

Frequently Asked Questions

The purpose of this document is to list the answers to frequent questions and concerns that arise. The document is intended to be a living document, that will be edited and updated over time. Please send questions or comments to assistant@woodstockct.gov

Special thanks to the various departments, boards, and all those who helped provide information to make this document possible.



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Ambulance and EMS

[Woodstock Volunteer Fire Association](#) is the licensed organization that governs the Woodstock Emergency Medical Services. This is the only transport agency for the Town of Woodstock. The Town of Woodstock operates two ambulances, both of which are housed and dispatched out of WVFA Station 76.

WVFA Station 76 holds the license with the State of Connecticut, OEMS, The Department of Health, and the Operating Certificate with Day Kimball Hospital. Accordingly, WVFA oversees ambulance operations. They have an EMS Administrator and an Assistant Administrator on staff who must hold certifications of EMT or greater. They work closely with the Chief and Deputy Chief to handle daily operations. The WVFA Executive Committee oversees the Administration.

The Woodstock Ambulance (WEMS) was established in the early 1970's by WVFA Station 76. Initially, this service was fully staffed by volunteers, but as call volume increased it became necessary to gradually transition to paid EMT's and EMR's. Up until just recently the EMT's were paid \$17.25 an hour and we were staffed by these paid crews from 6:00am to 6:00pm. However, the ambulance shifts were becoming nearly impossible to fill consistently even with our members devoting all their time and energy attempting to make it work. This led to a salary review with surrounding agencies and the need to pay comparative wages to hire and retain appropriately trained personnel. As a result, the membership of WVFA voted to approve a motion to move our ambulance savings to payroll in order to offer a competitive wage.

The transfer of savings funds to payroll that are currently funding our dedicated medical personnel was set up as a trial to save and retain this vital service. WVFA developed this program with the insight and approval of our town officials and without any funding from outside of the department, however, we have been very transparent that in order to continue this service we will need an increase in the current budget of \$262,164. This is a budget item that we hope will be approved. It would cost exponentially more to bring in an outside agency to provide ambulance services to the town. If the additional funding is not approved, we would have to return to volunteer EMT/EMR ambulance staffing resulting in decreased staffing and increased response times.

In 2022 WEMS responded to 652 ambulance calls. By law, the Town of Woodstock must provide ambulance service for its residents. The source of this service is determined by the Selectmen and the Board of Finance. We at WVFA have laid out a responsible and cost-effective plan to continue our long history of ambulance service to our residents with appropriately trained and caring personnel.

From the January 17, 2023 Meeting and emails:

1. WVFA President Russ Downer Jr. reviewed the progress made toward 24/7 coverage with Woodstock EMS to date. The number of EMS personnel available to staff Woodstock has been at an all-time low for 4-5 years and much of this was due to offered pay rates. Changes have been made to raise pay rates and hire new staffing. Since December 3rd, no first duty call has been missed and 10 new hires have been onboarded.

2. WVFA Chief Eric Young shared that the old rate was lowest pay rate in the area, which greatly impacted filling EMS shifts. The WFVA is currently borrowing funds from their own ambulance savings to start and fund the new 24/7 program with increased pay. All shifts through February are currently filled with the exception of 42 hours.
3. \$262,614 is the proposed increase to budget requested that would go directly to the payroll to continue the new improved EMS 24/7 coverage. The total amount the EMS is seeking from the town for Fiscal Year '24 is \$477,854.
 - a. Jay Swan noted that DKH is currently having ambulance coverage concerns. There are currently many regional ambulance coverage issues. He has been working with other towns to monitor how their ambulance services are working out. There is a state law that states: towns must fund EMS for residents. Thompson and Putnam have formed a collaborative EMS program but currently are not able to absorb another town into that program at this time.
4. What happens with the insurance reimbursement that comes back to the EMS?
 - a. \$190,000 was brought in by billing for ambulance service. This money goes to back to EMS to cover expenses for services.
5. Can you contact OEMS for rates you may charge for each transport, and how to apply. Many people would say you have a volunteer organization and services should be free. I have been there years ago before I researched for the Bethel CT volunteer fire department as costs were going up and income was going down. Besides establishing a billing and collection system, it's advantageous to contract with a professional company who can do the various services and they would only charge a percentage of collections. Per OEMS regulations, ambulance billing revenue can only be used for ambulance related costs. You could contact your mutual aid departments to learn how they handle charging for services and what their experience has been with billing insurance companies and if they contract professional services. In Bethel we collect enough funds to help in replacing aging ambulances and have contracted with a paid staffing agency to supply EMT's during shifts that we don't have enough volunteers to cover all of the 24/7 needs. I wish you well in obtaining what you need to continue your vital service. If you have recruiting issues, something that helped us greatly was working with the Board of Education to establish a state certified EMT program in the high school. Some of the training takes place in our fire department, and many of the students become members. Some, also join the fire service.
 - a. The EMS currently bills in accordance with state and federal guidelines.
6. Fire tax? How would this work-would this help the problem?
 - a. This is something being considered; there is not enough time for it to happen for this year's budget. If it goes to a vote and passes it would be in effect for the next fiscal year.

