

TOWN OF WASHINGTON
ANNUAL TOWN BUDGET MEETING
May 18, 2023

MOTIONS & MINUTES

First Selectman James Brinton called the meeting to order at 7:31p.m. **Motion:** To nominate Hank Martin as Moderator by Dean Sarjeant, seconded by Janet Hill and unanimously approved.

1. **RESOLVED:** To approve an amount not to exceed \$6,595,082 for General Fund Expenses and Transfers for the 2023-2024 fiscal year. By Jim Brinton, seconded by Bob Weber. The motion passed with one opposed.
2. **RESOLVED:** To approve an amount not to exceed \$3,172,000 expenditures for the 2023-2024 Nonrecurring Capital Fund, to be offset by \$361,699 in anticipated grants for a net expense of \$2,810,301. By Jim Brinton, seconded by Phyllis Allen and unanimously approved.
3. **RESOLVED:** To approve the following ARPA Committee recommendations:
 - \$20,000 for the Institute for American Indian Studies
 - \$95,000 for the Gunn Memorial Library
 - \$30,000 for the First Ecclesiastical Society of New Preston. By Jim Brinton, seconded by Liz Peterson. Question: Valerie Andersen re: clarification of First Ecclesiastical Society of New Preston. The motion passed unanimously.
4. **RESOLVED:** To elect two (2) representatives to the Shepaug Regional School District #12 Board of Education. Said terms to begin July 1, 2023 to continue until June 30, 2027. By Jim Brinton. Moderator Hank Martin explained that the meeting would be now opened for nominations for two seats on the Shepaug Regional School District #12 Board of Education. Voting for the two upcoming vacancies will follow.

Jenn Pote nominated Joe Abdella III for a second term.
Sarah Belanger nominated Mary Weber for a second term.
John Buonaiuto nominated Todd Peterson.

Phyllis Allen requested the candidates stand. Jean Chapin inquired if the nominations should not be seconded. Hank Martin agreed.

Joe Abdella's nomination was seconded by Scott Pote. Mary Weber's nomination was seconded by Dean Sarjeant. Scott Peterson's nomination was seconded by Cathy Carron. Hank Martin closed the floor for nominations.

Election results:	Joe Abdella III	62 votes
	Mary Weber	56 votes
	Todd Peterson	11 votes

Joe Abdella and Mary Weber will continue in their positions on the Board of Education.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:32p.m. Motions and minutes documented by Mary Anne Greene.

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TRANSCRIPT

[0:00:00] [START audio file Audio_05_18_2023_19_31_42.mp3]

J. Brinton: Good evening everyone, thank you for coming out. I would entertain a motion to nominate a Moderator.

D. Sarjeant: Motion for Hank Martin as Moderator.

J. Brinton: Is there a second for Hank Martin to be Moderator? Janet [Hill], all in favor?

Audience: Aye.

J. Brinton: Opposed? Hank?

Moderator: Hi everybody, welcome to the Town of Washington's 2023 Annual Town Budget Meeting. That's what we're here for tonight. That's what this meeting is called. It's not the Annual Town Meeting which is in the fall. It's not a special meeting. It's the Annual Town Budget Meeting and the main thing we're here to do is to vote on the financial budget of the town. Mary Anne [Clerk], would you come up and read the Warning please?

Clerk: WARNING TOWN OF WASHINGTON
ANNUAL TOWN BUDGET MEETING

The voters and electors of the Town of Washington are hereby warned that the Annual Town Budget Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 18, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. at Bryan Memorial Town Hall, Washington Depot, Connecticut to consider and act upon the following:

1. To consider and act upon the proposed General Fund Expenses and Transfers for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.
2. To consider and act upon the proposed Nonrecurring Capital Expenses for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.
3. To approve ARPA Fund Committee recommendations.
4. To nominate and elect representatives to the Shepaug Valley Region #12 Board of Education.

