Link to view the April 13, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen
https://youtu.be/2cL4eb6LhWg

The April 13, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Woodbridge Board of Selectmen was convened at 5:00 p.m. by First Selectman Beth Heller, via WebEx in accordance with SB2012. Present via roll call: First Selectman Beth Heller; Deputy First Selectman Sheila McCreven, Joseph J. Crisco, Jr.; Paul Kuriakose; David Lober; and David Vogel. Present for staff: Mr. Genovese, Administrative Officer/Director of Finance; Ms. Ford, Media Specialist; Ms. Yagla, Assistant Administrative Officer, and Mrs. Shaw, Clerk
Excused: Mr. Weiner, Town Counsel

FIRST SELECTMAN’S REMARKS

"Good evening and welcome to the April 2022 Regular Board of Selectmen meeting. I have some exciting news for you, if you have not heard already ... The State of Connecticut has awarded the Town of Woodbridge $2 million to convert the Old Firehouse into a Community Center. This is a project we have been working on for a long time, and these State funds mean that the Town will not have to borrow money to pay for the project. As we all know, the Old Firehouse has been used primarily for storage since it was damaged by a horrible fire in 2006. I am hopeful that construction will begin this summer. I will appoint a Building Committee to oversee the Community Center renovation project at our next meeting.

We also plan to start construction on the Senior Center renovations — also paid for with State funds — this summer.

The next building that desperately needs renovations in our Town Center is the Center Building. Our Police Department needs remodeling and upgrades to conform with State standards, and the rest of the building needs new heating, ventilation and cooling along with other upgrades. To investigate these needs and make recommendations, I am appointing a Center Building Renovation Committee with Board of Finance member Dwight Rowland serving as Chair, Police Chief Frank Cappiello, Police Commissioner Andy Esposito, Human Services Director Jeanette Glickman and Board of Selectmen member Paul Kuriakose. As experience has shown, if we have a so-called “shovel ready” project, I am then able to seek grant funding. I am hopeful that we will be able to fund all or some of this project with either state, or even federal funding.

Next week the Board of Finance will present its proposed budget to the Preliminary Budget Hearing. This will be on Monday, April 18 at 7:30 pm at the new Firehouse at 100 Center Road in the apparatus bay. I thank our Volunteer Fire Association members for helping facilitate this meeting as we continue to try to limit residents’ exposures to virus during the on-going pandemic. Large gatherings all over the country, and locally, have recently resulted in many folks contracting COVID 19. I encourage all residents to attend and voice their opinions or ask questions. Following this hearing, the Board of Finance may make changes to the proposed budget which will then be presented at the Annual Town Meeting in May.

All residents should have received a pamphlet in the mail with the meeting details and a budget summary on it. This pamphlet and the full budget details are available on our Town website along with our new interactive online budget tool.

This year’s budget process was extremely challenging. Our budget crisis is caused by a long-term revenue problem. If we do not grow and diversify our grand list soon, we will continue to face increasingly difficult
budget decisions. New revenue is critical to fund our high-quality education and other important Town services. The Town could grow its grand list by expanding the commercial district and also offering new and diverse housing. We continue to explore ways to solve these issues.

I am excited tonight to hear from the consultant recommended to us by the 2030 Task Force. That group of volunteers was charged with growing our grand list. I look forward to learning more about their recommendations, and how it could help us bring more vitality and more businesses to Woodbridge. I am also appointing Chris Lovejoy to serve on the 2030 Task Force.

I am appointing resident David Franklin to serve on the ad hoc Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee. The committee is working on a survey that will soon go out to all Woodbridge residents, hoping that data gathered from the survey will help direct their future work. They are also continuing their book discussion series, Mosaic: Woodbridge Reads in community, with a discussion of “Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning” in May.

In your packet you have a copy of a letter from Arbor Haven regarding their former Country Club of Woodbridge (CCW) property proposal. At our last meeting the Housing Committee requested, and we agreed, to table the discussion regarding development of the CCW. Arbor Haven has officially withdrawn their proposal at this time. We plan to put together a Request for Proposals for this property, and I hope that Arbor Haven might participate in that process, along with other interested and qualified developers with any and all ideas.

