

Selectmen Unanimously Pass \$45.7 Million Budget, Cutting 1% from This Year's Spending — Maybe No Fireworks This Year

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The Board of Selectmen on Monday unanimously recommended cutting the non-education part of town spending to bring it 1.05 percent below the current budget, as passed last year.

One unexpected cut: \$13,498 for the annual fireworks display, which may not be taking place this year for reasons having nothing to do with budgeting. Town officials said the high school's turf fields and cafeteria reconstruction make that location too difficult, and there doesn't seem to be another.

The board cut \$233,434 from the town administrator's proposed budget to bring the overall budget to \$45,689,237 — which is \$485,395 less than the spending the town approved for the current 2017-2018 fiscal year.

The cuts included deferring a project to improve a firefighter training facility (\$45,000), postponing the hiring of more civilian dispatchers for the Police Department (\$93,033 in salary and benefits for the last quarter of the fiscal year) and making a small cut (\$42,391) to adjust the money the town gives Darien Library for workers compensation and medical insurance payments.

The selectmen approved separate budgets for the General Fund (regular town spending), the Capital/Non-Recurring Reserve, the Parking Operations Fund and the Parking Capital fund. The Capital/Non-Recurring Reserve was increased by \$45,000 from Town Administrator Kathleen Buch's proposal. The board didn't increase or decrease the overall budgets for the two parking funds.

The board passed the various budgets in separate votes, all the 5-0 votes were unanimous and discussion centered on clarifications on details.

The Board of Selectmen's budget now goes to the Board of Finance, which may cut it further, and then to the Representative Town Meeting, which will vote on both the selectmen's and the Board of Education budgets. The Board of Education budget takes up about two-thirds of overall town spending.

No Fireworks?

One new cut in the budget was for the annual town fireworks display. The \$13,498 budgeted for extra duty police pay was cut because the town may not hold fireworks this July.

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson announced that the expected construction work to renovate and expand the Darien High School Cafeteria and the increased use of artificial turf on high school sports fields was making it too difficult to hold the fireworks at the high school this coming year.

She said those problems meant a "hiatus" of a year might have to take place. Town officials explored whether it was possible to have fireworks at Weed Beach, but police officials said it would be too difficult or unsafe to get pedestrians in and out of the beach.

The town has also had problems getting volunteers to organize the event, Stevenson said. Unless another location could be found and the problems resolved, Darien might have to wait until 2020 for a town fireworks display, she said.

Selectman Susan Marks, who has organized the event in years past, said she thought there was a 50-50 chance that the town could still pull-off the fireworks event somehow, and if it did, the money could go back into the budget from town reserve funds.