Dated at Washington, Connecticut this 27th day of April 2023
James L. Brinton, Jay Hubelbank, Dean Sarjeant: Board of Selectmen

Moderator: Thank you Clerk, otherwise known as Mary Anne, we have four items on the agenda. For each we will have a resolution which is nothing more than a motion. I'll ask for a second to the motion and then we'll have a discussion which will typically for the first three items begin with an explanation of the item by our First Selectman and then continue with questions and comments from the public. Then we'll vote on the motion that's made and move on to the next. This is a bit of a hybrid meeting because after doing three financial

items, we're also going to take nominations and actually vote to elect two candidates for the Board of Education to fill two seats. When we do that I'll open the floor for nominations. I'll then close the floor and ask each nominee if they would like to say a few words. Then we'll proceed to a vote. If you have any questions, feel free to ask me as we go along. With that let's start with the first item.

J. Brinton: **RESOLVED:** To approve an amount not to exceed \$6,595,082 for General Fund Expenses and Transfers for the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Moderator: May I have a second to that resolution.

B. Weber: Second.

Moderator: Thank you, by the way when you make seconds or comments, it would be great if you could identify yourself and address even if you think we know you. The Clerk is looking down into her notes so it would be helpful if you could identify yourself. Jim, do you have anything you'd like to start with regarding this item?

J. Brinton: We have a second?

Moderator: Yes, we have a second.

J. Brinton: Sure, so this essentially is our operating budget. This is what the town's day-to-day operations revolve on. It's not capital items. It's payroll. It's benefits. It's improvements. Things of that nature. Happy to answer any questions.

Moderator: Questions regarding Item #1 on the Warning? I'm not seeing hands. Are we ready to vote right now? Okay, all in favor of the first resolution to approve an amount not to exceed \$6,595,082 for General Fund Expenses and Transfers for the 2023-2024 fiscal year, please say aye.

Audience: Aye.

Moderator: Any opposed? Any abstentions? I see one opposed. Any abstentions? Okay, the first resolution passes. On to number two.

J. Brinton: **RESOLVED:** To approve an amount not to exceed \$3,172,000 expenditures for the 2023-2024 Nonrecurring Capital Fund, to be offset by \$361,699 in anticipated grants for a net expense of \$2,810,301.

Moderator: Could I have a second on that motion?

P. Allen: Second

Moderator: Okay, I'll take Phyllis [Allen] over here.

J. Brinton: These are our capital, bridges, road improvements, major equipment purchases, building projects, operations like that. These are not part of our operations.

Moderator: Questions on item number two, the capital budget. Again I'm not seeing hands. Are we ready to vote? You are really easy tonight. Okay, all in favor of approving the second resolution to approve the amount specified for the Nonrecurring Capital Fund, to be offset by anticipated grants for a net expense of \$2,810,301, please say aye.

Audience: Aye.

Moderator: Any opposed? Any abstentions? This motion carries unanimously. Thank you very much. On to number three.

J. Brinton: **RESOLVED:** To approve the following ARPA Committee recommendations:

- \$20,000 for the Institute for American Indian Studies
- \$95,000 for the Gunn Memorial Library
- \$30,000 for the First Ecclesiastical Society of New Preston.

Moderator: Could I have a second on the ARPA fund resolution just made? Okay we've got one.

Audience: [unintelligible]

J. Brinton: Liz Peterson.

Moderator: Yes, thank you.

J. Brinton: This is going wind down with the exception of one more ARPA request or ARPA grant. These three items were initially vetted and approved by the committee, the Board of Selectmen, and the Board of Finance. We needed to go back and tie up some loose ends to have a better understanding of what the money was going to be spent on. We needed an MOU from one of the institutions. So there were just details to be ironed out and all those criteria were met.

Moderator: Questions or comments on the ARPA fund resolution? I'm seeing no hands. Ah, a hand.

V. Anderson: Valerie Anderson, Blackville Road.

Moderator: Thank you.

