

**SOUTH FIRE DISTRICT
445 RANDOLPH ROAD
MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457**

**Board of Fire Commissioners
BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES
Tuesday, April 2, 2024 – 6:30 p.m.**

Held at the firehouse and available via Zoom - Meeting ID 822 3048 7512

Present: Commissioners Kleckowski, Giuliano, Thazhampallath, Pessina, and Gregorio (arrived at 6:35 p.m.);
Deputy Chief Fischer, Executive Assistant Alyse McEwen, Budget Analyst Kathy Kiley, Tax Collector Lee
Matterazzo

Absent: Chief Trzaski

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Kleckowski called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. BUDGET WORKSHOP

Deputy Chief Fischer indicated no significant changes have been made to the proposed budget since the first workshop except line 7906 – Special Services Unit (Dive Team). The increase is due to our having to replace aging equipment in an effort to stay ahead of the pending OSHA changes. Executive Assistant Alyse McEwen informed the commission she has not yet received firm quotes for worker's compensation, commercial, medical, cyber, and life and disability insurances, and uniforms. Budget Analyst Kathy Kiley advised that the mill rate scenario in the proposed budget is based on Mayor Florsheim's proposed mill rate. It's very difficult to set a mill rate until the city sets theirs. To answer Commissioner Pessina's question about keeping the mill rate flat, DC Fischer directed the commission's attention to Chief Trzaski's 4/2/24 email to the commission regarding grants received, and to be received, from the state (PILOT and Municipal Grants-in-Aid) and how they can be utilized to benefit taxpayers. The commission agreed these funds should be used to keep the mill rate flat with a zero increase in taxes.

Commissioner Thazhampallath asked that an "actual, year-to-date" column be added to the proposed budget document between "2024 Budget" and "Proposed 2025" to better identify how the department is performing against the defined budget figures for FY 2023-2024. Commissioner Giuliano recommended showing the 1% of property taxes not expected to be collected as negative income.

Copies of the proposed budget and related documents are attached.

4. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION to adjourn by Comm. Giuliano/Comm. Gregorio. The meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Submitted by,

Alyse McEwen

Alyse McEwen
Recording Secretary

ACCEPTED 5/13/23

The recording of this meeting is available upon request, according to Connecticut Freedom of Information Act requirements.

As of 04/02/2024

South Fire District
Budget 2024 and Proposed 2025
Special Meeting - Budget Workshop - 04/02/2024

	2024 Budget	Proposed 2025	Change	% Change
Motor Vehicle Property Tax Calculation				
Motor Vehicle Grand List	115,473,300	109,067,130	-6,406,170	-5.55%
Motor Vehicle Grand List @ 99%	114,318,567	107,976,459	-6,342,108	-5.55%
Motor Vehicle Mill Rate *	4.160	1.260	-2.900	-69.71%
Motor Vehicle Taxes Billed	480,369	137,425	-342,944	-71.39%

* Fixed rate based on Mayor Florsheim's proposed City of Middletown 31.2 mill rate, and CT motor vehicle 32.46 mill rate cap.

Real Estate and Personal Property Tax Calculation

Grand List	1,312,670	1,311,788	-881.887	-0.07%
Grand List @ 99%	1,299,543	1,298,670	-873.068	-0.07%
Mill Rate *	5.311	5.437	0.126	2.37%
Real Estate and Personal Property Taxes Billed **	6,420,861	7,132,717	711,856	11.09%

* Total Expenses minus 99% Motor Vehicle Taxes Billed minus Additional Income divided by Grand List @ 99%

Income

Property Tax Revenue at 99%	6,901,230	7,197,440	296,210	4.29%
Tax Supplement	15,000	15,000	0	0.00%
Interest and Liens	30,000	30,000	0	0.00%
Investment Income	10,000	15,000	5,000	50.00%
Municipal Grants and Revenue Sharing	0	0	0	0.00%
NRG	201,650	201,650	0	0.00%
State MV Fire District Grant	0	0	0	0.00%
	7,157,880	7,459,090	301,210	4.21%