ARPA

ARPA, or the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, was signed into law March 11, 2021 by President Biden. Funding is provided by the U.S. Treasury and is intended to provide support to the Town in responding to the impact of COVID-19 and in its efforts to contain COVID-19 on its community, residents, and businesses. Guidelines are based on the U.S. Treasury Final Rule, which was approved by the U.S. Treasury on January 6th, 2022. The town and the Board of Education each received separate ARPA funding.

The Town of Woodstock was awarded \$2,325,579.67, which was paid in two tranches. At the January 20, 2022 Board of Selectmen meeting, the Board unanimously elected the standard allowance under the revenue loss option. This allows the government to use ARPA funds towards government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue due to the pandemic as follows:

- Provides governments with a broad latitude to use funds for provisions of government services, including but not limited to:
 - Maintenance or pay-go funded building of infrastructure, including roads
 - School or educational services
 - Environmental remediation
 - Police, fire, and other public safety services
 - Cybersecurity including hardware, software, and protection of critical infrastructure
 - Health services

ARPA funding may not be used for the following:

- Paying down unfunded pensions
- Applying as matching funds toward other federal grants
- Paying interest or principal on outstanding debt
- Legal settlement payments, except as it relates to matters that require the provisions of services that would respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency
- Contributing to “rainy day” funds
- Offset taxes

ARPA funds may be used to hire a program administrator or consultant which may include salary and fringe benefits.

All ARPA expenditures approved by the Board of Selectmen go to the Board of Finance for final approval. The town has a dedicated email address, arpa2021@woodstockvt.gov for citizens to use to ask questions or make suggestions for ARPA funds.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. Has any ARPA fund spending resulted in an increase to operational budgets? For example, building a new field that now needs to be maintained?
 - a. Yes, equipment has been purchased for the Highway Department, Fire Departments, and Town Hall HVAC will all need proper maintenance.

Assessor's Department

The Office of the Assessor is responsible for discovering, listing, and valuing all properties located within the Town. There are three types of taxes that we are responsible for. They are real estate, motor vehicle, and personal property. It is the Assessor's responsibility to value all properties fairly, uniformly, and equitably for Ad valorem taxation. All properties in town reflect the fair market value of the last revaluation, which was for the October 1, 2021 Grand List.

Our duties also include handling exemption programs for the blind, disabled, elderly, veterans who served during wartime, and disabled veterans. The elderly and disabled programs are income-based.

The ultimate role of the assessor is the fair administration of the local property tax.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. I am not sure if you have the tax freeze on elderly, that might help turning over Prop 46 to not be so concerning. Freeze program: allows eligible homeowners (over the age of 60 or 50 for a surviving spouse) who applied for this program before May 15, 1980 to have their property tax benefits capped at 1986-1987 levels or \$2,000 (whichever is greater.) The State reimburses at 100% for this program.
 - a. Regarding the freeze program, that program has not allowed new applicants since 1978. There are other programs for veterans, elderly, and disabled that are income qualified. More information can be found here:
<https://www.woodstockct.gov/assessors-department>
2. Perhaps taxes could have a structure that required house values over a certain valuation like \$600,000 to pay a surcharge?
 - a. As far as a different pay structure, we must value per the CT State Law, which is 70% for appraisals.
3. The reval this past year was incredibly high. Please explain.
 - a. Pursuant to Connecticut State Law, every municipality must complete a new town-wide revaluation every five (5) years. Woodstock last implemented a town-wide revaluation for the October 1, 2021. However, Public Act 22-74 will require Woodstock to perform another town-wide revaluation effective October 1, 2025 (one year earlier than scheduled). Section 7 of PA 22-74 changed the dates municipalities perform revaluations in order to both "balance the cycle" and "align municipalities based on their region." It will then resume to every five (5) years thereafter.

