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FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET
General Remarks

CHAIRMAN Lilia Maselli
MEMBERS of the Board of Selectmen

CHAIRMAN John F. Doherty, and
MEMBERS of the Finance Committee

Dear Members:

As required by Chapter 592 of the Acts of 1950, it is my honor and duty this evening to present the annual budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022 which reflects planned expenditures and anticipated revenues for the ensuing twelve (12) months. In accordance with the Town Manager's Act this budget is being presented not less than ninety (90) days in advance of the annual town meeting. Accompanying this document is a five (5) year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). While the operating budget establishes a financial plan for the upcoming fiscal year the CIP forecasts the "big ticket" items that the Town will need to address in the next five (5) years. Replacement of vehicles, technology, building repairs and upgrades to infrastructure are included in the CIP.

Unfortunately, locally, nationally, and internationally the world continues to confront an ongoing pandemic. The virus continues to morph into different variants each presenting their own challenges. Monitoring and reporting on individuals testing positive, and advising residents, businesses and employees about the changing protocols has been taxing for the employees of the Health Department and staff in Health Services at the Wilmington Public Schools. We all continue to be challenged by the pandemic to varying degrees in our personal and professional lives. While financial assistance has been provided from the state and federal government to cover some of the costs associated with the COVID-19 virus the Town has borne and will continue to bear significant costs from the virus. Of course, the greatest cost are the lives lost or lives impacted by COVID. It is my sincere hope that we can collectively "turn the corner" within the next few months and get to a place where COVID is not such a dominant part of our daily lives.

While the increase to the budget was held to less than one percent going into the current fiscal year such near level funding is not sustainable without impacts to services and deferring capital

investments. The budget for fiscal year 2023 does not meet that mark but has been developed with a continued emphasis on limiting expenditure growth to the greatest extent possible. The inflationary pressures that have been reported in recent months are having an impact on this budget as costs six to eighteen months into the future are projected. Costs on everything from road salt to heating fuel are expected to increase significantly.

Fiscal year operating expenditures for fiscal year 2023 are proposed at \$125,516,578. This represents a 3.89% increase from the current year. Four (4) major categories comprise the Town's expenditures. They are in order of size as a percentage of the entire budget: Wilmington Public Schools, Shared Costs which include statutory charges, insurance and debt and interest, General Government, and Shawsheen Valley Technical High School.

	FY2022	FY2023	\$\$\$ Change	% Change
Wilmington Schools	\$ 44,815,088	\$ 45,935,465	\$1,120,377	2.50%
Shared Costs	\$ 37,086,186	\$ 40,087,624	\$ 3,001,438	8.09%
General Government	\$ 32,558,361	\$ 33,695,118	\$ 1,136,757	3.49%
Shawsheen Tech	\$ 5,271,247	\$ 5,798,372	\$ 527,125	10.00%
Total	\$119,730,882	\$125,516,578	\$ 5,785,696	4.83% *

*Includes PEG & Ambulance Services

It is worth noting that \$1,125,000 of the total budget increase results from a change in accounting practice recommended by the Town's audit firm. The appropriation of WCTV community access funds from Comcast and Verizon in the estimated amount of \$525,000 has historically not been included in the budget as a cost. Receipts from the two cable providers are received by the Town and subject to the annual town meeting appropriation transferred to WCTV. Traditionally, the gross revenue received from billing for ambulance services has been reduced by the cost associated with advanced life support (ALS) services the Town receives from Action Ambulance and reported as a net revenue. The effect of this accounting adjustment is to show both the gross revenue or local receipts received and the offsetting cost which constitute a pass through. Previous fiscal years did not include these two items as part of operating revenue and expense.

Personnel costs continue to be a major driver for the fiscal year 2023 budget. Five of six collective bargaining agreements with general government employees expire on June 30, 2022. This fact along with the likely payout costs for the retirement of long-term employees will increase the Salary Adjustment account by \$200,000 to \$1.1 million. The Wilmington School Department is projecting an increase in personnel costs of \$951,099. The Police Department currently has seven vacancies and Central Dispatch has two vacancies. The vacancies in many instances lead to overtime to ensure adequate staffing. Overtime in the Police Department is increasing by \$25,000.