Expenses

Utilities				
7201 · Electricity	22,500	22,500	0	0.00%
7202 · Water and Sewer	2,500	2,500	0	0.00%
7203 · Heating	15,000	15,000	0	0.00%
7204 · Telephone	3,000	3,000	0	0.00%
Total	43,000	43,000	0	0.00%
Apparatus / Vehicles				
7401 · Fuel	45,000	45,000	0	0.00%
7403 · Vehicle Repairs	40,000	40,000	0	0.00%
7403-1 · Apparatus Preventative Maint.	12,650	12,650	0	0.00%
7404 · NFPA/OSHA Compliance	9,850	25,000	15,150	153.81%
7406 · Vehicle Supplies	2,000	2,000	0	0.00%
Total	109,500	124,650	15,150	13.84%
Insurance				
7501 · Insurance - Workers Compensation	177,685	202,016	24,331	13.69%
7502 · Insurance - Commercial Package	55,000	55,000	0	0.00%
7503 · Insurance - Medical	995,447	1,095,531	100,084	10.05%
7504 · Insurance - Cyber	6,515	6,515	0	0.00%
7509 · Insurance - Life and Disability	56,586	57,306	720	1.27%
7512 · Pension - Defined Contribution	364,055	387,088	23,033	6.33%
7513 · Unused Sick Time	23,796	20,321	-3,475	-14.60%
Total	1,679,084	1,823,777	144,693	8.62%

As of 04/02/2024

Salaries and Wages

7601 • Salaries - Fire Department	3,107,984	3,157,136	49,152	1.58%
7602 • Salaries - Administrative	190,000	190,000	0	0.00%
7603 • Replacement / Call Backs	671,539	707,884	36,345	5.41%
7604 • Fringe Benefits	132,942	139,885	6,943	5.22%
7606 • PEB - Uncompensated Absences	10,000	10,000	0	0.00%
7607 • PEB - Heart and Hypertension	206,489	206,489	0	0.00%
7609 • Employer - Social Security	255,202	260,642	5,440	2.13%
7610 • Employer - Medicare	59,685	60,957	1,272	2.13%
Total	4,633,841	4,732,992	99,151	2.14%

Administration

7701 • Tax Collector's Expense	24,000	24,000	0	0.00%
7702 • Professional Org / Periodicals	2,675	3,281	606	22.65%
7703 • Office Expenses	3,500	3,500	0	0.00%
7704 • Auditor	7,750	7,750	0	0.00%
7705 • Professional Development	8,500	8,500	0	0.00%
7706 • Postage	4,000	4,000	0	0.00%
7707 • Contingency	50,000	50,000	0	0.00%
7708 • Commissioner's Compensation	9,000	9,000	0	0.00%
7709 • Activity Expense	3,500	4,000	500	14.29%
7710 • Professional Services	35,000	30,100	-4,900	-14.00%
7712 • Office Equipment	1,200	1,200	0	0.00%
7713 • Actuarial Services	3,300	3,300	0	0.00%
7714 • Advertising / Voting	6,200	8,400	2,200	35.48%
7715 • Lien Fees	1,200	1,200	0	0.00%
7716 • Archive Services	1,000	1,000	0	0.00%
7717 • Software Support	53,100	59,010	5,910	11.13%
Total	213,925	218,241	4,316	2.02%

Physical Plant

7801 • Repairs Building	20,000	20,000	0	0.00%
7802 • Supplies Maintenance	8,900	8,900	0	0.00%
7803 • Services	13,000	13,000	0	0.00%
7805 • Equipment	4,600	4,600	0	0.00%
Total	46,500	46,500	0	0.00%