Board of Education

Sec. 10-220. Duties of boards of education. (a) Each local or regional board of education shall maintain good public elementary and secondary schools, implement the educational interests of the state, as defined in section 10-4a, and provide such other educational activities as in its judgment will best serve the interests of the school district.

There are nine members of the Board of Education, who are elected for a term of six years.

From the BOE PowerPoint Presentation by Superintendent Viktor Toth at the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. CT General Statute 10-34 states that “any Town in which a high school is not maintained shall pay the whole of the tuition fees of pupils attending such school or academy”. This tuition cannot be restricted by local ordinance. The financial arrangement in for high school education in Woodstock is the only one of its kind in the State, if not the Nation and places tremendous limitations on both the educational and municipal budgets. He noted that providing for our youngest students and maintaining public safety are the two most important responsibilities of any community.
2. Woodstock is ranked 87th of 169 median household income, 147th in equalized mill rate and 164th in per pupil expenditure. The ranking of median household income and equalized mill rate will result in \$901,000 in State Education Funding to be eliminated by 2030. All of this reduction in funding will have to come from the PreK-8 budget.
3. The 2023-2024 Budget Projection includes the following:
 - a. \$490,000 increase in contractual obligations
 - b. \$66,000 increase in heating oil
 - c. \$63,000 increase in transportation costs
 - d. Loss of \$128,000 in education state aid
 - e. Woodstock Academy tuition increase of 5% resulting in total cost of \$18,845 per pupil
4. Victor Toth reviewed losses in schools since 2012 which include the following: 14 Classroom Teachers, 13 Regular Education Paraprofessionals, WMS Librarian, WES Librarian, WES Computer Program, WMS 7th Grade Spanish, WES Gifted Program, WMS Gifted Program, Language Arts Coordinator, Math Coordinator and Technology Coordinator. All Woodstock Public School sports have been removed from budget and are now Pay to Play teams.
5. Other impacts to the quality of Education in Woodstock due to finance restrictions to consider are: The education budget is unable to budget for any capital expenditures, the buildings and systems require regular maintenance and upgrades including the Public Address Systems, HVAC systems and structural maintenance. Budgetary limitations cause the School System to wait until something fails, and then fund it as an emergency expense and Campus Safety cannot even be addressed.
6. In conclusion: Nearly one third of Education budget is controlled by High School costs that Woodstock has no control over because of the state statute. The brunt of all budget

limitations is absorbed by PreK-8 Schools and Municipal budget. There is currently no room to maintain or improve services and voters currently do not have the ability to approve or decline a reasonable budget request.

BOE Member Michele Woz wanted to note that boards are governed by state statutes that outline responsibilities. She wants it clear that boards are limited in what they can do in many situations.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. Are the middle school and elementary schools and properties town owned?
 - a. Yes
2. Are the middle school and elementary school staff considered town employees?
 - a. They are employees of the Board of Education and are paid with town funds.
3. What the ratio is of teacher to students and support to student in the different schools.
 - a. Victor Toth responded that PreK and Kindergarten classes average 16-17 students per class
 - b. Grades 1-8 range in class size from 18 to 24 kids
 - c. Special Ed is mandated by statute and changes on a year-to-year basis depending on student needs.
4. What is the ratio of paraprofessionals to classes?
5. Special needs students to Spec education teachers/support personnel?
6. Could the board of ED address declining enrollment and is that factored into the 2023 projections, or is it based on current enrollment?
7. Would be beneficial to the town to lock in all fuel as 1 entity instead of separate BOE and General Government fuel purchases.
 - a. DPW John Navarro noted his past good and bad experiences with locking in pricing of fuel.
8. To the School System- how do you address students from outside towns?
 - a. Any student that establishes residency is entitled to education. There is a committee to address this concern and please let the BOE know if you know of these people that are not Woodstock residents in our school system.
9. I do think hearing from parents is pivotal. For instance, we did not agree that the middle school had mandatory 7th grade Spanish for all the WMS students. It could have been an opt in program for students to save funds. It is a small example, yet an example. Both my kids wanted to opt out of 7th grade Spanish, and we did not have a path to do so.
10. With the schools all having iPads to they need \$200,000 worth of textbooks? There are lots of options to download material at a much lower cost. My children have informed me that the rarely use their textbooks in middle school and when they do the teacher often copies pages out of it and scans it into their iPad anyway. There is a lot of waste in the school budget like this. For example, our kids have technology class, this class is teaching them to write code for the internet for items they cannot apply to the real world. Why isn't this class an off shoot of LA and the kids are taught how to use the internet for proper research and skill building for office jobs. Similar to what library used to do, but online instead of in books, since libraries are not widely used anymore.