Wilmington's assessment to the Shawsheen Valley Technical High School is anticipated to increase by \$527,125 due largely to expected increasing enrollment. The Middlesex County Retirement System assessment is increasing by \$521,610 which represents a 6.69% increase over the current assessment. Heating fuel prices are expected to rise sharply as evidenced by a budgeted increase of \$159,650 in the Public Buildings budget or 19%. The line item in the Public Works budget for materials to treat roads during snow and ice events is expected to increase

nearly 33% or \$87,767 while rubbish and recycling collection and disposal is expected to increase by \$88,955. When taken collectively these previously noted adjustments total \$3,686,206.

Health insurance costs continues to be a bright spot in the Town's budget. Over the past five fiscal years through 2022 the health insurance budget has increased 2.5%. Costs for the upcoming fiscal year are projected to decline by \$326,950. Actual monthly claims continue to track behind projected claims although that margin is growing smaller. It is believed that the impact of the COVID pandemic on the medical system continues to depress the number of medical visits and treatments for all but the most urgent care. As we approach the second year of this pandemic it is my hope that COVID cases will decline. Such a decline will likely lead to increased medical care of employees and their dependents that has been deferred to date. In spite of the potential for increased medical care the recommended budget should be adequate. As new fire fighters complete the fire academy, they will be available to be counted on a shift which is expected to reduce overtime. As a consequence, the overtime line item in the Fire Department budget is being reduced by \$350,000. Benefits paid to Veterans continues to track below \$250,000 per year. After consultation with the Director of Veterans Services it has been determined that a decrease in that line item of \$50,000 to \$250,000 is reasonable. While there are other savings through the replacement of more senior personnel the above noted line items account for the largest amount of budget reductions.

The proposed use of free cash and the capital stabilization account to fund capital projects is declining over the amount approved for the current fiscal year and remains very modest relative to available reserves. A request will be made at the March special town meeting to appropriate funds for a feasibility study of the Wildwood Early Childhood Center. In the fall of 2022 articles for funds to support a senior center and a town/school administration building are expected to be included on a special town meeting warrant. Free cash and/or capital stabilization funds will play important roles in funding each of these projects. Use of these funding sources is also expected to defray the cost of a future fire substation.

REVENUES

Revenues in fiscal year 2021 increased to a much greater degree than anticipated. New growth, which is comprised of the value of new construction and business investments in equipment increased to over \$2.0 million. This new growth, in addition to the tax levy, becomes the permanent base from which future property taxes are projected. However, much of that new growth was the result of one-time investment in equipment and a change in the corporate status of a business in Town. This was an outlier event and cannot be expected to continue going forward. Several residential developments which have added new homes recently are nearing completion. Purchase of new motor vehicles by residents continued to be brisk leading to sustained growth in motor vehicles excise revenue. As has been reported by the news media and observation of automobile dealership lots can attest, the ability to keep dealerships stocked with new vehicles has been exceedingly difficult. The limited supply of new vehicles has led to new vehicles selling at above sticker price which is highly unusual. As a consequence, it is expected that new vehicle sales will drop off sharply resulting in a decline in motor vehicles excise revenue for the first time in

many years. Other local receipts, which are made up of various fees including building permits, meals tax, dog license fees and the like are expected to see a decline.

Local aid makes up roughly 12% of the Town's revenue stream. Given the resources deployed by the Commonwealth to respond to the pandemic and with an expected negative impact on state revenues there was concern going into the current budget that local aid would be reduced to cities and towns. That has not been the case and in fact local aid increased by \$349,310 from FY2021 to FY2022. This has been welcome news as these funds are directed to supporting the full range of municipal services.

The Governor's "State of the State" budget address will follow my presentation and the legislature will not likely present a consensus budget package including local aid until close to the end of this fiscal year. The Town is taking a conservative approach with forecasting local aid and expects it to remain at its current amount of \$14,658,557.