Fire Department Operations

7901 • Emergency Medical Equipment	12,500	12,500	0	0.00%
7902 • Computer Equip & Supplies	2,000	2,000	0	0.00%
7903 • Training	37,500	37,500	0	0.00%
7904 • Fire Education and Prevention (renamed)	4,500	7,500	3,000	66.67%
7905 • Fire Fighting Equipment	14,000	14,000	0	0.00%
7906 • Special Service Units	7,000	10,000	3,000	42.86%
7907 • Fire Marshal's Office	4,000	4,000	0	0.00%
7909 • Uniforms	31,000	40,000	9,000	29.03%
7910 • Protective Clothing	35,000	50,000	15,000	42.86%
7911 • Communications	4,500	4,500	0	0.00%
7912 • Cellular Phones	5,600	5,600	0	0.00%
7913 • Breathing Air & Oxygen	1,500	1,500	0	0.00%
7915 • Medical Testing	4,180	12,080	7,900	189.00%
7916 • Breathing Apparatus-Test & Repair	2,800	2,800	0	0.00%
Total	166,080	203,980	37,900	22.82%

8999 • CNR Contribution

265,950	265,950	0	0.00%
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Total Expense

7,157,880	7,459,090	301,210	4.21%
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South Fire District

2024 – 2025 Budget Notes

Income

Motor Vehicle Property Tax Revenue and Tax Supplement – This calculation is estimated based on the Common Council's approval of Mayor Florsheim's proposed 31.2 mill rate and the State of Connecticut motor vehicle 32.46 mill rate cap, allowing South Fire District to collect motor vehicle taxes using a maximum 1.26 mill rate. *Please note: the mill rate is subject to appeal for a period of 15 days after Common Council approval.*

Investment Income – a conservative increase due to the increase in interest rates on unrestricted funds.

Expenses

7404 – NFPA/OSHA Compliance – Increase due to additional OSHA requirements being imposed.

7501 – Insurance – Workers Compensation – Estimated using a 9% increase. Actual quoting process closer to July 1.

7502 – Insurance – Commercial Package – Estimated using a 6% increase. Actual quoting process closer to July 1.

7503 – Insurance – Medical – Increase due to staffing and family status changes based on current premiums. An estimated increase of 6% has been used for the period of 01/01/2025 – 06/30/2025, however, we are still awaiting quotes from our carrier.

7504 – Insurance – Cyber – awaiting quote from our carrier in April.

7509 – Insurance – Life and Disability – Increase is due to staffing changes and salary increases.

7512 – Pension – Defined Contribution – Increase due to staffing changes and salary increases.

7513 – Unused Sick Time – Decrease due to staffing changes.

7601 – Salaries – Fire Department – Increase due to staffing changes and salary increases.

7602 – Salaries – Administrative – Increase due to salary increases.

7603 – Replacements/Call Backs – Calculated based on overtime hours in previous fiscal year and using new salary rates. *As of the payroll of April 4th we are currently at \$412,363.63 which is 61.4% of budget. When underfunding this line, it also affects the following:*

- 7609 – Employer – Social Security
- 7610 – Employer – Medicare
- 7501 – Insurance - Workers Compensation – Each year we submit our expected payroll for our worker's comp carrier to provide a quote for the next fiscal year. However, when audited annually and we are over the expected payroll, we are billed for the difference.

Unfortunately, we cannot anticipate emergencies, illness, or injuries. Regardless, it is fiscally irresponsible to underfund this line. This causes a strain on the rest of the budget and makes it more difficult to operate within our lines.

7604 – Fringe Benefits – Increase due fringe benefits paid associated with salary and staffing changes.

7609 – Employer – Social Security, and 7610 – Employer – Medicare – Increase due to salary increases, and increase in 7603 – Replacements/Call Backs.

7702 – Professional Org/Periodicals - Increase due to increase in professional memberships and fees.

7709 – Activity Expense – Increase due to increased participation in activities/events.

7710 – Professional Services – Decrease due to reduction of entry level and promotional exams.

7714 – Advertising/Voting - Increase due to increase in advertising costs, printing costs (tri-fold brochure), additional voting card, card programming and voting machine setup.

7717 – Software Support – Estimated Increase due to increase in software and support.

7904 – Fire Education and Prevention – Increase due to increasing number of requests for external events.

7906 – Special Service Units – Increase due to maintenance and repair costs and possible gear replacement.

7909 – Uniforms – Estimated. Current increase due to price some quotes received, and anticipated hiring of two new firefighters.

7910 – Protective Clothing – Increase due to price increases, and anticipated hiring of two new firefighters.