Since our last Board of Selectmen meeting, Tony and I have met with Dr. Budd, WBOE Interim Director of Business and Operations Richard Huot, and WBOE Chair Lynn Piascyk for our monthly meeting. I also attended the “Woodbridge Together” Luminaria Event on the anniversary of the pandemic-caused shutdown. It was a frigid, but lovely evening, and a wonderful way to remind ourselves of the importance of community, especially during difficult times. I attended the SCRCOG monthly meeting in late March. I attended a meeting with Amity Superintendent Dr. Jenn Byars along with Bethany First Selectman Paula Cofrancesco. Tony, Betsy, and I hosted a meeting with Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner Mark Rolfe and members of his staff for an update on the Heroes Tunnel project and the Exit 59 project, and tried to ascertain timelines, which are still unfortunately, only estimates. Betsy and Tony and I also met with our State legislative delegation and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner David Lehman to discuss ways to continue to grow the Town’s grand list. Lindy Lee Gold of DECD and Martin Heft of the State Office of Policy and Management also joined the meeting. We have a meeting next week with a realtor who may have a biotech firm interested in the old Bayer building on Research Drive.

Thank you.

WOODBRIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION – Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Budd
Dr. Budd reported that the Board of Education’s FY2023 budget has been approved and is ready for the preliminary budget hearing. He thanked the Board for its continuing support.

THE WOODBRIDGE CENTER RENOVATION – David Stein, Silver Petrucelli Architects/Engineers; Jeanette Glicksman, Director of Human Services; and Susan Davidson, Chair of the Human Services Commission
Mr. Stein shared slides showing an overview of the plan to renovate The Woodbridge Center, aka, the Senior Center. He explained that cost estimates are higher than the amount budgeted for the project, especially the estimate for an improved HVAC system with ventilation. On a question from Ms. McCreven, Mr. Stein assured the Board that the new system would easily integrate with any other building
renovations. Ms. Glicksman spoke to the importance of a high-efficiency filtration system and the reliable temperature controls for the senior population. The Board discussed recommending that the additional funds needed for the HVAC/ventilation system be included in the capital budget for FY2023, supplemented by funds from the American Rescue Plan Act funds received by the Town.

The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Vogel) to recommend to the Board of Finance that an amount, not to exceed $275,000, from the American Rescue Plan Act funds, be included in the FY23 Capital Budget for an HVAC/Ventilation system in the Senior Center.

REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY/DOG PARK – Proposal for waterline – Ms. Womer, Ms. Glicksman
Ms. Glicksman explained that the Regional Water Authority has offered to install a water line from Beecher Road to the dog park on the Fitzgerald Property with the Woodbridge Dog Park Cooperative responsible for any ancillary costs.

The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to approve the proposed water-line installation pending a favorable response from The Town Plan & Zoning Commission of the Board’s request for an 8-24 review.

EVERSOURCE REPRESENTATIVES – Transmission Line Vegetation Management - Project Services Dan Burns; Services Management, Sean Redding; and Arborist John Pagano
Mr. Redding reviewed the timeline for the vegetation management under and around the high energy transmission lines. He said that the plan is to clear the scrub beneath the lines and remove any tall trees within 100 ft of the lines to prevent damage to the lines and interruption of electrical service to a wide section of the State from Norwalk to Middletown and beyond. Public notification includes letters sent to effected property owners in December 2021 and January 2022, door-to-door direct outreach, in-person meetings and/or door-hangers to alert homeowners. The 100-foot Eversource easement has been surveyed and marked and work is expected to begin in July 2022. Mr. Redding noted that the Connecticut Public Utility Regulatory Authority (“PURA”) does not have any involvement in the management of the transmission lines.

The public may view the Eversource presentation on the Town’s website.

PUBLIC COMMENT
Professor Kent Golden, 16 Old Still Road, and Mary Gorham, 21 Old Mill Road presented spoken and written statements to the importance and advantage to the Town of installing a solar farm on a portion of the former Country Club of Woodbridge property. Mr. Golden’s statement can be viewed on the YouTube recording https://youtu.be/2cl4eb6LhWg

Ms. Gorham’s written statement is attached to these minutes as part of the public record.

LIAISON REPORTS
Mr. Crisco: Police Commission – held a special meeting on March 26th. Financial disbursements are on target with the planned budget; decommissioned ballistic vests and medical supplies are being donated to Ukraine; the “coffee with a cop” program was successful. Two members of the force participated in the Special Olympics penguin fund. Chief Cappiello notified the Commission of various personnel changes. The Traffic Authority approved various Town events.