Each of these factors are expected to lead to an increase of \$5,785,696 in new revenue while still remaining within the constraints of Proposition 2 1/2. As has been the longstanding mindset when preparing these budgets, conservatively projecting revenues places the Town in a far better financial position than overestimating the revenues. Revenue in excess of projections ultimately is returned to the general fund and supplements the Town's financial reserves. Revenue in the aggregate that falls short of projections requires a reduction in operating expenditures and will affect the ability to provide services.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

Education

Funds proposed to be earmarked to the Wilmington Public Schools and the Shawsheen Vocational Technical School represent over 40% of the Town's total operating budget which signifies the importance that the community rightly places on the education of the generations to come. In the words of Abraham Lincoln *"Upon the subject of education, not presuming to dictate any plan or system respecting it, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as people engage in."*

The budget for Wilmington Public Schools is proposed to increase for the second consecutive year by a margin of 2.5% to \$45,935,465. The school administration continues to engage in collective bargaining with the Wilmington Teachers Association (WTA) to arrive at terms and conditions for a new agreement. Personnel cost increases comprise the majority of the adjustment to this budget and as previously noted represents \$951,099. Within the personnel costs include step and lane changes, salary adjustments, the additional of 1 special education teacher and additional hours to address English as a Second Language (ESL) and reading. Non-salary increases represent \$169,278 and include textbooks, curriculum supplies and technology.

School enrollment data provided by Dr. Glenn Brand, Superintendent of Schools, shows a continuing decline in student population for the 2021 to 2022 academic year even with the return to in person learning. This decline continues a trend that has been largely consistent since the 2006-2007 academic year. Given the increased demand for individualized and social emotional services

it is not possible to establish a direct correlation between a decline in student enrollment and a decline in the overall school budget. However, there is a need to examine staffing requirements with a declining enrollment and Dr. Brand has confirmed that such efforts will be undertaken. The ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic may be serving to temporarily influence enrollment numbers.

A critical goal of the Wilmington School Department and the Town is the replacement of the Wildwood Early Childhood Center. As of this writing the Town is completing the Eligibility Period which is the first step, working with the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), to obtain financial assistance replacing the school. My recommendation is that residents appropriate \$1.2 million at the March 8, 2022 Special Town Meeting set for 7:00 pm at the Shriners Auditorium to fund a feasibility study. This study will evaluate the best options for replacement of the existing pre-kindergarten to kindergarten school and will position the Town to proceed to schematic design with the ultimate goal of new construction. The steps required to open a new school with financial assistance from the MSBA are expected to require five (5) to seven (7) years.

The Shawsheen Valley Technical High School continues to be an attractive alternative to many students. Students from Wilmington attending the technical vocational school over the most recent two academic years went from 246 to 275. Enrollment is expected to continue to increase as a percentage of the total student enrollment for the 2022 to 2023 academic year. While the regional school is still in the process of finalizing their budget, an increase of 10% or \$527,125 is projected for an assessment of \$5,798,372.

General Administration

The number of personal working in Town Hall departments or other non-public safety departments will not be changing in the coming fiscal year. However, there has been an ongoing wave of retirements that will continue. Communities across the state are being challenged to fill positions in a variety of departments from finance to planning to Information Technology. We are operating in a classic supply and demand environment in which the demand for qualified, experienced individuals in many areas of municipal government is outpacing the supply leading to competition to retain quality employees and to attract qualified people to fill vacancies. The Town continues to seek qualified applicants for a planner/economic development coordinator. This position will work with the Planning and Conservation Director not only on planning matters but on efforts to engage with existing businesses with a goal towards supporting and retaining them. When possible, the position can work with businesses seeking to relocate to Wilmington.

The sum of \$60,000 is included in the Town Manager's budget to hire the services of a grant writer/administrator. Contracting for these services will enable the Town to launch a "pilot program" without the commitments associated with hiring an employee. The consultant would be available to general government departments to both identify grant opportunities and to work with personnel to file and administer the grants. Grants clearly present the ability to extend services or potentially acquire goods without using dollars from the local tax levy or other local sources. Many departments including the Police, Fire, Elderly Services, Library, Planning and Conservation, Health and Town Clerk's departments have obtained grants to enhance their operations. Two key factors that must be considered when pursuing grants are the "bandwidth" or capacity of current

staff to execute the grant and long-term financial commitment required after the grant expires. While some grants permit funding of personnel for grant administration the responsible department still needs the capacity to oversee the program. If the grant is intended to subsidize the first few years of new positions, for example, does the Town have the financial capacity to take on the cost when grant funds expire? The expectation is to contract with a firm or individual with expertise in identifying grants, grant writing and administration.