V. Anderson: What was the last thing? Something about the Ecclesiastical Society?

J. Brinton: That's the stone church in New Preston.

V. Anderson: What do we do with them?

J. Brinton: What do we do with?

V. Anderson: The stone church in New Preston.

J. Brinton: It's for construction and maintenance.

V. Anderson: Okay.

- Moderator: Any other questions? Seeing no hands, are we ready to vote? All in favor of the third resolution to approve the ARPA fund committee recommendations as specified by Jim in his motion, please say aye.
- Audience: Aye.
- Moderator: Any opposed? Any abstentions? It carries unanimously. The fourth item as I had mentioned is to nominate and elect two representatives to the Shepaug Regional School District #12 Board of Education. I should say to elect two. We don't know how many nominations there will be yet. Said terms to begin on Jul 1, 2023 to continue until June 30, 2027, four years. I declare the floor open to nominations and would like to hear from anybody who would like to nominate a candidate. Would you like to come up to the microphone please? Thank you, we want to hear from you.
- J. Pote: My name is Jenn Pote. I nominate Joe Abdella. Joe is a lifelong member of Washington and alumni of Shepaug. He's seeking a second term on the Board of Education. Joe is a team player who always works cohesively with others for one common goal, what is the best for the students. Joe serves on the facility committee and is also part of the Board of Education Advance. Joe is selfless with his time, thoughtful, and is always willing to listen to our stake holders in our community. There's no hidden motive with Joe, no political agenda, he simply cares about the people and the children of this community.
- Moderator: Thank you very much. Are there other nominations for these two seats? Great, come on up. Thank you.
- S. Belanger: Sarah Belanger of Bee Brook Road. I would like to nominate Mary Weber for another term on the Board of Education. Mary has served many years ago for many years. In the past few years she has begun her service again. She is a huge advocate for the students in our district. She is a liaison for the Board to the WPS PTO. She volunteers at our events. She shows her face at school events all the time. She is out there to do what is best for our kids and we couldn't ask for a better Board member than Mary. Thank you.
- Moderator: Thank you very much. Are there other nominations for either of these two seats? Yes, come on up.
- J. Buonaiuto: John Buonaiuto from Shearer Road. I'd like to nominate Todd Peterson. He's a lifelong resident of Washington, attended the Washington school system, and he pays a keen attention to not only Washington events but federal events and state events, happenings [unintelligible]. So he'll be a fine addition. His family has been in Washington forever. It would be great to have him on the school board. Thanks.
- Moderator: Thank you. Looking for hands for any other nominations? Are there no more nominations? Are we ready to close the floor to nominations?
- P. Allen: Could I ask that the three candidates just stand so we can be aware of who they are?
- Moderator: Right, the plan was once the nominations are closed to give each of the three candidates that were nominated a chance to speak to you.
- P. Allen: Okay.

Moderator: Will that be okay for you?

P. Allen: That's fine.

Moderator: Yes?

J. Chapin: Nominations require seconds?

Moderator: The resolution to vote requires a second. To be honest I'm not sure. This is a little bit of a hybrid thing for a town meeting. Maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea just to make sure the meeting stays legal if we did get a second for each one and it's not too late to do that. Thank you for raising that issue. If we could backtrack a little bit to the nomination of Joe Abdella, could I have a second on that?

S. Pote [Scott Pote] I second it.

Moderator: Okay, for the nomination of Mary Weber?

D. Sarjeant: [Dean Sarjeant] I second it.

Moderator: Thank you, and for the nomination of Pat Peterson?

Female: Todd Peterson.

Moderator: Todd Peterson, I'm sorry. Forgive me for that.

C. Carron: [Cathy Carron] Second.

Moderator: The nomination of Todd Peterson we do have a second. That covers that just in case we really did need it. With that and seeing no hands raised for further nominations, I'm ready to declare the floor closed to nominations. I just wanted to give you one more chance in case there were any. Going, going, gone. Ok, the floor is closed for more nominations at this point. With that, I'd like to ask each of the three nominated candidates to come up and say a few words to you, spend a couple of minutes and tell you whatever they want to say, what their message is. I thought we'd do it in the order in which they were nominated. So that would mean Joe Abdella would come first. Joe, would you come up?

J. Abdella: Good evening, I'm Joe Abdella. I live on Anna Jay Lane in New Preston. I've been through the middle-high school. I graduated in 1987. A few of you may know me from school or you've seen me around town. I own my own business and I also run our soccer club which serves all three towns, Bridgewater, Roxbury, and Washington. I have felt really comfortable being on the Board these past four years. We all work as a great team. I think it's been such a learning experience and I like to be that supportive voice for Washington and our district and for teachers and students as well. I feel that I have another good four years in me and would love the support from you people. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Would Mary Weber like to come up?