7915 – Medical Testing – Increase due to anticipated NFPA 1582 physical requirement and anticipated hiring of two new firefighters.

South Fire District
Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual
 July 1, 2023 through April 2, 2024

	Jul 1, '23 - Apr 2, 24	Budget	\$ Over Budget	% of Budget
Income				
4101 · Property Tax Revenue	7,245,202.96	6,901,230.00	343,972.96	104.98%
4102 · Interest and Liens	35,734.30	30,000.00	5,734.30	119.11%
4103 · Tax Refunds	-7,227.35	0.00	-7,227.35	100.00%
4104 · Fees	4,313.86	0.00	4,313.86	100.00%
4105 · Prior Year Tax Collections	47,240.34	0.00	47,240.34	100.00%
4107 · Tax Supplemental MV	39,320.74	15,000.00	24,320.74	262.14%
4109 · Grants - FEMA	62,312.38	0.00	62,312.38	100.00%
4125 · Grants	37,501.65	0.00	37,501.65	100.00%
4126 · Contributions - Individuals	25.00	0.00	25.00	100.00%
4127 · Contributions - Corporate	5,250.00	0.00	5,250.00	100.00%
4204 · Municipal Grants & Rev. Sharing	710,643.93	0.00	710,643.93	100.00%
4210 · NRG Tax Revenue	201,650.00	201,650.00	0.00	100.00%
4301 · Investment Income	82,439.30	10,000.00	72,439.30	824.39%
4901 · Miscellaneous Income	31,712.35	0.00	31,712.35	100.00%
Total Income	8,496,119.46	7,157,880.00	1,338,239.46	118.70%
Expense				
7201 · Electricity	13,625.58	22,500.00	-8,874.42	60.56%
7202 · Water and Sewer	1,960.25	2,500.00	-539.75	78.41%
7203 · Heating	7,582.82	15,000.00	-7,417.18	50.55%
7204 · Telephone	2,098.48	3,000.00	-901.52	69.95%
7401 · Fuel	27,425.10	45,000.00	-17,574.90	60.95%
7403-1 · Apparatus Preventative Maint.	10,184.76	12,650.00	-2,465.24	80.51%
7403 · Vehicle Repairs	38,210.43	40,000.00	-1,789.57	95.53%
7404 · NFPA/OSHA Compliance	13,542.06	9,850.00	3,692.06	137.48%
7406 · Vehicle Supplies	1,082.42	2,000.00	-917.58	54.12%
7501 · Insurance-Workers Compensation	174,976.00	177,685.00	-2,709.00	98.48%
7502 · Insurance - Commercial Package	38,828.00	55,000.00	-16,172.00	70.60%
7503 · Insurance - Medical	716,822.84	995,447.00	-278,624.16	72.01%
7504 · Insurance - Cyber	6,515.00	6,515.00	0.00	100.00%
7509 · Insurance - Life and Disability	39,030.47	56,586.00	-17,555.53	68.98%
7512 · Pension - Defined Contribution	267,745.81	364,055.00	-96,309.19	73.55%
7513 · Unused Sick Time	0.00	23,796.00	-23,796.00	0.00%
7601 · Salaries - Fire Department	2,333,235.07	3,107,984.00	-774,748.93	75.07%
7602 · Salaries - Administrative	127,309.09	190,000.00	-62,690.91	67.01%
7603 · Replacement / Call Backs	412,363.63	671,539.00	-259,175.37	61.41%
7604 · Fringe Benefits	119,954.09	132,942.00	-12,987.91	90.23%
7606 · PEB-Uncompensated Absences Exp	0.00	10,000.00	-10,000.00	0.00%
7607 · PEB-Heart and Hypertension	39,017.90	206,489.00	-167,471.10	18.90%
7609 · Employer - Social Security	180,059.41	255,202.00	-75,142.59	70.56%
7610 · Employer - Medicare	42,110.87	59,685.00	-17,574.13	70.56%

South Fire District
Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual
 July 1, 2023 through April 2, 2024