Capital Investment

Developing an operating budget that is responsive to the needs of the community is critically important to the day-to-day requests for services and demands of the residential and business community.

Equally important is directing funds into the buildings, roads, infrastructure, technology, and equipment that enables municipal government to support day-to-day operations. In fiscal year 2023 the Town seeks to implement its Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) through use of funds from the tax levy, free cash and capital stabilization.

A deliberate effort has been made to build up the financial reserves in free cash and capital stabilization to weather financial storms that periodically take hold. While these funds are not intended to address operating expenses, free cash can be used on a limited basis to fill the gap when other sources of revenue temporarily decline. Free cash and capital stabilization are expected to play a significant role in the Wildwood Early Childhood Center replacement, a new senior center, a town/school administration building and for the construction of a future fire substation.

Nonetheless, it remains necessary to annually address capital needs to avoid a backlog of emergent issues that overwhelm the ability to pay.

The third and final phase of upgrades to the police/fire and central dispatch communication system is planned for the coming year. This project which has been divided into increments of \$450,000 again seeks this amount to replace the existing communication system that is essential to enabling police, fire and central dispatch to remain connected for both routine and emergency situations. The final phase calls for the installation of a microwave system at specified locations throughout Wilmington. This microwave technology will provide for a seamless switch should one of the fiber-based radio sites become inoperable for any reason. This redundancy will ensure that radio messages communicated between central dispatch and police and fire personnel at any location in Wilmington are received clearly. Ensuring that emergency response personnel are not isolated from central dispatch and from each other is a major goal of this effort.

The existing central dispatch E911 system records all emergency and non-emergency calls received on Police and Fire lines or the business lines. The State E911 Department has no legal obligation to support or repair the equipment associated with recording non-emergency phone calls. The amount of \$45,000 would enable the installation of a non-emergency recording system at central dispatch. Oftentimes calls are received through the non-emergency line that are emergencies or become emergencies during the duration of the call. In other instances, requests

are filed for recorded messages. Ensuring that the non-emergency lines have a reliable recording system separate from the E911 recording system is important.

The IT Department will be entering the second year of a three-year project to replace both the town and non-emergency public safety phone systems with a single, redundant cloud-based Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system. The \$54,000 of budgeted capital includes costs for wiring, networking, phones and licensing. The existing phone system is increasingly unreliable resulting in outages and lacking modern features such as detailed logging and reporting.

Wilmington Public Schools is seeking \$400,000 for capital expenditures in fiscal year 2023. Replacement of elementary school projectors is requested for \$80,000. The amount of \$54,000 is requested to replace the WiFi Network in the elementary schools. Additionally, computer network switches are scheduled to be changed out in the elementary grades at a cost of \$117,000. Their capital plan calls for a multi-year replacement of projectors in the high school. In the coming fiscal year \$125,000 is requested for projector replacement. Replacement of amplifiers and control boxes which support the public address (PA) systems in the early childhood centers, the elementary and intermediate schools is planned to continue next year at a cost of \$24,000.

Replacement of one (1) ambulance is proposed at a cost of \$350,000 to be taken from free cash. Due to the daily demands placed on these vehicles the intention is to limit their use as a front-line response vehicle to 2 years before placing them in a reserve capacity for up to four (4) years. Replacement at this time is recommended. The existing ambulance was purchased in 2017. The Fire Department Tower Truck which was purchased at a cost of \$975,000 in 2010 has extensive corrosion on the undercarriage. The vehicle otherwise continues to function effectively and should be operable for another 10 to 12 years. The amount of \$110,000 is requested to remove the existing corrosion and apply a protective coating to lessen the degree to which road salt can impact the underbody.

A request of \$400,000 from free cash is earmarked for the installation of warning lights on the approaches to the Public Safety Fire Department apron on Church Street. These lights would turn solid red when fire apparatus is leaving or entering the fire station and signal to traffic to yield. There have been a number of instances in which motorists have attempted to drive around fire apparatus as it is backing onto the apron to enter the fire bays and motorists failing to yield as apparatus exits the station leading to near collisions. Through the efforts of the Town's legislative delegation \$75,000 has been appropriated by the state for design and development of bid specifications for the warning lights. These funds are being used now to obtain engineering services to design the warning light system. Design is expected to be completed by late spring. Approval will enable bids to be issued during the summer with installation expected in the 2023 construction season.

