

Town Administrator Proposes Budget Increase of 3.89% to Board of Selectmen

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In the first public stage of the town budget process, Town Administrator Kathleen Buch proposed to the Board of Selectmen on Monday a \$48.9 million town budget, a spending increase of 3.89 percent.

The budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2019-2020 is subject to changes made first by the Board of Selectmen, then the Board of Finance, and finally by the Representative Town Meeting, which is expected to adopt the in late spring. The town fiscal years run from July 1 to June 30.

—You can see the entire Town Administrator's Proposed Budget [here](#) on the town government website.

Buch proposed the hiring of three civilian dispatchers to free up more police officers from dispatch duties, and the hiring of a maintenance worker for the Parks and Recreation Department.

"These personnel increases are significant, and there will be, I think a good lively discussion as you debate whether you should put forward my proposal on these positions," she said.

Buch's proposal would raise town spending by \$1,876,638 to a new total of \$48,926,032. The current year budget is \$47,049,394. The budget is less than 30 percent of all town spending, since the Darien Public Schools budget takes in the lion's share of town taxes.

The Representative Town Meeting and Board of Finance each vote on the overall school budget but can't cut specific line items — only the Board of Education can do that.

Buch is also proposing that the working hours of the blight officer (who deals with complaints of poorly kept property in town) be increased by five hours a week. The position is relatively new.

"The time required to investigate and properly document blight cases has exceeded our original expectations," Buch said. The position is still not full-time and the officer does not receive full town benefits, she added.

The town legal budget would be increased to pay for additional work by lawyers representing the town in expected appeals from last year's townwide property tax revaluation. The debt service budget also has an increase on the assumption that the town will be borrowing more money to start paying for a reconstructed Ox Ridge School.

In the emergency preparedness budget, Buch said, the cost of radio maintenance is going up in a "significant" way, but she didn't explain why. Town department heads are expected to go before the Board of Selectmen to discuss their budgets starting on Tuesday evening.

In the capital budget, Buch is proposing money to fund:

—new parking lots at the Highland Farms property (bought from Ox Ridge Riding and Racquet Club)

—development of the Short Lane property that is now part of Weed Beach Park.

—reserves for purchasing and maintenance for town government buildings

—a "traffic pre-emption system" that allows fire trucks to change traffic lights to green as they're heading to the scene of an alarm

—sidewalk rehabilitation and new sidewalks

—paving of streets and parking lots

—the local share of funding for improvements at the intersection of Noroton Avenue and Ledge Road

She said the Board of Finance may want to fund some of these capital projects with bonds.

Buch's presentation to the selectmen lasted a little over half an hour. Members of the Board of Finance and RTM attended the meeting.