11. I know that the Board of Ed just signed a contract with Woodstock Academy that was not very advantageous for the town. In that contract did they leave us wiggle room to not have to pay the extra assessment? I noticed that they did not include that number in the tuition number last night and did not bring it up. They are not using that money as they keep stating and conveniently the amount is very similar to what the ambulance needs.
 - a. The Woodstock Academy does not separate a capital assessment fee. They simply identify a tuition rate that is the same for all sending towns.
12. What I picked up on from their presentation was their perennial need of more money and that we have plenty more to send them if we want to. It is never enough. I am not a believer that more money thrown at education is the solution to better learning. The gentlemen who made the point about home schooling is right. It does not take a lot of money to home school and get great results. Why should public school need so much more? I don't know when school staffing became so complicated. We typically had a single teacher for a class size of 25-30 through all grades and it worked. I hear all these new names for a variety of school staff positions that never existed in the past and I interpret that as wasted money and pampering of students.
13. The BOE pointed out that Woodstock rates very low in terms of dollars spent per student. Again, I do not think there is a direct correlation between spending and results. Look no further than some of our cities in CT (i.e., New Haven) to see that. It would have been interesting if the BOE presenter had also included a slide on how Woodstock student performance ranks in our state in comparison to other towns. My guess is that it would be much higher than our ranking for money spent. I expect we get more efficiency out of our education dollars spent here than other towns/cities do and that probably has to do with demographics in our town. We should not be embarrassed as they tried to say we should feel.
14. The BOE showed the Ability to Pay chart. That is meaningless. Just because a person or a business can afford something does not mean they should squander their resources. This chart also does not mean everyone in town has the ability to pay. Again, this goes to Prop 46 protection. There are people in this town who work but are barely keeping up with expenses. Higher taxes to fund education could put them under. For retirees, higher taxes to fund education could put us out of our homes. That is not right. Not everyone has the ability to pay.
 - a. The ability to pay factors weigh heavily on Woodstock's funding from the state and federal governments. Ability to pay also directly impacts collective bargaining agreements with our employees.
15. They pointed out that by 2030 there will be a \$900K deficit. They did not say how this corresponds to student head count. I don't have any numbers for Woodstock but in general across the country, student population has been dropping. If they have less students in 7 years, will they really miss the \$900K?
 - a. Based on the most recent Fiscal Indicators for Connecticut Municipalities, Woodstock ranks 87th in Per Capita Income, 147th in Equalized Grand List, and 164th in Per Pupil Expenditures. Woodstock's positive Fiscal Indicators are scheduled to result in a reduction of \$901,000 in the state's Education Cost

Sharing grant to the Town of Woodstock by the year 2030. All loss of state funding will only impact the PK-8 and general government portion of the budget. Student enrollment impacts would be in addition to the ECS formula.

16. I also wonder about their business practices. Unless I misunderstood, I heard them say they need money to fund staff they hired using ARP money that is now running out. Why would they think it is smart to incur a recurring expense using non-recurring funding?
 - a. ARPA ESSER funding requirements was dependent on the additional staff positions as required by the grant.
17. A parent noted the change in class size and the effect on students. She wants to express thanks to the EMS and fire and is concerned that we have to nitpick at budget items where we should be willing to pay more to provide needed services and not lose any additional services or teachers. She is seeing teachers that are burning out because of too many kids and not enough help. We need to move from being less to being what this town is admired for.