	<u>Jul 1, '23 - Apr 2, 24</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>\$ Over Budget</u>	<u>% of Budget</u>
Expense, continued				
7701 · Tax Collector's Expense	14,239.79	24,000.00	-9,760.21	59.33%
7702 · Professional Org / Periodicals	2,009.41	2,675.00	-665.59	75.12%
7703 · Office Expenses	2,735.25	3,500.00	-764.75	78.15%
7704 · Auditor	8,475.00	7,750.00	725.00	109.36%
7705 · Professional Development	8,500.00	8,500.00	0.00	100.00%
7706 · Postage	1,608.14	4,000.00	-2,391.86	40.20%
7707 · Contingency	0.00	50,000.00	-50,000.00	0.00%
7708 · Commissioner's Compensation	7,500.00	9,000.00	-1,500.00	83.33%
7709 · Activity Expense	2,605.86	3,500.00	-894.14	74.45%
7710 · Professional Services	18,366.60	35,000.00	-16,633.40	52.48%
7712 · Office Equipment	97.40	1,200.00	-1,102.60	8.12%
7713 · Actuarial Services	3,150.00	3,300.00	-150.00	95.46%
7714 · Advertising / Voting	2,386.11	6,200.00	-3,813.89	38.49%
7715 · Lien Fees	0.00	1,200.00	-1,200.00	0.00%
7716 · Archive Services	585.00	1,000.00	-415.00	58.50%
7717 · Software Support	47,197.89	53,100.00	-5,902.11	88.89%
7801 · Repairs Building	18,700.22	20,000.00	-1,299.78	93.50%
7802 · Supplies Maintenance	7,188.32	8,900.00	-1,711.68	80.77%
7803 · Services	9,182.37	13,000.00	-3,817.63	70.63%
7805 · Equipment	4,519.84	4,600.00	-80.16	98.26%
7901 · Emergency Medical Equipment	8,658.40	12,500.00	-3,841.60	69.27%
7902 · Computer Equip & Supplies	1,179.44	2,000.00	-820.56	58.97%
7903 · Training	28,100.63	37,500.00	-9,399.37	74.94%
7904 · Fire Education and Prevention	4,224.87	4,500.00	-275.13	93.89%
7905 · Fire Fighting Equipment	16,453.96	14,000.00	2,453.96	117.53%
7906 · Special Service Units	4,217.59	7,000.00	-2,782.41	60.25%
7907 · Fire Marshal's Office	2,424.29	4,000.00	-1,575.71	60.61%
7909 · Uniforms	33,524.96	31,000.00	2,524.96	108.15%
7910 · Protective Clothing	32,480.66	35,000.00	-2,519.34	92.80%
7911 · Communications	2,753.87	4,500.00	-1,746.13	61.20%
7912 · Cellular Phones	5,654.92	5,600.00	54.92	100.98%
7913 · Breathing Air & Oxygen	1,270.37	1,500.00	-229.63	84.69%
7915 · Medical Testing	4,341.00	4,180.00	161.00	103.85%
7916 · Breathing Apparatus-Test Repair	972.58	2,800.00	-1,827.42	34.74%
8999 · CNR Current Year	196,653.86	265,950.00	-69,296.14	73.94%
Total Expense	5,115,638.68	7,157,880.00	-2,042,241.32	71.47%



Mill Rate Comparison

Assessment	7/1/2023 Tax Bill	7/1/2024 Tax Bill	Change
	Mill Rate 5.311	Proposed Mill Rate 5.437	
\$100,000	\$531.10	\$543.70	\$12.60
\$150,000	\$796.65	\$815.55	\$18.90
\$200,000	\$1,062.20	\$1,087.40	\$25.20
\$250,000	\$1,327.75	\$1,359.25	\$31.50
\$300,000	\$1,593.30	\$1,631.10	\$37.80
\$350,000	\$1,858.85	\$1,902.95	\$44.10
\$400,000	\$2,124.40	\$2,174.80	\$50.40
\$450,000	\$2,389.95	\$2,446.65	\$56.70



City of Middletown OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

2024-04-01

For Immediate Release

Contact: Mayor Benjamin D. Florsheim, 860-638-4801

A Message from the Mayor on the proposed 2024-25 budget

To my fellow Middletown residents:

Three factors loomed large over this year's budget deliberations: one at the local level, one at the state level, and one at the federal level of government. As in years past, it is my hope today to present these factors as clearly as I can in concert with a breakdown of proposed changes in my budget. (The budget documents can be viewed here: <https://middletownct.gov/budget>).

