

**Minutes of the  
Board of Selectmen (BOS) Special Meeting**  
Town of Redding CT  
February 12, 2024 at 6:00 pm  
Town Hall Hearing Room  
100 Hill Road  
Redding CT

**Board of Selectmen in Attendance:** Julia Pemberton; Margaret O'Donnell; Michael Thompson.

**Others Attending:** Janet August, Recording Secretary; Jim Sanders, Finance Director; Wes Higgins, Treasurer; Chief O'Donnell and Officer Tim Succi of the Redding Police Department; Rob Blick, Park and Recreation Director; Aimee Pardee, Land Use Director; members of the public.

**1. Call to Order**

First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

**2. Approval of Minutes of special meetings on 1/3/24 and 1/22/24**

Ms. Pemberton suggested they move the minutes approval until later.

**3. Public Comments**

None at this portion of the meeting.

**4. 2024-25 Town Budget Discussion and Possible Action**

Ms. Pemberton noted that all Town departments presented their budgets at the budget workshop. She stated that the original budgets need some reductions and asked Mr. Blick to share the key drivers of the Park and Recreation budget.

Mr. Blick said the walking path and Topstone Park are key drivers. Ms. Pemberton states that she would like the Topstone playground item to be brought to the March BOS meeting. Mr. Blick discussed the deteriorated fence at the community garden, despite repeated repairs. He has quotes for the fence and a wait list for gardening spots. He is clarifying with vendors on whether to remove or replace the posts.

Mr. Blick stated he would like to expand the community garden, but there are water issues with the well there. He has a loose quote of \$8K for a water storage tank. He is hoping to get a grant to cover the cost. The selectmen and Mr. Blick discussed above and below ground water storage tanks, and other options, and whether the well pump might be the issue.

Mr. Blick spoke about the needs assessment that Park and Recreation has proposed, opining that it is vital. Ms. Pemberton noted that she gave his commission an RFP a year ago, and that this would not just be a Park and Recreation study, but a study of all community recreation and social programs. The study will include outreach to all users now and look at current and future needs. Mr. Blick states that he and the Heritage Center agree on the space issue. Ms. Pemberton states that we need to create an RFP to find someone who is best for our unique town and circumstances.

Mr. Blick discussed the issues with rising wages and cost-of-living-adjustments (COLAs) that affect counselors and supervisors. He added that fees have been increased in almost all programs including extended day. Mr. Blick suggested a potential reorganization as he has employees at the end of their careers.

Mr. Blick discussed the Park and Recreation brochures, both the online and physical versions, and that he has budgeted some money for advertising. He is proposing about 10 hours for additional training on their software. He discussed the teen and community programming e.g., movie night, open gym, etc., which no fees are charged and are popular. Ms. Pemberton said that she supports these programs and asked about the types of expenses incurred to run them. Mr. Blick discussed the needs and preferences of middle school versus high school students. The cost of the weekend custodian was discussed. Ms. O'Donnell rhetorically asked the impact of taking the recreation study out of the Park and Recreation budget. It is noted that the fence for the community garden is not in the existing budget proposal.

Land Use Director Aimee Pardee addressed land use issues and public trails. Ms. Pemberton discussed mowing, haying, and conditions at the Couch Preserve. The Saugatuck bridge was completely restored five years ago but since then it has been vandalized.

Ms. Pemberton discussed the need to hire a planner and provided background. She noted the substantial contributions of volunteer Amy Atamian as a project manager, but agreed this was not a sustainable situation. Ms. O'Donnell noted that the Town did have a planner on staff, but the position was dropped. She added that while the absence of a planner has been sustainable for some time, it no longer is with the increase in workloads coming through the land use offices and large reports being due. Specifically, the 5-year Affordable Housing Plan is due in 2027 and the Plan of Conservation and Development is due in 2028., and both are required by the State. Ms. Pardee stated that these plans require several years to complete. The Board commented on this as not just a local

problem, but other municipalities are seeing increases as well. Aimee Pardee noted the intense efforts by the State on affordable housing and the upcoming mandatory reports increase workloads. She added that our commissions and committees are made up of volunteers, who simply cannot devote the time needed to these larger duties and projects. Ms. Pemberton stated that having a planner with the needed ability will be very helpful for proper planning.

The selectmen discussed the possibility of phasing in a planner with half on this year and half in the next. Ms. Pemberton suggested assigning the planner 50% to the wire mill and 50% to other Town needs. She further suggested that grant funding sources may allow us to pay a planner from the grant money received. Ms. Pemberton opined that the Town is taking a significant risk by not having a professional planner on staff to support our land use commissions and to see the overall big picture. Ms. Pemberton inquired if land use funding is enough to cover the needs of outside consultants for zoning and land use. The selectmen and Ms. Pardee discussed the amounts budgeted.

