

Information Technology (IT) Committee Meeting Minutes - 11.12.2024

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

IT Com Members Nancy Kail D9 (Chair), Clarence Hayes D4, Pam Kopack D3, David Rosenwaks D6 and Claudia Shaum D5 attended. Matt Mandell D1 was absent.

AGENDA and GOAL

Agenda: Continue our RTM communications improvements work

Goal: Provide project updates and decide next steps for each project.

DISCUSSION

Recognition of town government and related communications improvements:

First Selectwoman's Newsletters, DPIC Charette & Survey, Safe Streets Mtg, LWV Election Recap, 06880 JT/LG Podcasts, DPIC survey, Town website improvements, Jeff Wieser emails, Matt Newsletters, David emails, Claudia/Nancy D5/D9 newsletters

Review of IT Com Communications Work Ground Rules

- Focus on small/actionable RTM communications improvements items, avoid duplicating effort
- Adhere to applicable rules, coordinate w/ the Moderator & Town Clerk, be respectful of staff
- Understand how to get input w/out violating FOIA/similar - see E Flug note in 6/20 minutes [HERE](#)
- Share our work and what we learn - best practices and challenges/what to avoid

IT Committee Communications Projects Next Steps

Projects: Website Improvements, FAQs, Budget FAQs, Community Conversation

- Website: comments & photos to nkail@westportct.gov by 11.15
- FAQs: Comments to cshaum@westportct.gov by 11.15
- Budget FAQs: Comments to pkopack@westportct.gov by 11.15
- 3.24.25 Conversation: drosenwaks@westportct.gov marketing signup by 11.15

See draft info from projects on next pages

Ideas for Other Communications Projects

- Year in Review – NK
- RTM Newsletter – CS?
- District Chats Guidelines – CS
- Constituent Contact Guidelines
- RTM Presence at Volunteer Fair, RTM T-shirts for Mem Day Parade
- Website Enhancement – Reps photos and bios

NEXT MEETING

Tues., Dec 3, 6:00 pm, Town Hall - for project updates/next steps IT Com & RTM

IT Committee Meeting Agenda - 11.12.2024 Continued

Website, nkail@westportct.gov

Aiming to go live 11.18, see draft RTM home page below

Photo Banner will be at top of page, maybe a mem day parade pic

Next steps:

- Send NK comments on tiles including headings, order and any **photos**
- Review tile hyperlinks copy below and send NK comments by 11.15
- [RTM, ATTEND AN RTM MTG](#) (alt [LINK](#)), [YOUR RTM REPS](#) (alt [LINK](#)), [DISTRICT MAP](#)
- [RTM COMMITTEES](#), [VOTING RECORDS/MEETING MINUTES](#),
- We can include “coming soon” to missing items and add tiles ie for 75th



Community Conversation, drosenwaks@westportct.gov

Aiming to send Save the Dates before Thanksgiving, see draft

Next steps:

- Sign up with David for marketing assignments by 11.15
- Send David your invite comments, thoughts on marketing/how to help 11.15

FAQs, cshaum@westportct.gov, Budget FAQs pkopack@westportct.gov

Aiming to go live 11.18 as part of website redo

See drafts below

Next steps:

- Send CS and PK your comments by 11.15



SAVE THE DATE

for a

Representative Town Meeting Community Conversation

Sunday March 23, 2025

2:00 pm – 3:30pm

At the Library Trefz Forum



**What is the RTM? What do we do?
Who are my RTM representatives?
How does RTM work impact me and our town?
How can I get involved?**

Learn about our publicly elected, non partisan town legislature/council

Speak with your neighborhood's RTM representatives

Find out how you can get involved

HOW TO [RTM](#)

FAQs for RTM Members and the residents they represent

(to be posted on the RTM page and maybe in another place as well/cross referenced)

Q: What is the RTM?

A: The Representative Town Meeting (RTM) is made up of four elected Representatives from each of Westport's nine Districts, and is part of Westport's town government, embodying a form of direct democratic governance. [Here](#) is more information about current members, RTM Districts and the RTM page of the Town's website. The RTM meets monthly as a group and in Committees. [Here](#) is the meeting calendar, including agendas and materials.

