 million to cover the costs of items that came to light during the due diligence period.
- The Board of Selectmen's budget was presented to the Board of Finance (BOF) last evening. All budget information may be found on the Town website under News.
- Ms. McNally met with Senator Chris Murphy to discuss what's happening in Darien. She took the opportunity to explain that with the new developments in Noroton Heights, which he was aware of, the Town would like help accessing State financial support for a new train station that the Town has been working towards for a long time.
- Metro North will be closing the New Canaan branch line for the summer to construct a new train station in Stamford.
- Ms. McNally spoke about Eversource's clear-cutting over 3.5 miles of rail lines in Darien. The Town has a right-of-way in the area of Little Brook Road, which allowed it to mitigate for a replanting plan.

State Representative Tracy Marra provided updates on:

- Ms. Marra spoke on some bills that were submitted in January and are now in committees.
- Public Hearings come up quickly and constituents are encouraged to track bills in order to be able to submit oral or written testimony.
- Bills related to vegetation/clear-cutting by Eversource, and Fair Share Housing bills were discussed.

RTM Mr. Morton reviewed items before the RTM:

- Tom Hennick presented on Freedom of Information guidelines at the RTM meeting on March 6th. A video recording of his presentation will be distributed and posted to the Town website.
- Items approved on March 6th: purchase of a Noroton Heights Fire Dept. fire truck, a worker's compensation settlement and the acceptance of gifts.
- The agenda for the next RTM meeting is expected to address a change in Planning & Zoning fees, approval of funds for the DHS track and consideration of a commercial blight ordinance.
- Members of the RTM are updating Appendix B of the Town Code, so committee descriptions better reflect current responsibilities.

Board of Education Mr. Dineen provided updates on:

- The Board of Education (BOE) budget was presented to the Board of Finance last night. The Supervisor's budget came in at 4.94% and the Board approved a final increase of 3.56%. Major budget drivers are health care costs and contractual obligations.
- Mr. Dineen expressed appreciation for the Town approvals of the DHS track.
- The facilities tour of the schools is scheduled for March 18th. Ox Ridge Elementary School is heading towards completion.
- An expected increase of 47 students next year is not anticipated to create a need for additional sections.
- The new Chief Security Officer is interviewing SSOs. The BOE is creating a plan on how to roll out SSO information to parents and students.
- Mr. Palen suggested the BOE consider creating a five year projection of its operating budget, much like it does for its capital budget.

Planning & Zoning Mr. Reilly provided updates on:

- Demo of the Noroton Heights Shopping Center buildings will begin next week. The V20 Group has taken over the redevelopment project that will now be referred to as The Heights.
- In April the Commission will discuss Accessory Dwelling Units.
- The Governor's Executive Order allowing outdoor dining will expire as of April 1st and so the Commission will review applications to continue outdoor dining permits for Darien dining facilities that were allowed to operate outside under this order.

Board of Finance Mr. Palen provided updates on:

- The Board of Finance will hold a Public Hearing on the budget March 14th to hear comments on the BOE and BOS proposed budgets.
- Mr. Palen said that the BOS and BOE budgets are, and will continue to be, experiencing significant health care cost increases. He asked if the Town and BOE have considered being self-insured. Ms. Buch said it was looked at about ten years ago, and that she would look into it again.
- Bonding options will be reviewed with Jenn Charneski, the Director of the Finance Department, and a financial advisor for Hindley, Holmes, and Royle construction, Great Island purchase, and some smaller capital projects.

Ms. McNally called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Morton moved. Mr. Dineen seconded and all voted in favor.

Mrs. McNally adjourned the meeting at 9:45 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda O'Leary