Mr. Kuriake: Economic Development Commission – Chair Robert Sharrer will discuss the implementation of incentivized zoning with The Town Plan and Zoning Commission. The business district
is planning a “happy hour” in May to highlight the new wine store; the Commission is also planning concerts or pop-up musical events on the spring and winter solstice to attract foot and drive-thru traffic to businesses.

Amity Regional #5 Board of Education – March 14th - pension fund is doing well; three students were awarded the National Merit Scholarship. April 4th – Mr. Leahy, Orange Board of Finance, made a thorough and detailed presentation re the Amity Board of Education’s practice of overbudgeting by at least $1M and requested that the practice be reconsidered. Mr. Kuriakose reminded the Board that Connecticut recently passed a law that allows Boards of Education to retain up to 2% of any overage for capital expenditure the following fiscal year. Mr. Leahy was advocating that this practice be reeled in.

Dr. Lober: Conservation Commission – the Town Clerk, Stephanie Ciarlegli gave a presentation on Freedom of Information regulations and the requirements of minutes as the record of a meeting. Ms. Ciarlegllo also gave a brief overview of the mission of the West River Coalition that advocates for the health of the river and its 25-mile corridor. Short-term plans include blazing trails and installing signs identifying areas of historical interest. The Army Corp of Engineers has made various suggestions for alleviating the twice-a-year flooding – but none have been implemented. The Woodbridge Land Trust made a presentation re the offer to purchase a conservation easement on the former country club property and the benefits of such easements. Discussion followed about the presentation being made to other boards and commissions. The Commission has an interest in securing open space within the development planned on Merritt Avenue. Sub-committees have been formed to review a proposed tree ordinance for submittal to the Selectmen and to pursue grants.

Inland Wetlands Agency – Deemed that the Greater New Haven Water Pollution Control Authority’s plan to upgrade the pumping station on Ansonia Road poses no impact on wetlands. Approved a solar tracking panel on Seymour Road. Merritt Avenue proposed development – the Agency will retain an expert to review the impact on the flood plain and environmental concerns.

Human Services Commission – There is a guided study program offering students 30 minutes of tutoring per week; home alone classes were held on April 12th; donations for the Youth Evening Program were provided by the Woodbridge Police Union, Amity Middle School PTSA; and area businesses. People’s Bank is donating a $200 prize for the First Selectman’s Youth Award. The Senior Center is beginning some new programs and will sponsor a tag sale on Earth Day. Programs usually held in the cafeteria/lounge will be moved to the library during the renovations. 120 COVID test kits were distributed to vulnerable seniors; 200 received tax preparation assistance; Beacon Falls has been added to the medical transportation list.

Ms. McCreven: Woodbridge Board of Education – met on March 21st – at which meeting Ms. McCreven thanked the Board of Education for working with the Boards of Finance and Selectmen to reach the budget that is being presented at the Preliminary Budget Hearing.

Commission on the Use of Publicly Owned Properties – met on March 28th. Discussed the “No Littering Ordinance”.

Ordinance Committee - met on March 30th and April 7th – Police Chief Frank Cappiello attended the April meeting. He recommended not adding another No Littering ordinance. That the State law was sufficient. He also noted that a second law/ordinance would cause confusion when writing citations. The Committee is recommending that before a new ordinance is considered that a public information campaign to urge residents not to litter and to take pride in their neighborhoods and the Town in general. Also, to consider organizing rid litter days more often through the year with support of police presence along the busier roadways.

Ms. McCreven said that the Selectmen asked that the Committee review all the ordinances, and in response the Committee considered Chapter 75 – Municipal Agencies. The overlying ordinance said that boards and commissions should meet at least 6 times per year. She asked that the Liaisons inquire if any of their boards/commissions are interested in meeting less frequently which would also reduce staff use.
Mr. Vogel, another member of the Ordinance Committee said that some boards are charged to meet quarterly.

Mr. Vogel: Library Commission – met on March 14th. 61% of the budget has been expended; the Friends of the Library have donated 8 new computer chairs; during COVID overdue fines were suspended, the Commission is considering making the practice permanent and referred the idea to the Policy Subcommittee for a report.

Government Access Television – did not achieve a quorum on the 27th and he was not able to attend the re-scheduled meeting.

Recreation Commission – the March 28th meeting was cancelled.