Q: What is the history of the RTM?

A: Westport adopted the RTM in 1949, moving away from the traditional "town meeting" format that was common throughout New England. For more information on the RTM's history, [click here](#) ([insert link – maybe to 75th anniversary doc written by Velma](#))

Q: Why is the RTM important? How does it fit into the Town government?

A: The RTM works as the legislative body for the Town, and integrates with all the other branches of the Town's government, often serving as a final check and balance. Click here to see how the RTM fits into the Town's governance structure: [insert link to org chart on Town Website](#)

Q: What does the RTM do?

A: The powers and responsibilities of the RTM are provided in the Town Charter and Connecticut General Statutes and include: adopting the annual Town and Education budgets, writing and enacting ordinances, approving appropriations over \$20k, reviewing labor agreements and **addressing Citizen Petitions**. Together, these powers allow the RTM to play a central role in Westport's governance, ensuring that residents have a voice in crucial decisions affecting the community. For more detail about what the RTM does and how, [click here \(insert link to??\)](#).

Q: What does the RTM not do?

A: The RTM does not direct the Town administration on managerial or P&Z issues, or get involved in employee relations at any level. The RTM is not an open forum for debate on all topics - while RTM Reps can champion any constituent complaints, the RTM as a body cannot solve issues that fall outside its purview ([link to Charter](#))

Q: What are RTM committees and what do they do?

A: Most RTM work takes place in Committees. Almost everything that is on an RTM Meeting Agenda has already been discussed and voted on in at least one Committee – sometimes more than one. Each committee is run by an RTM member, selected by the Moderator to serve as Chair. [Here](#) is a listing of the RTM's committees, and see the [calendar](#) for when meetings take place.

Q What do RTM Members do?

A: An RTM Member's job is to represent the interests of their district in all of the RTM's business. Members attend and participate in Committee Meetings, monthly full RTM Meetings and other meetings of the Town relevant to issues coming before the RTM, both in person and via Zoom. It is the RTM member's job to be well-informed and to understand the rules governing the RTM, including Robert's Rules of Order and FOIA, and to conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner as detailed in the Code of Conduct. For more information CLICK HERE: [insert links to orientation docs, Robert's rules, Zoom Guidelines, Code of Conduct, etc.](#)

Q: What does the RTM Moderator do?

A: Each December, the full RTM elects the Moderator. The Moderator sets the Agenda of the meetings, refers matters to Committees for discussion and/or votes, and, along with the Deputy Moderator, ensures that meetings are run according to the Rules. [Link to rules of procedure?](#)

Q: What do RTM Committee Chairs do?

A: The Committee Chair is crucial in ensuring the effectiveness and success of an RTM committee. Chairs serve as the primary contact with the relevant Town Department, are responsible for onboarding new members of their Committees, leading the committee, organizing work, creating reports, and ensuring objectives are met. Each Chair brings their own personality and strengths to bear; however, there are key responsibilities and best practices to be followed. **Click here** ([insert link to Committee Chair guidelines, sample reports](#))

Q: How does the Budget process work, and what is the RTM's role ?

A: Reviewing and approving the Town and BOE budgets each year is one of the most critical jobs of the RTM. The process is lengthy and includes many meetings. For more information and calendars, **Click here** ([link to Pam's doc](#)) *mention this above referencing

Q: How can Westport Residents best interact with the RTM?

A: Going to meetings is a good start. All of the RTM's meetings are posted on the Town's website and properly noticed. You can find that information here: ([insert link to calendar pages](#)) and you can sign up for emails about meetings of particular interest to you here: ([insert link to the sign-up page](#)).

Q: How can I speak with my RTM District reps?

A: Emails and contact information for RTM members can be found **here** ([insert link](#)).

Q: Can I attend RTM meetings and committee meetings?

A: Yes. All RTM meetings and Committee meetings are open to the public by law. See here for the current calendar ([insert link](#)).

Q: Can I speak at an RTM Meeting?

A: Yes, all RTM meetings allow for public comment, which is typically limited to three minutes per presenter. The RTM is governed by its Rules of Procedure ([link](#)) and Roberts Rules ([insert link](#))

Q: How can I contact the RTM?