Funding for three (3) police vehicles is being requested in the amount of \$151,000. Two Ford Explorers would replace two existing frontline vehicles and one Ford Edge SUV would replace an existing Ford Interceptor utility vehicle for the Community Liaison Detective. As has been the longstanding practice the two existing frontline Ford Explorers will be reassigned within the department to replace two vehicles that may replace vehicles in other departments.

Multiple vehicles are slated for replacement in the Public Works Department. A 2006 heavy duty ten-wheel dump truck with plow will require replacement at a cost of \$202,000. A 2006 heavy duty dump truck with plow and sander will be replaced at a cost of \$198,000. The Parks and Grounds 2008 heavy duty one ton dump truck is scheduled for replacement at a cost of \$95,000.

The sum of \$200,000 will be requested to begin the repaving of the parking areas at schools located on Carter Lane. This funding request is the first phase with subsequent funding required to complete the repaving.

Funds were appropriated in the current fiscal year to complete the engineering design for replacement of the Frank Kelley Track at Alumni Field. This budget calls for \$550,000 to complete the replacement of the track which will include new subsurface and surface material and will retain the six (6) lanes. Following up on design work completed in the current year at the intersection of Shawsheen Avenue, Hopkins Street and Lake Street \$520,000 will be requested to replace the existing signals to meet current traffic signal design standards.

An amount of \$50,000 is budgeted again for ongoing efforts to remain in compliance with the town's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. The Town must take steps to control street runoff and other forms of discharge. This amount is expected to be an ongoing requirement and will increase in cost in the coming years.

The Public Works Department plans a multi-year effort to expand burial sites within the Wildwood Cemetery. In the FY2023 budget \$40,000 is earmarked to improve the turf, repair fencing, and begin efforts to repave roads within the cemetery. With the planned acquisition of adjoining property at 64 Wildwood Street \$40,000 is proposed for removal of the structure currently on the property. A portion of this property will permit future expansion of the cemetery.

Investment in municipal buildings remains a priority in this budget. The fact that the Town is actively pursuing the replacement of the Wildwood Early Childhood Center, the Buzzell Senior Center, the Town Hall and the Roman House is influencing where capital improvement funds are being directed for work on buildings. Options under consideration for the Wildwood School include the prospect of a new or renovated and expanded school at one of the existing school locations. While the completion of such a project is a few years out, before making significant additional investments in some existing school sites that might host students from the Wildwood School, it will be extremely helpful to have the Wildwood School feasibility study completed to know the proposed replacement plan for the school. Also, the roof over the auditorium portion of the Town Hall should be replaced but is being deferred pending a determination on whether funds will be appropriated for a new town/school administration building.

The two Woburn Street boilers are original with the building (1963) and require replacement. While this site could be considered to host students from the Wildwood School, \$80,000 is proposed to complete the engineering design, draft specifications, and develop a cost estimate for replacement of the boilers. Engineering design services are budgeted in the amount of \$50,000 to replace 19,124 square feet of roof over the West Intermediate School. Specifications and a cost estimate will be developed to plan for funding to replace this portion of the roof in FY2024. Engineering design services are being provided in the current fiscal year for replacement of 24,000 square feet

of roof at the Shawsheen Elementary School. Funding in the amount of \$825,000 is being requested from capital stabilization for removal of the existing roof and replacement. Replacement of the Public Buildings 2001 aerial bucket truck is recommended for \$147,000. Public Buildings personnel use this vehicle to replace light fixtures and traffic lights. The truck bed which houses the bucket is showing signs of fatigue which raises concerns as to how much longer the bucket will be safe to use.

In response to the economic impacts brought on by the COVID pandemic in March of 2021 President Joe Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which authorized \$350 billion to state, local, Tribal and territorial governments to provide “assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits or to aid impacted industries.” The Town of Wilmington is due to receive just over \$7 million in ARPA funds. The amount of \$1.0 million is being directed to implement best management practices to approximately 200 catch basin structures throughout Wilmington to improve the water quality from runoff discharge in sensitive locations. The sum of \$5.5 million will be used in ARPA funds to replace 11,000 linear feet of 10” water line along Woburn Street from Kajin Way to Lowell Street. The existing 10” cast iron pipe was installed in sections beginning in 1931. Cast iron, which is no longer used for water lines will be replaced with a 12” ductile iron line. The larger water main will provide the appropriately sized infrastructure that would be required if the Town deems it necessary to increase its water supply from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA).

