

Finance Board's Budget: Mill Rate Would Go Up 2.5%, to \$15.73

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The Board of Finance passed a \$141,399,008 budget that would raise Darien taxes 2.48 percent to a new mill rate of \$15.73 (per \$1,000 of assessed value).

All votes at the board's Thursday night meeting were unanimous, 5-0. The budget figures approved by the board are by no means final — the Representative Town Meeting will have the last word on the budget and taxes for the 2016-2017 fiscal year, which starts July 1.

The 2016-2017 education budget, set by the Board of Education and also up for RTM approval, is \$93,847,816, a 3.44 percent increase from the budget approved for this fiscal year.

The town operating budget (covering everything but education spending and not including debt service or capital projects) is \$30,519,897 for next year's budget, which is down 0.45 percent from the budget for this year.

Part of the reduction comes from lower pension and retiree health care costs, which were adjusted downward after some policy changes by the town pension board.

There was no disagreement on the board over any of the amounts approved. Board of Finance Chairman Jon Zagrodzky said he thought the board's emphasis on sitting in on budget meetings of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Education and inviting RTM members to sit in on Board of Finance meetings was helpful in creating a sense of cooperation, and it made the process smoother than it might otherwise have been.

First Selectman Jayme Stevenson said after the meeting that she was pleased with the Board of Finance's approved budget, part of which had been submitted by the Board of Selectmen. She said town officials were trying to balance concerns about taxes with levels of spending that met the town's needs.

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