First, I will touch on what this budget means for taxpayers and city operations. For taxpayers, the proposed mill rate of 31.2, an increase of 2.9 mills from the 2023-24 budget, would mean an annual increase of approximately \$500 for a home with an appraised (fair market) value of \$250,000, or a little under \$42 per month. Operationally, the proposed budget is largely a "status quo" budget, with the majority of the increase driven by contractually obligated wages and benefits for City of Middletown and Board of Education employees. Where we have proposed new spending, we have done so with a surgical focus on improving city operations and making local government more efficient and effective, with the goal of delivering taxpayers the best possible value for their dollar.

At the local level, the biggest factor looming over the development of this budget has been the continuing impact of the mandatory 2022-23 property revaluation, which saw residential property values in Middletown skyrocket by an average of about 40%. In response, last year I proposed and the Common Council adopted a budget that reduced the city mill rate from 35.7 to 28.3. Even with this significant reduction -- technically a "tax cut" -- homeowners still saw increases in their

property tax bill due to the dramatic increase in assessments. That increase last year (also about \$500 on average) would have been more onerous if our adopted budget did not dip into the City's general fund to drive the mill rate down as much as prudent. This year, we have less ability to tap that reserve while staying within the fiscal guidelines adopted by the Common Council some years ago, which have allowed us to maintain a AAA bond rating.

At the state level, I along with my fellow municipal leaders have found ourselves coming to grips with an unfortunate reality this year. The reality is that state leaders have learned they can claim they are cutting taxes (meaning sales and income taxes) when in fact what they are doing is shifting the cost of general government services onto cities and towns, whereby the cities and towns are forced to raise the lost revenue back at the local level (meaning higher property taxes). I don't use the term "forced" lightly; budgeting, when done correctly, is about making tough decisions, and in some cases when municipal aid from the state has disappeared, the programs it paid for have simply been eliminated at the local level if adequate replacement revenue can't be found. But more often, and increasingly in recent years, that option does not exist. Why? Because many of the programs being created and continued -- but, crucially, not funded -- by our state government are mandatory, not optional.

Presently and historically, the impact of this approach has been most significant in the area of K-12 education, which in Connecticut is lopsidedly funded by municipal property tax revenue. According to the Institute of Education Sciences, only four states -- New York, New Hampshire, Nebraska, and Missouri -- rank higher than Connecticut for how much education funding comes from local government (as opposed to state or federal); of those four states, one (New Hampshire) has no state income tax whatsoever, and all have some form of county government which can assist localities with the raising and managing of education dollars on a regional level. It is for this straightforward reason that our state has such profound levels of educational inequality. In the extraordinarily direct correlation we have created between the wealth of a particular neighborhood or district and the performance of its schools, Connecticut stands ignominiously apart from every other state in the union.

However, the problem has spread to other policy areas. For many years, the State of Connecticut failed to regularly make payments into its retirement system as obligations accumulated, a bill that began to come meaningfully due when the 2008 financial crisis decimated the state's economy. Starting in 2011, the state resumed making payments into the retirement fund, which was good, but it did so by adopting budgets that dramatically slashed aid to towns and cities, as well as scaling back or freezing state investment in critical social services, which was bad. There have been few meaningful steps since then, other than recent adjustments to the state's Payment In Lieu of Taxes program, to ease the squeeze on local governments and property taxpayers that has been tightening for over a decade. Meanwhile, during the same period, significant new laws have been added to the statute books -- from police accountability to early voting to fair rent commissions to school curricula and beyond -- with either no funding at all or funding that is completely inadequate to set up and actually administer these policies.