A: members of the Public can contact their RTM Reps directly ([insert link](#)) or as a group ([insert link](#)) to ask a question, share a concern, etc.

Q: How can I Petition the RTM?

A: Any group of 20 electors, or two RTM members can Petition the RTM. **Click here** for details and to download the Petition form ([insert](#)).

How to “RTM Review” the Town Budgets RTM’s Town Budgets FAQs GOALS:

- Help RTM Members understand the Town budget process and their role in it
- Provide budget timing and where to find needed budget information
- Provide information on what to look for when reviewing the budget
- Help RTM Members ask better and more timely budget questions
- Improve budget meeting efficiency and minimize budget related staff demands

PROPOSED QUESTIONS:

1. What is the RTM’s role in review and approval of Town and BOE budgets?

- a. We review after everyone else has voted it
- b. We are not in charge of running departments, we are governance.

2. Who else reviews and approves the budgets?

Town Budget – Budget heads submit proposed budgets to the Town Finance Director. The Town Finance Director, in conjunction with department heads, reviews the proposed budget with the First Selectperson who reviews, makes changes and approves. The First Selectperson, in conjunction with the Town Finance Director and department heads, then presents the budget to the Board of Finance for review and approval.

Superintendent/Schools – The Chief Financial Officer, working with the Assistant Superintendents and department heads, prepares and presents a budget to the Superintendent. The Superintendent reviews, makes changes, approves and presents to the Board of Education. After BOE review and approval, the budget is presented to the Board of Finance.

The First Selectperson is involved in both budgets throughout the review/approval process. (When does she weigh in on BOE budget?)

After BOF approval, the budgets are approved by the RTM. See timeline discussion below.

3. What is the budget timeline, preparation to approval?

Town Budget

- a. Town/Board of Finance (BOF) timeline: <https://www.westportct.gov/government/departments-a-z/finance-department/financial-administration>
- b. Town/BOF - Working meetings are held over 3 evenings (not recorded) in January/February at the Library on the Town budget. RTM members can attend those meetings (but generally should not ask questions) to better understand the BOF’s approach to the budget and get detailed explanations from town department heads.
- c. The Current BOF does not set a % increase or mill rate guideline for First Selectperson or BOE. This may not always be the case going forward.
- d. After the BOF has approved the Town budget, individual RTM committees will review/approve budgets for their relevant areas (Public Safety = Police and Fire; Park & Rec = Parks & Rec). Most budgets will be reviewed by related committees. The entire town budget will be presented to the RTM Finance Committee by the BOF chair. Department heads will also be available at this meeting (and other committee meetings) to answer questions. The RTM Finance Committee review ensures that each individual department budget has undergone RTM Review.

- e. Individual committees and the Finance Committee will present committee reports on the budget presentations. These committee reports should include information on questions asked by committee members, responses, how committee members voted and ultimately provide a recommendation to the full RTM for approval of the budget as presented.

Superintendent/Board of Education Budget

1. Superintendent/Board of Education (BOE) timeline: <https://www.westportps.org/board-of-education/budget>. (BOE Chair budget message, page 2 identifies the timeline for the school budget.)
2. Superintendent/BOE – BOE working meetings begin in January. Many public meetings are held as part of regular BOE meetings until the budget is approved in February/March. The BOE approved budget is submitted to the Town/BOF in March. Printed/**electronic (?)** copies of the budget are then made available to the RTM.
3. BOF and BOE hold joint budget workshops in February/March. RTM members are encouraged to attend/watch these meetings.
4. After the BOF has approved the Superintendent/BOE budget, RTM committees – **Education and Finance** - will review/approve the Superintendent/BOE budget. RTM members are encouraged to attend/watch this meeting
5. The Finance Committee will present a committee report on the budget presentation. This report should include information on questions asked by committee members, responses, how committee members voted and ultimately provide a recommendation to the full RTM for approval of the budget as presented.

4. What information and other meetings should RTM members access to understand the budget?

Budget books for the Town and Superintendent budgets will be provided to RTM members either in physical or electronic form. Review the information provided.