The Board began discussing the Redding Police Department budget. Ms. O'Donnell asked for clarification on the billing process for the Joel Barlow High School (JBHS) resource officer. The need for overtime when officers attend mandatory training and mandatory testing was discussed. Ms. Pemberton asked how the department was managing the required firearms training. Chief O'Donnell and Officer Succi discussed the difficulty in finding open spots (vacancies) for the 3–4-hour training and using facilities in Danbury or wherever possible. The availability of a Bethel firing range was discussed. Chief O'Donnell stated that the department works to find cost effective solutions and vendors.

The Board discussed the number of dispatchers (5 full-time and 1 on-call), and how they were budgeted in the last budget. Ms. Pemberton stated that the Board needs to discuss anticipated retirements and keeping officers on the road. A recent change in the police officer retirement plan will be effective July 2025. At that time, a less advantageous COLA formula will go into effect, and negatively affect a police officer's retirement income for those who retire after July 2025. This one change is expected to incentivize retirement-eligible police officers across the state to retire prior to that date. Complicating the expected onset in retirements is the time lag from when a new rookie officer is hired and the time they are fully trained and on the road. Typically, this takes about one year, but could be longer depending on whether vacancies exist at the Police Academy. The Board discussed the time lag and the need to plan properly to fill vacancies. Chief O'Donnell discussed current staffing patterns and schedules, as well as working with mandatory training and health issues, injuries, etc., Because of these constraints, overtime is needed to keep a minimally allowable and safe number of officers on the streets. The officers and the Board discussed some of the more difficult scheduling practices. Ms. O'Donnell expressed support for hiring given the current and future constraints on the department. The Board recognized the staffing problems at the department. The Board discussed targeting mid-year to add staffing to the department.

Chief O'Donnell and the Board discussed the software system and dispatching to fire, EMS and the police. The Board and the Chief discussed planning for new software in the future.

Finance Director Jim Sanders discussed changes to the operations budget that could mitigate budget increases. The areas discussed included leasing new highway equipment and removing the recreation facilities study. Mr. Sanders noted that some ARPA funds that were previously granted, may be coming back to the Town and these funds could help us in other areas. The discussion led to a general discussion of planning for MS4 (mandatory stormwater management per the State), Umpawaug Schoolhouse painting, employees using their own cars (with reimbursement), etc.

Ms. O'Donnell noted that while we have more expenses, we should have more investment income coming in to offset these expenses and help the mill rate. Mr. Sanders noted that he has budgeted for a \$200K increase in investment fees, but he is still fine tuning it. The Board and Mr. Sanders discussed the Fed Funds rate and Fed signals for a rate decrease in the future. Ms. O'Donnell raised using unallocated ARPA funds for capital items.

Ms. Pemberton discussed the Dry Hydrant project at Lonetown Marsh. The project was expected to be \$180K, then up to \$230K, and then questions about whether we had an effective design were raised, with the cost increasing to \$300K. Ms. Pemberton noted that the Town does not have the funding for it at this time. Ms. Pemberton recommended that if we have funding, then a Public Safety study of the Fire Departments and EMS services should be completed before the Dry Hydrant. Ms. Pemberton shared that she spoke with the Fire Chiefs and Fire Marshall and identified where water storage tanks are located and the individual capacities of each.

Ms. O'Donnell raised the issue of the need for recreational space. Ms. Pemberton stated the recreation study would look at all recreation spaces in town. A discussion of reconfiguring space to use it more efficiently was held. Ms. Pemberton notes that the Town has outgrown the space at the Redding Community Center, pointing out the Park and Recreation space and the Heritage Center space as stretched. She adds that the study would look at all recreation spaces that all programs (public or private) are using. Ms. O'Donnell says we should reach out to the school board and work with them on space issues.

The Board discussed other cost items that must be addressed. It was noted that funding costs for future road scanning have not yet been determined and the upgrade of the Town Hall sprinkler system, estimated at \$350K, is still being studied.

Other issues were discussed briefly. Mr. Sanders pointed out that the budget to present at the public hearing needs to be ready in early March. Ms. Pemberton stated her preference of approving it in March rather than at tonight's meeting. Discussed also was maintaining

Park and Recreation staffing at the current level and reducing the library funding request. Ms. Pemberton reported that funding for the newly required early voting was included in the budget requests. Treasurer Wes Higgins reported that the school populations (students attending) are increasing after many years of decline. He noted that the expected upwards trend in student populations will change the financials needed for space, facilities repair, additional teaching staff, etc.

**5. Other Business**

None presented.

**6. Public Comment**

No comments presented.

**7. Board Member Comment**

No further comments presented.

**8. Adjournment**

Mr. Thompson moved to adjourn the meeting and the motion was seconded by Ms. O'Donnell. The motion was carried unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:16pm.

Submitted by:  
Janet August, Recording Secretary