

TOWN OF WESTFORD
Budget Task Force – Open Forum Minutes
Monday, July 24, 2023

Date: Monday, July 24, 2023 7pm

Location: Millennium Conference Room and virtual

The Open Forum was called to order and the committee was introduced.

The purpose of this forum was to communicate the charge, collect feedback, concerns and ideas for areas to include in research and findings. Recordings and minutes from meetings and a feedback form are available on the Budget Task Force website: <https://www.westfordma.gov/1582/Budget-Task-Force>.

Budget Task Force Charge

The Budget Task Force shall be charged with recommending several scenarios for a five-year, sustainable fiscal plan for the Town of Westford. Said fiscal plan shall consider, as an example, alternative revenue sources; overrides and exclusions under Proposition 2 ½; cuts in service; contracting out of services, as well as other measures. Said fiscal plan shall include both operational and capital budgets for the Town. The Committee shall consult with pertinent departments as it formulates its plan.

The Task Force shall present its findings to a joint meeting of the Select Board, Finance Committee, and School Committee by October 1, 2023.

Review of Budget Challenges

There are significant increases in several areas of the budget resulting in a large gap. Areas discussed included; natural gas and electric costs, town/school bargaining contracts, health insurance increases, and a new solid waste/recycling contract. The report will estimate these increases in more detail.

New Revenue Opportunities

The committee is examining potential revenue opportunities. The final report will contain more detailed information on expected outcomes of each opportunity presented.

Benchmarking Data

The committee is using 2 lists for benchmarking; one for town budgets often used in municipalities for comparison and one for school budgets, taken from the DART (District Analysis & Review Tools). These communities share similar population size, geographical location, similar demographics and school achievements. The committee will compare budgets looking for similarities and/or efficiencies. Interviews of department heads and comparison communities will be included in the report.

Key Dates

- Initial Public Forum - July 24th
- Update Select Board, School Committee, and Finance Committee on Progress to Date – August 8th or 22nd
Strategic Planning Retreat at Kimball Farms – September 7th
- Update Select Board, School Committee, and Finance Committee on Progress to Date – September 12th
Second Public Forum – September 13th
- Report due to the Select Board – September 29th
- Presentation of the Budget Task Force Report to the Select Board - October 10th
- Revised report submitted, considering feedback from the presentation - October 18th

Public Feedback

A resident suggested the new revenue opportunities portion examine the complexity of each suggestion. For example, can they be implemented without state or federal input?

A resident suggested that the benchmarking communities be similar in per capita income versus medium income. He asked us to remember our community has recently seen an addition of a storm water fee, increased assessment, and overrides. Additionally he asked that families with children, households on fixed incomes be kept in mind as well as business when looking at tax or fee increases. He suggested we consider the privatization of ambulances and regionalization/shared services to help alleviate the budget.

A resident asked if the results of the public feedback form would be shared.

The final report will include information collected as well as a list of recommendations for the Select Board to consider.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sue".