2020 AD HOC COMMITTEE – Presentation and Request – Laurie Pirie Associates
Ms. Laurie Pirie presented an overview of her firm’s proposal to develop a plan expanding on the 2012, Yale Urban Design Workshop (or Plattus Report) to develop a vision for the Woodbridge Village District to attract new businesses, and make the area visitor and shopper friendly. The Board briefly discussed changing the area name to refer to the West River – since the river runs through the area.

The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Lober) to move forward with the agreement with Pirie Associates as described, pending approval of the budget at the Annual Town Meeting.

REQUEST TO WAIVE BUILDING PERMIT FEE
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY to waive the Town Building Permit Fee in the amount of $1,089.60 for construction of the Learning Pavilion on the Massaro Farm.

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/DIRECTOR OF FINANCE REPORT
Monthly Report – Mr. Genovese reported that as of March 31, 2022, he is estimating a year-end budget surplus of $672,413. However, because the current budget includes an allocation from fund balance of $400,000 the increase to the fund balance at year end is projected to be $272,413 resulting in an estimated fund balance of $7.0M or 13.55% of annual expenses.

TAX REFUNDS
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Vogel) pursuant to section 12-124 to 129 of the Connecticut General Statutes and the recommendation of the Tax Collector to refund Motor Vehicle Taxes in the amount of $3,625.21.

The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Lober) pursuant to section 12-124 to 129 of the Connecticut General Statutes and the recommendation of the Tax Collector to refund Real Estate taxes in the amount of $10,946.77.

RESOLUTION – GRANT FOR OLD FIRE HOUSE
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to approve the following resolution:

RESOLUTION
TO FILE AN APPLICATION TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
for
CONVERSION OF A FORMER FREHOUSE TO A NEW COMMUNITY CENTER
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING
APRIL 13, 2022

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 4-66(c) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development is authorized to extend financial assistance for economic development projects: and

WHEREAS, it is desirable and in the public interest that the Town of Woodbridge make an application to the State for $2,000,000 in order to undertake the Conversion of a Former Firehouse to a new Community Center and to execute an Assistance Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE Woodbridge Board of Selectmen:

1. That it is cognizant of the conditions and pre-requisites for the state financial assistance imposed by Section 4-6(c) of the Connecticut General Statutes
2. That the filing of an application for State financial assistance by the Town of Woodbridge in an amount not to exceed $2,000,000 is hereby approved and that First Selectman Beth Heller is directed to execute and file such application with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development to provide such additional information, to execute such other documents as may be required, to execute an Assistance Agreement with the State of Connecticut for State financial assistance if such an agreement is offered, to execute any amendments, decisions, and revisions thereto, and to act as the authorized representative of the Town of Woodbridge.

STRATEGIC PLAN — UPDATE — Ms. McCreven, Mr. Vogel
Ms. McCreven asked that the Board review the latest draft of the strategic plan outlining the Boards priorities, goals and objectives for FY2022 – 2023 and report back with their thoughts. Ms. McCreven said that the Committee’s goal is to have the plan in place by July 1, 2022.

Ms. Heller thanked Ms. McCreven, Mr. Vogel, Ms. Yagla, and Mr. Genovese for their diligence to develop the plan.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT ("ARPA") – Ms. Yagla, Mr. Genovese
Mr. Genovese said that it is hoped that the strategic plan will help provide a framework to use some of the ARPA funds to accomplish some of the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan.

ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER'S REPORT
Ms. Yagla reported that the Town did apply for the State’s Environmental and Protection grant for the “Pay as you Throw” trash program. The program outlined in the application was scaled back from the plan originally discussed. If the Town receives the grant, residents will opt in to participate, receive a limited number of bags, and also participate in curbside food waste pick-up. This will eliminate the heavy food from the household trash — and the limited number of bags. Between 150 – 325 residents are needed to participate in the program.

Update on solar program — installing solar panels on the firehouse and public works garage is not compatible with the micro-grid. Through research it appears that the construction costs to make the project work safely and in tandem with the micro-grid are going to be unsustainable for the project. Other options for installation of panels are being sought.

Up-coming events — Earth Day — April 23, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m.; Bike Fun Ride — May 14; Mosaic:
Woodbridge Community Read – May 26, 7 p.m. Details for events are on the website.

APPLICATION TO HOLD AN EVENT ON TOWN PROPERTY
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to approve the Woodbridge Volunteer Fire Association’s application to hold a fundraiser dance at the firehouse, 100 Center Road.