M. Weber: Good evening, I'm Mary Weber of New Preston and I've served as your Washington member of the Board of Education for the last four years. I am also a liaison for the Board of Education and the Washington Primary School PTO. It would be my honor to serve for another term.

You may not know me personally, but you may recognize my name and my face from being an active volunteer in our community. Before the pandemic I did programs and read to the children at the Washington Gunn Memorial Library. I deliver white daisies which are a symbol of hope to our POW and MIA families on Memorial Day. During the pandemic I shopped for the people of Washington that were unable to do it for themselves. You might recognize me because I volunteered at the vaccination clinic in New Milford or you may recognize me as I gave out treats for the kids on the Washington Primary School PTO haunted trail.

The reason I'm asking for another term is simple. I care about the students of Region 12, their education, safety, health, wellbeing, and happiness. These last four years have been the most difficult I've ever encountered. The pandemic turned education in our town upside down. Everything had to be revisited. It takes a village to educate our children. Washington and Region 12 stepped up to do whatever we could. It was not perfect, but we did our best. Our Board of Education has worked with an excellent innovative financial staff to keep our increases low or zero during that time. In fact recently, we voted to add solar fields to our schools saving taxpayers millions in the years to come.

Even during the difficult time, Region 12 received many honors. Booth Free School was voted the number one elementary school in Connecticut by US News and World Reports. Washington Primary School came in at number twelve. Shepaug was on the US News and World Report's best high schools, as high schools in Litchfield County by niche for the last three years, as place to work by niche in Litchfield County. All three elementary schools received recognition for 100% participation in our governor's reading challenge. All three elementary schools were recognized as schools of distinction. The Shepaug theatrical productions received many halo awards. Art awards were for every school including congressional art awards. Shepaug basketball played in the finals. Shepaug athletes were voted the Good Sportsmanship Award by the CIAC. Most recently Johanna Hayes bragged about our agrosience program in the US capital to the House Agricultural Committee.

I believe in strong public schools to being the key element in the wellbeing of our country. I want our students in America to have the tools to make good decisions throughout their lives. I want the students to be lifetime learners. I want the students to be able to problem solve creatively. I want the students to want to learn to the best of their ability.

I promised you that I would do everything in my power to make sure that our students would never have to attend a huge, forced region. It's bad for so many reasons. Anyone that would encourage a plan that would put a five-year old on a school bus for multiple hours a day does not care for children. Please remember that because it is not being considered today does not mean it will not be considered tomorrow. Be careful to vote for people who will never vote for it.

There are people in this town who want the students of Region 12 to learn only reading, writing, and arithmetic. That may have been fine in the 1950s but does not work today.

Education is as much exploring as learning and we give our students plenty of opportunity. Everything from our spectacular, successful, agrosience academy that offers so many different classes to explore and learn. Students outside of Region 12 are on the waiting list to get in. Our refurbished planetarium provides a window into space exploration. An appellate court was held right at Shepaug. Authors come to our middle school. People from other nations come to Washington Primary School and our Shepaug Chorus appeared at Radio City Music Hall. Our agrosience students learned right through a roundtable by Congresswoman Hayes to speak to the USDA Deputy Secretary. Because we have a TV studio, our students have a digital communications lab and have entered the student news competition. The list goes on and on. We want our students to be able to have exposure to new and exciting things. That is why [unintelligible] parents want their children to come to our schools. In fact we had a waiting list for 260 students at one time.

These wonderful opportunities happen because you vote for people who care about our students. It is important to have a good superintendent, Board of Education, and staff all working together to make Region 12 the best that it can be. Education is not a business, and our students are not products. I want to invest my time in something that matters, the future of America. If you will vote for me and trust the education of our children to me, I promise to give it my all. I will always be open to your questions, suggestions, and concerns. Please know I care about our students as if they were my own children. In triumph and tragedy we are the Shepaug family. The future of Region 12 depends upon the people that you send to the Board of Education. Make no mistake about it.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you very much, Mary. Would Todd Peterson like to come up?