Board of Finance

The Board of Finance is the budget-making authority responsible for financial and taxation matters, presenting the annual operating budget and special appropriations to the Town Meeting for its approval, and for establishing the tax rate. The six members of the Board of Finance are elected for a term of six years.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. Board of Finance Chair Michael Dougherty said he does not see funds coming from anywhere to increase the budget number as we have lost grants and property values are now dropping. He does not expect to see the grand list generate any additional revenue this year and noted that \$168,000 is the highest value generated in last 10 year by grand list. In the last 10 years, the budget has gone to the maximum all but 3 times. Even if the budget did go to the max last year, the difference would only be \$603,000 higher and that would not solve the problems at hand. There is a problem in the Town of Woodstock and the Board of Finance cannot do its job unless they can present something reasonable to vote on. Prop 46 currently limits the options.
2. Sue Connor of West Woodstock Library noted that the Town of Woodstock's current spending rate towards the libraries is \$14 per capita and state average is \$56. She feels that a wonderful service is provided by the libraries and is now in jeopardy. She also volunteers as the municipal Agent for the Elderly and noted that we have basically no services for our elderly population. The Town of Woodstock has the means to provide for seniors but cannot under Prop 46 limitations.
3. Has anyone discussed the issue of inflation? Inflation in 2022 was over 6% year over year on average but was much higher for many categories. If the Town budget doesn't increase by at least 6%, the spending power of the Town decreases. The proposed budget

increase is a little over 2%, which means that the spending power of the 2023 budget is 4% less than 2022 due to just inflation. How can the Town keep up with all expenses/spending when the budget increases don't even keep up with inflation? If town budget does not increase by the current inflation amount, then spending power decreases.

- a. This is the problem with our current budget and the reason that we are here.
 - b. BOF Chair Michael Dougherty stated that the last 10 years cumulative increase in inflation was 29.27 percent and our budget has increased by 21.17 percent.
 - c. We need an additional 6 percent to keep heads above water from previous increases.
4. A citizen emailed: I do think that it should be more visible that the Board of Finance is willing to really listen to the Board of Education. Time has proven that good school systems help the overall valuations of the houses in towns which translates to tax revenue.

Board of Selectmen

The Board of Selectmen reviews policy issues before the town, develop the town budget, and rule on proper use of the town's resources. The Board also approves bids, labor agreements, bonding authorizations, legal claims, and appointments to Boards and Commissions. Legislative questions are also brought before the Board of Selectmen before going to a Town Meeting. The Board is elected every two years in November. The Board of Selectmen consists of three people, the First Selectman and two other Selectmen.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. It seems the BOE and the town negotiate/commit to fuel costs individually, would it make more sense for it to be done by one party for all?
 - a. DPW John Navarro noted his past good and bad experiences with locking in pricing of fuel.
2. The real question is how to we increase income. There are lots of people in this town that are not wealthy that are being punished because we do have portion of residents that are more well off. We need to find multiple income sources besides our residents. More business and grants are a start. We need to be more attractive for things other than our schools.

Budget Process

December – Memos from the First Selectman are sent to Dept. Heads, Boards and Commissions, and Outside Organizations requesting input on the budget including funding requests.

January – Budget Requests are due to the Finance Director.

February-Board of Selectmen & Board of Education hold meetings for Budget Reviews on Submissions and possible approval of budget and Five-Year Capital Plan.

March-Both Board of Education and Board of Selectmen present the budgets and estimated revenues to the Board of Finance.

April – Board of Finance host a public hearing on the proposed budgets from both Board of Education and Board of Selectmen (usually first Tuesday in April).

April – Board of Finance approve a combined budget to recommend for town meeting (usually second Tuesday of April).

May – First Tuesday of the month, Board of Selectmen call an annual town meeting to discuss/approve town business.

May – Second Tuesday of the month, referendum (vote) on town budget and Board of Finance set mill rate.

If budget doesn't pass at referendum, the process starts over again until a budget is passed.

Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick noted that she is always available for questions. She reviewed that for the last 3 years the general fund has been used for tax relief and the town cannot do that anymore- it is not the answer. It is time to face reality and support the budget without dipping into savings.

Fire Departments

Woodstock has three volunteer fire departments: [Bungay Fire](#), [Muddy Brook](#), and [Woodstock Volunteer Fire Association Station 76](#).

From the January 17, 2023 meeting:

1. Dave Elliot, Chief of Bungay Fire Brigade stated that volunteerism is at an all-time low. Fire Departments depend on EMS Ambulance for calls and 24/7 coverage is critical for safety in the Town of Woodstock. Bungay Fire is in full support of Woodstock EMS. Without in town EMS, mutual aid will lengthen response times and impact the safety of our community.

2. Jim Dunlea stated he is new to town and has joined one of the Fire Departments. He is amazed at the number of calls in this town and cannot imagine the waiting length of some calls in the past. He asks that you think of your loved ones when deciding EMS coverage. He also noted that this concern is not unique to Woodstock.
3. If we got a new radio system why is there still huge areas that radio communication cuts out in town?
 - a. The radio system is working as it should. It greatly increased our radio coverage in many parts of the town as well as giving emergency services their own frequencies to talk on. No radios will be perfect in our area due to our topography. This also gave the entire town a radio/frequency that everyone can communicate on. (Emergency Management, Fire Marshal, constables, town public works, and all three fire departments. It also allows us to listen on state police frequency. This radio upgrade sets up emergency services for the next 20 years as that is the communication platform most towns are switching to with uhf becoming over run as low band radios are phased out. The town coverage exceeds what we have while using both uhf and low band and gives us a backup radio system.
 - b. Also noted by the Fire Marshal, we used it for an auto accident in Muddy Brook's District during a snowstorm in which we were able to contact a plow truck driver using the new radio system directly to the scene to sand the area and plow within 5 minutes. This was a great benefit during an emergency response.
4. Why can't fire and EMS be combined in one location centrally, it's seems as though that would reduce cost in apparatus, and person. Why does the town need 3 fire departments? why couldn't one be formed, centrally located, maybe at highway garage location? maybe funded by grant? redundancy seems very expensive. one ambulance for whole town, why not one fire department?
 - a. Fire Marshal Dick Baron noted there are a lot of factors including that Woodstock is one of largest town in state and there is not a water supply system with hydrants. He noted that all chiefs do meet and work together for apparatus and training. Russ Downer added that EMS has worked with fire departments to ensure all ambulances and rescue vehicles are adequately equipped.
5. Has the town explored creating a special taxing district under CT statute to add to room and board taxes for B&Bs and other guest houses in town? Could create some additional revenue to offset expenses for emergency services.
6. A fire tax was brought up years ago, and the last time a tax for paying for this service came to vote, it lost by 3 or 4 votes (fire tax). I expect it would pass if it came to a vote again. It makes me think of our car registration. It now comes with a fee for state parks. I think an extra fee specific for our Fire Departments or EMT as needed would be approved. It just makes sense, and I would not think it would be a huge cost when amortized over the number of taxpayers in town.
 - a. This is something being considered; there is not enough time for it to happen for this year's budget. If it goes to a vote and passes it would be in effect for the next fiscal year.

Grants

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. How actively we pursue grants, and do we have a grant writer on staff?
 - a. Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick noted the struggle of not having a staff grant writer. The Town relies on individual employees to assist with grant writing, but those employees do not have time for many grants. She does feel that the town is missing out on monies that are available with grants and is working with the Selectmen to add this into to budget in the future.
 - b. The Fire Departments and the school system do not have a grant writer on staff and face the same struggles.
 - c. The school system uses the Business Manager for grant writing and does currently have grant funds in use (some of which expire this year). The school system is constantly looking for grants, but most educational grants are based on community needs and the Town does not qualify for many of those grants.
 - d. Karen Fitzpatrick reviewed the ARPA funding and how it works for the Town of Woodstock as well as briefly describe town aid road grants and municipal aid grants that are given for being a municipality.
2. Russ Downer Jr. state that all 3 fire departments have received grants in recent years for various items. Bungay has gotten ½ million in last 10 years that has benefitted taxpayers. Muddy Brook also has gotten grant funding to save town spending on fire department expenses. He noted that Fire Department grants are very competitive.
3. There was a discussion about grants and the need for someone to do them. Hiring a freelancer on a per project basis might be a great place to start working on some.