CALL OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) In accordance with the Charter of the Town of Woodbridge, Article III, Section 3-2, the Board of Selectmen hereby votes to notify all electors and citizens qualified to vote in a Town Meeting of the Town of Woodbridge that the Annual Town Meeting will be held on May 16, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. DST in the Woodbridge Fire House, 100 Center Road, Woodbridge CT, to (1) Elect a Town Meeting Moderator for a two year term 2) to consider and take action on the FY23 budget as recommended by the Board of Finance 3) to conduct any other business proper to come before the meeting.

STATE AFFIRMATIONS – ADOPT AUTHORIZ THE FIRST SELECTMAN TO SIGN
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Crisco – Lober) to adopt and authorize the First Selectman to sign the following State Affirmations:

- Affirmative Action Policy Statement
- ADA Notice
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- ADA Municipal Grievance Procedure
- Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Fair Housing Policy Statement
- Fair Housing Resolution – Town of Woodbridge

ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THE TOWN CLERK’S REPORTS
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to acknowledge receipt of the Town Clerk’s reports for the month ending March 31, 2022 and cumulative from July 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022.

MINUTES
The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to approve the minutes of:

- January 27, 2022 – Operating Budget Presentations – Boards of Finance and Selectmen
- February 1, 2022 – Operating Budget Presentations – Boards of Finance and Selectmen
- March 9, 2022 – Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting

APPOINTMENTS
Zoning Enforcement/Inland Wetlands Enforcement Officer – The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to appoint Kristine Sullivan Zoning Enforcement Officer and Inland Wetlands Enforcement Officer for a term ending June 30, 2023.

Police Commission to June 30, 2023 – The Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (McCreven – Crisco) to appoint Mica Cardozo to fill a vacancy on the Board of Police Commissioners for a term ending June 30, 2023.

Police Commission to June 30, 2025 – Ms. McCreven nominated Henry Kopel, Mr. Crisco seconded. Mr. Vogel nominated Stephen Falcigno, Mr. Crisco seconded.
VOTE: Henry Kopel – Aye – Ms. McCreven, Ms. Heller, Mr. Kuriakose, Mr. Crisco
      Nay – Mr. Vogel, Dr. Lober
      Stephen Falcigno – no action was taken on the nomination as the vacancy was filled.

Ms. Heller declared Henry Kopel appointed to fill a vacancy on the Board of Police Commissioners for a term ending June 30, 2025.


Human Services Commission to June 30, 2023 – Ms. McCreven nominated Alexandra Sanchez, Mr. Crisco seconded.
      Mr. Vogel nominated Diane Carrano, Dr. Lober seconded.

VOTE: Alexandra Sanchez – Aye – Ms. McCreven, Ms. Heller, Mr. Kuriakose, Mr. Crisco
      Nay – Mr. Vogel, Dr. Lober
      Diane Carrano – No action was taken on the nomination as the vacancy was filled.

Ms. Heller declared Alexandra Sanchez appointed to fill a vacancy on the Human Services Commission for a term ending June 30, 2023.

EXECUTIVE SESSION
At 7:54 p.m. the Board of Selectmen VOTED UNANIMOUSLY (Heller – Crisco) to move into executive session pursuant to Section 1-200(6)(C) of the Connecticut General Statute Security Devices related to Dispatch – Selectman Paul Kuriakose.

At 8:13 p.m. the Board moved out of executive session. Ms. Heller stated that no motions were made or votes taken in executive session.

ADJOURNMENT
On a non-debatable motion by Ms. McCreven, seconded by Mr. Vogel, the meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Geraldine S. Shaw, Clerk
Dear BOS members,

Thank you for all your service on behalf of our town. I am particularly aware of the challenges you are facing as you seek to balance various housing and financial objectives with the need to preserve the town’s woods, rural character, and our first-rate school system. I’d like to offer some thoughts on how I see some of these issues intersecting, and recommend a path forward that I would like for you to consider. I have spoken to Beth Heller and Betsy Yagla about these ideas two weeks ago, and sent them these ideas in writing yesterday as well. I hope these thoughts and recommendations are helpful, and I look forward to discussing them with you. Specifically, what I’d like to share with you are thoughts on the following:

- what the housing survey shows Woodbridge residents most want and how we can best achieve it;
- why I believe the Goman & York study is not valid;
- my calculations for why the Arbor Haven proposal would be an enormous financial burden (not benefit) to the town;
- a summary of why a solar farm on half of the country club would be an enormous benefit to the town;
- a request for an RFQ and RFP to solar companies to investigate a solar farm option further.