Many, many meeting are held during the budget process – BOF working meetings, BOE working meetings, RTM committee meetings. If you have an interest/concern in any area, ATTEND THE MEETINGS or look the recording or meeting minutes up on line and view for yourself.

5. What should an RTM member look for in reviewing Town budgets?

- a. Budget drivers – Drivers for the Town budget are different than BOE budget. The Town budget drivers are largely projects underway, and staffing needs (up/down). Drivers for the BOE budget are enrollment and special education needs, both of which ultimately drive staffing.
- b. Does the story make sense? Do any new projects make sense given the direction the town is headed? What's happening that's different than prior years?
- c. Look at variances between years. Town budget is only prior year budget to actual year budget; BOE has YTD actuals (at a point in time) to budgets. Variances don't mean there is a problem, just that something has changed. And it might be a good change so listen to the reason why.
- d. One-time events – These will generally be called out. Covid, Superstorm Sandy, etc. Legal fees may be high if there is an increase in FOIA requests.
- e. What projects are on tap? Future capital or operating costs anticipated? (Example: Public Works – how many miles of road to be paved? PW also has many multiple year projects.)
- f. Employee additions – salary and benefit implications including pension costs. Average salary per employee for departments. Does it make sense?
- g. Offsetting revenues for new programs (mostly P&R)

6. Pro Tips

Take it easy - It is easy to get caught up in the weeds when looking at the mountains of information provided. Some of your fellow RTM members have been known to create year over year spreadsheets to compare budgets over more time than is provided to you. Review what you can and focus on the what you can.

Other people have reviewed it before the RTM gets it - Remember that by the time the RTM sees the budgets they have been discussed for many, many weeks and approved by various boards. It is unlikely that the RTM will discover a big “gotcha” find that no one else has been wise enough to notice.

Comparison between our town and others in the area - While this seems like a good thought, it is difficult to do because budgets aren't always done the same way. Example: Our IT costs are spread in multiple departments, so total cost of IT is difficult to determine and compare. Some school districts pay their own snow plow expense; ours is included in Public Works budget. Our budget categories may not match those of other towns.

Detail, detail, detail – does it match the story - Each department's budget will include detail about head count, salary, contracted services and projects to be undertaken in the upcoming year. Again, individual projects by department should make be in line with the direction the town is heading long term. For example, because so much of what occurs in the town and schools is electronic, it generally would not make sense to make a big expenditure on a fleet of copiers unless there is a valid reason (perhaps making copies of budget books). Conversely, if the IT department asked for additional funding for expanded cloud storage or devices to record town meetings, that would be very valid.

A very detailed explanation of all the expense objects is attached at _____

7. What are Budget Outliers/Anomalies?

- a. Health Department – They don't follow the presentation used by other departments because we are part of a 3-town arrangement for our health district so presumably they prepare one report that they give to all towns. (There is a new Health Director coming this year so perhaps we can get closer.)
- b. Library – For unknown reasons, the pension costs of the library are not included in their narrative where they discuss what % of their budget is funded by the town. They do some of their own fundraising, so that percentage is important to some. The amount is included in the budget so not wrong, just a different calculation.
- c. Debt Services – Other Financing – Keep an eye on upcoming capital projects (i.e., Long Lots, Longshore, Police/Fire/EMS, CES). Those will be coming up soon and with interest rates higher than normal, debt service costs will rise. The town will attempt to refinance if rates go down but who knows what may happen. There are a lot of eyes on this, particularly at the BOF level, so you don't need to go too deep into the woods here.
- d. Railroad Parking Fund – This is separate because these fund balances can be seized by the state if they are not utilized for transportation-related services. All budgeted and spending is controlled by the police department. We need to keep ensuring that funds are being spent timely.
- e. **Sewer Fund? – I know nothing about this. Is there a source I can speak with?**

Bottom line – The RTM has a responsibility to review and approve both the Town and Education budgets. We have a lot of very good people working at town hall and on various volunteer boards who spend mountains of time in so many meetings to ensure that the information presented to us is complete and accurate and that is reflects the overall direction the town and schools are moving toward. While our role is important, we can't underestimate the others involved in this process and the work they have already done. We are governance, not management.