Capital improvements for fiscal year 2023 total \$6,762,000 and break down as follows:

Funding Source	Expenditure
Chapter 90	\$ 750,000
Tax Levy	\$ 2,932,000
Free Cash	\$ 1,200,000
Capital Stabilization	\$ 825,000
Water	\$ 1,010,000
Sewer Enterprise	\$ 45,000

The complete listing of capital projects can be found on pages **71** through **73** of the budget book.

Long-Term Commitments

The Town must remain ever focused on its long-term commitments of retaining healthy financial reserves, retiring its unfunded pension liability, and addressing Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB). Funding of a new school, a senior center, town/school administration building and fire substation will require some measure of borrowing. The bond market is competitive like any other private market. Investors will assess the risk and return that purchasing bonds from the Town of Wilmington poses versus debt from other municipalities and other entities. Standard and Poors will analyze the impact that Wilmington’s increased borrowing will have on its ability to maintain financial reserves and continue to address pension liability and OPEB. Retaining consistency with respect to addressing these three issues will assure Standard & Poors and investors that investing in Wilmington makes good business sense.

For the seventh consecutive year the Town will add at least one million dollars (\$1,000,000) from the tax levy to the capital stabilization account. The balance as of June 30, 2021 was \$16,161,177. The same amount of money is proposed to be directed towards the OPEB Trust Fund adding to the June 30, 2021 balance of \$9,963,676. In an effort to further demonstrate the ongoing commitment to retiring the Town's pension liability the so called "pre-payment" against the Town's liability will continue in the amount of \$1.5 million. This next pre-payment will mark the seventh consecutive year that the Town has followed this practice resulting in over \$7 million in total prepayments. These liabilities did not occur overnight, and they will require many years to address. The degree to which Wilmington can "stay the course" with respect to making these payments sends a strong message that the Town is serious about sound and responsible financial management. Expressing a desire to do the right thing is helpful but, in the end, it is the actions in support of that desire that matter most.

Personnel

The FY2021 budget was intended to be the first year of a two-year effort to add four (4) additional police officers, two sergeants and two patrol officers to the ranks of the Police Department. The Wilmington Police Department has maintained three (3) sectors in the community since the late 1960's. Officers are assigned to patrol one particular section of the community during their shift barring calls for assistance from officers in other areas of Town. Wilmington's daytime and residential population has increased significantly over the past fifty years and one objective with the additional police personnel is to add a fourth (4) patrol sector. Due to concerns over the financial impacts of the ongoing pandemic the fiscal year 2022 budget included only one sergeant position. This budget seeks funds for an additional patrol officer which would be the fourth officer. The salary for the patrol officer is \$56,838. Once the position is filled the additional personnel will also reduce the need to backfill when a position is vacant or another officer is absent. The reduction in backfills will have a favorable impact on overtime.

While losing the institutional knowledge and experience of police officers is hard enough filling their vacancies has been increasingly challenging. A key component of onboarding new personnel to the ranks of patrol officer requires that new hires meet specific physical fitness standards and successfully complete a 24-week police academy. Over the past twelve months individuals from the police Civil Service list have been appointed subject to successfully meeting the fitness standards and completing the academy. Unfortunately, there have been several instances in which individuals have been unable to meet the fitness standards and could not proceed to the academy. In these instances, another candidate is selected from the Civil Service list further extending the time which a position remains unfilled. As a result, the police overtime costs may exceed the budget of \$675,000 in the current fiscal year. In recognition of the fact that filling the existing vacancies cannot be completed readily the Police overtime line item is being increased by \$25,000 to \$700,000.

Fiscal year 2023 will be final year for the Staffing for Adequate Fire Emergency Response (SAFER) grant. This grant in the amount of \$1,509,600 paid for 75% of the cost of new fire fighters for two consecutive years and will pay 35% of the cost in the final year. Since the Town will bear a larger portion of the cost for new fire fighters the salary line item is being adjusted accordingly to

add \$100,000. As new hires continue to complete the fire academy the overtime is expected to decline resulting in a reduction of \$350,000 to \$1.05 million in the overtime budget for fire personnel.