What the Housing Survey Shows Woodbridge Most Wants:

The town’s recent housing survey shows clearly that the people in town who most need additional housing options are seniors over age 65 (as evidenced by the answers to question #7.) In addition, the #1 kind of affordable housing options that people thought Woodbridge could use more of is “housing options that allow older adults to ‘downsize’ - smaller units with lower maintenance needs” (see page 25). And the #1 most supported strategy to increase housing variety and opportunities (question 11) is “encouraging mixed use buildings, including the addition of apartments over offices and retail uses”.

So to sum up, the #1 housing need our town has is for affordable housing for seniors over age 65 who want smaller homes they can downsize to. I would note from this that the stated need is for housing for people “over age 65” and not “over age 55”. Seniors are looking to downsize, and when doing so are looking for more affordable housing rather than housing that costs more than their current housing. Since fulfilling this need could also address our town’s need to increase the percentage of housing units that are deemed legally affordable, it seems logical that this specific demographic is where we should be focusing our efforts. And since the #1 most supported strategy for increasing housing variety and opportunities is in mixed use buildings including apartments over offices and retail use, the most logical place for this is in our business district.
So rather than trying to address everyone’s housing needs simultaneously with a strategy that tries to offer something for everyone, let’s focus first on what our town needs first. In other words, let’s focus our efforts solely on the “over 65” affordable housing need first, and do as much as we possibly can over the next five years expanding that availability in the business district. Some good possibilities might include the land behind the senior apartments on Lucy Street, a possible additional floor above the building that houses Amity Physical Therapy, additional floors on other buildings in the area, properties on Litchfield Turnpike, and the Bradley Road property where the Toll Brothers have made a bid. The town might provide a financial incentive to property owners in these areas who have extra land so their land might become available for this purpose.

Focusing on senior affordable housing will not only be a logical priority, but it will also enable us to avoid overwhelming the town by trying to do too much at once. From a financial, environmental, and town planning perspective, incremental rather radical change will be far more digestible for our town. History shows that our town is able to assimilate several new homes per year. Never have we built 145 all at once. Such would be a tsunami that would overwhelm our schools, town services, roads, finances, and forever change the character of our town.

The Goman & York Study & Why Arbor Haven’s Proposal Would Be Financially Disastrous

The Goman & York Municipal Fiscal Impact Study should be immediately suspect to everyone since it was commissioned by Arbor Haven which has a clear vested interest in developing the Country Club. It is not an independent study. There is a clear conflict of interest here. And indeed, their assumptions and numbers over critical data are clearly wrong, and lead to a false conclusion that the Arbor Haven proposal would make the town over $1.5 million in net revenue per year. I believe nothing could be further from the truth, and instead believe Arbor Haven would be fiscally disastrous for Woodbridge. Here’s why:

One of the most important numbers in the entire study is their estimated number of schoolchildren per household that they say we can expect enrolling in our schools as a result of the Arbor Haven development. They have pegged this at .46. They have derived this number by dividing the number of Woodbridge school children (i.e. 1494) by the total number of occupied housing units in Woodbridge (i.e. 3258). (See footnote #1 on page 3.) This is the wrong number to use. Here’s why:

What is relevant for a new development is who is moving to our town, i.e. the new residents, not the existing residents. I have spoken with several local real estate agents who have been serving our town for many years, and they all say that over 75% of people moving to Woodbridge do so for our schools. Of those 75%, about 50% them already have school age children that enter the schools immediately upon their arrival, and the other 25% either plan to raise a family here or have pre-school age children who will do so. The remaining 25% (who aren’t moving here because of our schools) move here for a variety of other reasons that include our woodsy, rural character. As one real estate agent joked, “they are not moving here because of our sandy beaches, ample shopping, or easy access to Metro North.”
What is important about this- is this is who moves to Woodbridge. This is the data we need to be paying attention to, and not data from national studies, state studies, or other town's studies as the Goman & York study does. The people we should be listening to are our local real estate agents who know who moves to Woodbridge. And the people we should be listening to about the impact on our schools ought to be our own school leaders. They will tell you what is true for our schools, including that Beecher’s enrollment is 840 children, not 817 as the Goman & York study claims. Let’s look at Woodbridge’s actual experience and data, not demographic studies of other towns.