None of what I'm attempting to spell out here is particularly groundbreaking or unique to Middletown -- although I would argue that Middletown, with a fully-funded pension and AAA bond rating that we have worked diligently to maintain and build upon for the future, has modeled a

better approach to fiscal responsibility and weathered the new reality better than many of our peer communities. Indeed, municipal leaders and legislators of both parties have been banging the drum on most of these issues for years. I lay it out here not to cast blame on an agency or a person, but to offer important context for the institutional constraints that we, as your elected officials, are facing as we work to manage our communities and address the cost of living crisis facing our residents. Thus, the reason you don't feel like your taxes have been cut when you read in the news that the state has been on a tax-cutting spree is as simple and as complex as that: your taxes weren't really cut. They were just passed on to your city, your library, and your schools.

At the federal level, the biggest impact falls on the Board of Education's budget. This is because one-time federal pandemic assistance dollars, from the American Rescue Plan Act and other programs, are mostly gone as of this year. Unlike some communities who will now find themselves in an even more difficult situation, Middletown Public Schools has wisely directed most of their federal aid to non-recurring needs such as capital projects and pilot programs rather than using it to cover wages or create permanent new positions. I commend Dr. Vázquez Matos and the Board of Education for this approach, as well as the proposed budget they adopted.

Even so, however, the loss of this additional funding is having an impact in an environment where everything from school supplies to health insurance to bricks and mortar costs significantly more than it did four years ago. My budget proposal revises the 5.88% operational increase requested by the Board of Education to 4%, with the understanding that this will pose more difficult choices to be made in collaboration with the Council and the MPS administration. Here too, however, we are looking for opportunities to continue a program that has proven effective and financially prudent. An example I am excited about, which is part of the City's proposed budget, is to create a permanent funding line to provide school-based food pantries at Beman Middle School and Middletown High School in collaboration with St. Vincent de Paul. Kids can't learn if they can't afford to eat, and this new line item will ensure that the disappearance of pandemic assistance doesn't mean the disappearance of an essential lifeline for students and families.

This brings me back to the changes I am proposing in this year's budget. For all the grief I've given state government in this overview, I will be the first to admit that Middletown has not been as effective in the past as we should have been at accessing those state resources that are available to us. In part, this is because we have had an excellent legislative delegation in Middletown who has done much of the legwork for us when it comes to bringing dollars back home. But if we aren't identifying and asking for the right funding, even our legislators cannot help us. In the process of developing this proposal, we identified numerous capital needs requested by department heads that were potentially eligible for the state's Local Capital Improvement Program, or LoCIP. Two positions proposed in the Department of Economic and Community development, a grants administrator and a projects manager, will greatly increase our capacity to obtain and administer funding of this type from a variety of sources, an investment I believe will pay for itself in added value within the fiscal year. Crucially, they will also assist with our long-term, big-picture capital planning process, including the major renovation or replacement of major city assets that are nearing obsolescence: City Hall, Macdonough School, the Russell Library, and numerous road, sidewalk, water, and sewer projects.

am also proposing one new staff member apiece in our HR and Payroll divisions — administrative offices within City Hall that have been overwhelmed with work as we continue to review the city's job descriptions and compensation structure and work to recruit a diverse and talented workforce. Finally, this budget proposal also includes funding for two additional officers at the Middletown Police Department, in keeping with past years, as we work to provide full staffing to the agency. It also continues our investment in embedding clinical and community services within MPD itself, building on our unique and successful partnership with local mental health providers under DMHAS/River Valley Services to provide meaningful help to people in crisis while improving public safety.

I am grateful every day for the opportunity to serve and make a difference in this community, and I appreciate your taking the time to read this budget message. We face many challenges on many fronts — as a city, as a state, as a nation — and I have tried to shed light on some of them here to illustrate the obstacles we face while tackling cost of living for our residents. I hope that over the coming months, you will attend or tune in to the Common Council's budget hearings to learn more, share your feedback, and help us achieve a final product that keeps Middletown moving forward.

Sincerely,


Mayor Ben Florsheim


April 1, 2024


*In Connecticut, the tax value of your home tax rate is determined as follows: (Assessed Value * Mill Rate) / 1000 - The assessed value is 70 percent of the appraised (fair market value) determined by the assessor. Example: If the assessor determines that the market value of a home is \$100,000, the assessed value will be \$70,000.

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