A 19-hour per week clerical position in the Fire Department is recommended for replacement with a full-time 35 hour per week senior clerk. The rate for the full-time position is \$44,762 or an increase of \$19,266. This second senior clerk will ensure that office coverage can be provided when the other senior clerk is on vacation or otherwise absent. This position also supports the inspectional services personnel within the Fire Department with respect to maintaining documentation of inspections, scheduling, and follow-up. The scheduling and recordkeeping of propane, or oil tank removal, flammable hazardous materials, gas station, liquor license and quarterly nursing inspections are all handled by this position. Given the volume of work associated with the inspections the additional hours will assist fire personnel to remain current with inspections.

CONCLUSION

Adapting to change is a fact of life. It has often been stated that the only constant is change. However, the need to adapt to a changing environment has seldom come so quickly or been so pervasive throughout the world as the adaptations we have all made to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is hard to believe that we are nearly 2 years into this health crisis with no clear endpoint. In fact, it is highly likely we will never fully return to a pre-COVID state. Instead, this contagion may continue at some level, albeit at a more manageable level indefinitely.

This budget seeks to acknowledge the new norm while continuing to provide the programs and services relied upon by residents. Zoom and Microsoft Teams sessions have become as ubiquitous to our daily lives as has been the case with conference calls and in person meetings. The ability to meet “virtually” clearly has its benefits and will continue as an important way to conduct business, to communicate with patrons and to offer programs. As circumstances permit, we will strive to return to a greater level of in person engagement with respect to those interactions. As human beings we will always have the need to interact in person. More fully restoring in person library programs and in person activities through the recreation department and at the senior center are a priority while continuing to be mindful of the health and safety of patrons and staff.

While the increase recommended in the fiscal year 2023 financial plan is greater than the increased funding in the current budget, increasing energy costs, the unusual inflationary pressures on supplies and materials and upcoming wage negotiations with multiple employee groups in the school department and town departments requires a realistic recognition of future costs. Investment in the Town’s buildings, equipment, technology, and infrastructure while sustaining efforts to address long term responsibilities are part of this budget. This budget has been crafted while only seeking \$2,025,000 from the Town’s combined free cash and capital stabilization reserves which total nearly \$50 million. This forbearance on the spending of reserves has been intentional in recognition that later this calendar year residents will be asked to approve funds for the Wildwood School feasibility study in addition to two significant building projects. This budget also continues to be mindful of retaining an adequate “rainy day” fund to address revenue shortfall in the event of an economic downturn.

As Town Manager, I am incredibly fortunate to work with a host of very talented individuals invested in the premise that it is our collective responsibility to foster an environment that is responsive, friendly, safe and engaging for the families and businesses that call Wilmington “home.” The personnel in each and every department, town and school alike, have been tested in one way or another by this ongoing pandemic and have stood up to the challenge through their demonstration of professionalism, calmness and caring for those they serve. I extend a sincere “thank you” to each of you and wish you and your family continued good health.

In pickleball parlance this budget presentation concludes my opening “serve” to the Board of Selectmen, the Finance Committee, and residents on a plan that seeks to direct limited resources across competing needs. My hope and expectation is that upon thoughtful consideration of this document there will be constructive “volleys” that will lead to a “match point” which is a “win” for Wilmington.

Beginning tomorrow evening the Finance Committee will commence public meetings that will continue, on Tuesday and Thursday evenings throughout the month of February concluding the first week of March. The joint meeting of the Finance Committee and Planning Board will take place on Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. and is expected to be held in the Town Hall auditorium. The public hearing is a complete preview of the business to be conducted at the Annual Town Meeting on Saturday, April 30, 2022 beginning at 9:00 a.m. either in the high school auditorium or the Shriners auditorium. A final determination on the location will be made based upon the status of COVID-19 when Selectmen sign the warrant in March. Following the public hearing the Finance Committee will meet in open session on March 17, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall to vote on their recommendations which will be published and mailed to residents in advance of annual town meeting.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am available to entertain any questions and comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey M. Hull".

Jeffrey M. Hull
Town Manager