Planning & Zoning

The Planning & Zoning Commission consists of 9 members and 3 alternates elected for a four-year term. The development and use of the land is a major determinant of the future physical form of the Town, and therefore it is the primary objective of the Planning and Zoning Commission to manage the development in a responsible manner in order to protect the public health and safety of the town’s citizens, as well as the environment, natural resources, and character of the Town, and to further the goals of the Woodstock Plan of Conservation and Development.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting:

1. Planning and zoning has been looking to make Airbnb and bed & breakfasts harder to run in our town. What if they changed that outlook and added a “hotel tax” to them instead that would go right back to the town. I have been to many places where both the state and

the town charge you a tax for staying there as a tourist. While this probably wouldn't create a ton of revenue in our small town, it might be enough for the libraries or a part time person to write those grants.

- a. The PZC is not making things difficult for bread and breakfasts or for Air bnb operations to conduct business in town. In fact, there have been regulations in town for many years about bed and breakfasts, and bed and breakfasts have been able to follow a straightforward process to get a zoning permit. It was brought to the attention of the ZEO that there were Air bnb operations active in town. The ZEO received complaints about the Air bnb's from members of the public, not from the PZC. The ZEO conducted a required investigation and notified the Air bnb's that they need to obtain a zoning permit. It is the Air bnb owners' responsibility to have obtained permits before starting their businesses. One such Air bnb owner did check prior with the town about a permit. At this time, the PZC is in the process of reviewing what type of straightforward permit is needed to cover Air bnb's, which can be different operations from what is defined for bread & breakfasts. In fact, the PZC has allowed one Air bnb operation to continue because the owners submitted a permit application and the PZC is working with them to craft regulations to fully cover things. This is another example of the way that the PZC gets things done by working with people while still upholding the regulations. The PZC has no statutory authority to enact any type of tax upon a landowner or a business. That would be something for the BOS to decide about if allowed by state law.
2. Has the town explored creating a special taxing district under CT statute to add to room and board taxes for B&Bs and other guest houses in town? This could create some additional revenue to offset expenses for emergency services.
 - a. The PZC has no statutory authority to create tax districts. That would be something for the BOS to decide about if allowed by state law.
3. Is there a way to drive at-least some more business to town like new alternative farming and other small town like businesses to come in and help create stable funds as well?
 - a. The PZC has been working for many years on supporting and promoting responsible and reasonable economic development in town. Much has been done to streamline the permitting process and to make permits less financially burdensome. The same for agricultural operations. The work by the PZC continues. However, the reality is that given the population size of Woodstock, that no highway runs through it, and that no major public infrastructure (water and sewer) exists (other than a small part of town that has sewer, (the Town also has a sewer avoidance policy in place through the WPCA), that there is a limit as to what types of businesses might want to settle in Woodstock. The PZC has supported home occupations for many years. There are many people in town who have home occupations. Currently, the PZC is in the process of updating its regulations to better match the reality of what is happening with the types of home

occupations. Additionally, there are many state regulations, etc. that must be followed by businesses that are not in the jurisdiction of the PZC.

Prop 46

What is Prop 46?

Proposition 46 is an ordinance that was adopted at an adjourned Special Town Meeting December 8, 1979. The number '46' comes from the fact that the mil rate at the time was 46 mils. The ordinance reads as follows:

Resolved, the Town shall limit the increase in the town's combined annual budget to revenue generated by growth in the Grand List, in State and Federal assistance, and in other income, except for increases, voted upon by town meeting, necessary to cover debt service on legal obligations, court judgements against the town, State mandated programs and emergency expenditures.

In the event of property revaluation, the actual dollar increase in the combined town budget shall be limited to the dollar amount of increase in the preceding year's budget or the average amount of increase over the preceding three years, whichever is lower.