So if at least 75% of NEW residents move here because of our schools, and our town’s real estate agents also say the average household of new residents to Woodbridge has 2+ kids (regardless of demographic changes that other towns are seeing) then conservatively, the average number of kids per household of new residents should be .75 x 2 = 1.5. If 72 of Arbor Haven’s homes are not age restricted, this would result in 72 x 1.5 = 108 new school children, not 39 new school children as this study claims. In addition, if we assume (as the study does) that 30 of the homes are bought by Woodbridge residents (which is probably a very low estimate), then the homes that they are selling are likely to be backfilled by new families who also have an average of 1.5 children. This is another potential 30 x 1.5 = 45 school children moving into these vacated Woodbridge homes. So that is a total of 108 new school children who would live in an Arbor Haven development, and another at least 45 coming (indirectly) from the buyers of the homes in Woodbridge that people sell in order to move to Arbor Haven. That’s a total of potentially 108 + 45 = 153 new school children, not 39 new school children, i.e. nearly four times as many school children as this study claims.

It is worth noting too that the Toll Brothers estimate that on average 1/3 of the people who buy their homes come from the same town. So if that were true for Arbor Haven too, there wouldn’t be 30 Woodbridge homes being backfilled, but 48 homes being backfilled (which is 1/3 of 145 homes). If this were true, there would be 48 x 1.5 = 72 school children moving into these vacated Woodbridge homes. So this would mean a total of potentially 108 + 72 = 180 new children in our schools which is even more financially and logistically burdensome for the town.

The second number that this study has wrong is the per pupil expenditure. They have used $11,813/pupil (see page 3 of the study). Our town budgets $19,732/student/year for Amity and $19,270/student/year for Beecher, which is an average of about $19,500/student. Using the more conservative (lower) estimate of additional school children, this suggests that Arbor Haven could potentially generate an additional $19,500 x 153 students = $2,983,500 in additional school expenses for the town per year, excluding the millions of dollars that it would cost the town in building additions or new schools to accommodate these school children. In about three short years, this would equal the sale price of the property ($9 million) and every year thereafter we would have an additional $2,983,500 in school costs (plus additional costs since school expenses go up each year). Moreover, the cost of the school construction to accommodate all these children would likely cost many, many millions of additional dollars.
On the revenue side, the numbers that the Goman & York Study use are wrong as well. The average residential property tax the study uses is $19,373 for all 145 units. This is an average based on grossly inflated sale prices for all their market rate homes, as opposed to appraised values which are hundreds of thousands of dollars less. A closer estimate of the average tax revenue for these homes would be about half that amount, or about $10,000/year.

So instead of $2,809,188/year in tax revenues from these homes, I think we could expect more like $1,450,000/year in tax revenues from Arbor Haven (ie 145 homes x $10,000/home).

So even assuming their other numbers for tax revenues from motor vehicles ($121,182) is correct (although I doubt that people in affordable housing all have 2 cars as they are assuming, and the state is looking to cap those revenues) and assuming their General Government Services expense calculation of $925,996 is correct, the Arbor Haven development would result in an enormous loss to the town year after year forever. Specifically,

Projected real estate tax revenues from Arbor Haven: $1,450,000
Personal property taxes (290 motor vehicles at $417/vehicle): $121,182

Estimated total revenues to the town: $1,571,182

Additional school costs (even without new school buildings) (and using the lower estimated additional # of students) ($2,983,500)

Additional general government services ($925,996)

Additional expenses per year ($3,909,496)

Net annual cost to the town ($1,571,182 - $3,909,496) (-$2,338,314)

This annual additional expense of -$2,338,314/year would be an enormous burden to the town forever. Building additions to Beecher, Bethany Middle School or the Amity High School or building a new school entirely, would add many additional millions in expense. This is a very different picture from the at least $1,543,667 net positive impact on the town that this study claims that Arbor Haven would have. Instead, an Arbor Haven development would eventually be an enormous financial drain on the town after the few short years of relief that its $9 million sales price would offer us.

We should not be surprised that a housing development is not in the best financial interests of our town. No town has ever found housing developments to be financially advantageous, and there is no reason why Woodbridge should be any different. They are financially beneficial to developers, not to a town.