T. Peterson: Good evening, I don't have anything to read because I think coming up here, the thought of listening to me reading something is hideous, so I'm not going to do it. My good friend, John Buonaiuto, suggested this to me so I'm here. I could come up with a bunch of flowery things to say, but I'm not going to.

As far as what we've heard already, that's fine. I understand as time goes by that things do have to progress. Things have to change in a positive way. I like to refer to people who are a lot smarter than me if I have to make some sort of a public statement, so I'll just pull something from Dr. Thomsas Sowell paraphrasing one of my favorite quotes of his. This is an old quote so the time may be a little bit obsolete, but this is probably ten years or so ago he said something to the effect that much of the last thirty years in the western world we have replaced things that worked with things that sound good. I agree with that. As time has gone by, I kind of think that we've been replacing those tried-and-true things with things that don't sound good. They don't make sense and they're proving not to work. As far as philosophy, yes, things do need to change. We do need to evolve. Evolution is a good thing. De-evolution is not. Obviously reading, writing, arithmetic are part of it and sure we need to go beyond that. The simple man that I am I just look at that as a foundation.

I've been here all my life and I've spent many hours in this lovely room for a lot of reasons. You know when I was young and we came down here across the bridge and we'd visit as part of a little civics lesson, I can remember that fondly going about the building. Traveling with my family I would see town halls in other places, and they weren't anything like this. I just thought, "Doesn't everybody have an awesome place like this?" No, unfortunately

not. The reason why I'm saying this is because there's a lot of [unintelligible]. All of this wouldn't hold up without a good foundation. The foundational things, the reading, writing, arithmetic, by and large across society aren't being taught well enough or reinforced well enough.

If I sound like a simple person saying so, so be it. I will accept that all day long. I know there are people that are not happy to see me up here. Trust me, I'm used to that. If I don't get on, I won't take it personally. Believe me, if I took a lot of things personally, I wouldn't come near here. I like to think I understand what's important in this life. John suggested this to me. I gave it some thought, and I'll let the chips fall as they may. I spent some time in my life stringing words together mostly in print. As I said, I didn't come here to read things or come up with great flourishes. Last time I spoke publicly was actually eulogizing my mother. So this is a little bit different event. I'm glad I'm still here to make my face seen and be heard. I do appreciate the opportunity to speak publicly about things. Again, I am Todd Peterson and I approve this message.

Audience: [Laughter]

T. Peterson: Whatever you say is whatever goes and it's the way it should be. So, John, thank you for your service. What you've gone through so far, you shouldn't have had to go through, and I think you folks know what I'm talking about. I'll just leave it at that. Again, thank you and it is really genuinely good to see so many people coming out for this. In the past there would be a handful of people and I wasn't one of those handful. I'm not going to tell you that I was virtuous and paid attention because I didn't. I'm glad to be here. I'm glad to see you here. So let's make this work. Thank you.

Audience: [Applause]

Moderator: Thank you very much Todd. We're going to go to a paper ballot on this. We've got three candidates for two seats. Before we start, I'd like to ask our Town Clerk, Sheila Anson, to come up and explain to us all who can vote and who cannot vote for this particular question. This is a little different than financial types of motions.

S. Anson: Connecticut Statute Section 9-170 Eligibility to Vote at Town Elections. At any regular or special town election any person may vote who is registered as an elector on the revised registry list of the town last completed. Therefore each person so registered shall be permitted to vote. So when we're called to order by Hank [Moderator] you're going to turn and head out. You're going to go by street so it's from A-to-L and N-to-Z. You're going to show identification. If you do not have identification with you, you will be filling out a form. At that point you will be handed a piece of paper. You are eligible to vote for two positions. You will come to the back tables and place it in the box there. Thank you.

Female: [Unintelligible]

Moderator: Thank you, Sheila. Do you have any questions on what she just said. First of all, there are going to be two lines for paper ballot. A-to-K and L-to-Z.

S. Anson: [Unintelligible]

Moderator: Alphabetical by street, that's right. Let the vote begin.

Audience: [Ambient sounds]

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Transcription documented by Sheila Silvernail from audio file provided by Town of Washington.