In addition, the 22 affordable units (out of a total of 145 units) in the Arbor Haven proposal would barely help us at all toward our goal of achieving 10% affordable housing in
Woodbridge’s housing since we would be increasing the total number of homes in Woodbridge at the same time. Moreover, only 11 of these affordable homes would be age restricted which is the #1 kind of affordable housing that Woodbridge residents want. Clearly, Arbor Haven’s proposal does not help us much at all in this department either.

Arbor Haven’s proposal would also necessitate the sale of the largest piece of town property, and forever forego any other use of that land that our town might want down the road. This is very short sighted, particularly in light of how much the world is changing, and how our town’s needs may evolve. If we sell it, Arbor Haven’s contract for the number of units they are claiming to build is not enforceable. They could also sell the land to others, and who knows what others would want to build there. Why would we want to lose that control?

Finally, this Arbor Haven proposal would bulldoze the land, and disrupt the habitats of many species who live there. Worldwide, there are 40% fewer species alive today than there were in 1970, and a lot of that is because of housing developments. Once houses are built, they are there forever. Why would we want to contribute to environmental degradation and species extinction? This is completely contrary to our town’s stated values.

Recommenda­tion for a Solar Farm

In light of the above, I strongly urge you to set aside the Arbor Haven proposal and consider other options for addressing the town’s needs for sustainable income, affordable housing for seniors, and maintaining the beautiful, rural ambiance of our town. In addition, I urge you to plan not just for the next few years, but for future generations of Woodbridge residents.

To address all of the above concerns, I recommend the town consider erecting a large solar farm on the half of the Woodbridge property that is closest to the Merritt Parkway which has two large open fields. Preliminary estimates are that this could generate as much as $500,000 per year every year (potentially forever) in revenues to the town without any of the expenses to the town that new housing implies. Solar panels do not have children in the schools. They do not use our library, police, fire, town hall, or roads. They don’t care if the Merritt Parkway is noisy or full of fumes. We could lease the solar panels and in so doing, the town would not need to spend a dime to get them or install them. We also would not need to sell the land. Should we choose to use the property for something else in 25 years, we would retain that option. By using removable structures that do not mar the landscape with concrete, we could ask the solar company to take them away when we are done with them and the land would not be ruined.

With the revenues from the solar farm, we could pay for the remaining debt on the property. Future revenues from a solar farm could also pay for more affordable senior housing in the business district without building more market rate housing. In so doing, we could make real progress on our affordable housing goals. In addition, after we have exhausted all available space in the business district for senior affordable housing a number of years from now, we would have land on this property to add to our senior affordable housing stock.
Given the landscape of the country club, we could have a large solar farm on the Merritt Parkway side of the ridge that divides the country club, and a lovely park on the Johnson Road side. Revenues from the solar farm could pay for the upkeep of the park. Walkers on the Johnson Road side would not see the solar farm by virtue of the ridge. And if in some future year, we needed some of the land on the Johnson Road side for affordable senior housing, those residents would not see the solar farm either.

Lastly, and very importantly, a solar farm would help our town do its part in weening our dependence on fossil fuels, and increase our use of renewable energy. As the latest IPCC report tells us, we need to move away from fossil fuels quickly in order to avert the worst effects of climate change. Everyone needs to engage in that effort—every country, every state, every town, every organization, and every individual. A large solar park in our town would enable our town to do its part and be leaders in the state. The need for this cannot be overstated.

As this past Sunday’s 4/10/22 New Haven Register main cover story explains, Connecticut is also woefully short of our state goal of preserving 21% of its land as Open Space by 2023. To come close to reaching this goal, the state needs towns like Woodbridge to preserve far more than 21% of their land since the cities cannot do so. So while Woodbridge has exceeded the state’s average, we need to continue preserving open space on behalf of everyone in our state. By putting a solar farm on half of the country club property in a way that does not permanently destroy the land, and creating a park on the other half of the land, we will continue to preserve our open space as well.

**RFQ and RFP Needed**

To explore this solar farm option further, I urge you and the Board of Selectmen to put out a “Request for Qualifications” to solar companies in order to educate ourselves further about solar farm possibilities. Once we have done so, I then would urge the town to write an informed “Request for Proposals” for a large solar park on half of the Country Club property. The proposals we received would give us firm numbers for how much the town could expect in revenues from a solar farm, a picture of how this would look on the property, and a vision of new possibilities for how we can meet the town’s various financial, housing, and environmental preservation needs.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to future dialogue.

Best wishes,

Mary

Mary Gorham
21 Old Mill Road
Woodbridge, CT 06525