Each year the boards of Selectmen and Education bring recommendations to the Board of Finance as to the needs of the Town. The Board of Finance then decides to either go or not go to the max allowable under Prop 46 and then allocate funding to both the boards of Education and Selectmen. This may result in a decrease in budgets.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting:

1. I would like to please better understand how the town will propose to turn over the Prop 46 rule. I do think the town needs to know if that is an option. It is challenging as a resident to not hear an option is to raise taxes.
 - a. As an ordinance directed and adopted by the Townspeople in 1979, any revocation or amendments must also be led by the Townspeople. This process begins with a petition being filed with the Town Clerk.
2. Leaders need to come up with solutions and Prop 46 is a huge part of the problem. Limitations of Prop 46 for the future of education does matter.
3. A resident stated he feels that we need to keep prop 46. He and his wife home school 6 boys and feel Prop 46 is a community problem not government problem. This community needs to come together to care for each other and solve problems as community.
4. Over the years Prop 46 has gone out to vote and been voted down. It is a decision that needs to be made by voters. That is what this discussion is for tonight.
5. A resident noted that even if we (the Town) got rid of Prop 46, the citizens still have the power to say no at the polls. This all gets back to involvement, and we all have to do the

work. People will always have the chance to vote on the budget whether we have prop 46 or not. You always vote!

6. Finance Director Karen Fitzpatrick noted that the town and schools have sought legal advice around Prop 46 many times and the people have to make the change with the town.
7. What would be the process to amend Prop 46 (NOT ELIMINATE IT)?
 - a. See the Town Clerk for an explanation of the petition process.
8. What happens to budgets that are overspent when we are at the max of Prop 46?
 - a. That would be violation of a statute and a plan of action would have to be submitted to the state. But the bill would still have to be paid.
9. Prop 46 is called 46 because that is what the mil rate was in 1976. At that time, all fire service was self-funded, and it is time to take care of the people who take care of us. If people want to change/modify Prop 46, the work is outside of this room. The support of a larger group needs to be found to change Prop 46. More people need to be involved and engage to make change.
10. A long-time resident voted for Prop 46 but feels that anything can change. He feels we need to understand the reasons for the creation of Prop 46 and hopes that an amendment can be made as it seems to be needed. Mandates are tying hands of our local boards. He wants a representative on the state board of education from our area. He thanked the town very much for this evening as he learned a lot from the boards.
11. I grew up in Woodstock and left for 20 years after graduating from UCONN and joining the USMC. I returned in 1996. During those 20 years out of here, I lived in CA for 18 years. They have had Prop 13 in place since the late 70's. I expect you have heard of it. Similar to our Prop 46, one of its goals was aimed at preventing retired people from getting taxed out of their homes. That is always my fear when I hear people wanting to do away with Prop 46. I would hate to have to sell our home because taxes go up too much. I imagine we are not the only ones who feel that way.

Town Hall

From the January 17, 2023 meeting:

The Town Hall has been closed on Fridays since 2018 as an effort to save money for tax payers. There are some town offices that are open part time trying to provide services to the town. Many employees will leave (or already have left) Woodstock for full time jobs with better pay and benefit in other towns. These are some of the items that the Town is dealing with.

Karen Fitzpatrick introduced herself and in her role as Finance Director is tasked to find ways to pay for the items in the budget. She noted that every year of her 17 years in Woodstock has included budget struggles. Karen discussed the problems Woodstock faces paying for infrastructure maintenance and capital projects with the CNR funds balance not keeping up with rising costs of projects. There is a \$600,000 projected increase in just debt and EMS services for the upcoming year. She reviewed Prop 46 (*Prop 46 states "the Town shall limit the increase in the town's combined annual budget to revenue generated by growth in the Grand List, in State*

and Federal assistance, and in other income, except for increases, voted upon by town meeting, necessary to cover debt service on legal obligations, court judgements against the town, State mandated programs and emergency expenditures. In the event of property revaluation, the actual dollar increase in the combined town budget shall be limited to the dollar amount of increase in the preceding year's budget or the average amount of increase over the preceding three years, whichever is lower”) and its effect on the Town Budget. She noted that Town of Woodstock funds are limited, and this meeting is to get input from residents on what is important to them to take into consideration for budget decisions. The Grand List will be complete by January 31st and at that time the upcoming budget amount will be determined, and discussions will begin to determine where money will be allocated.

Town Meetings

Town Clerk Judy Walberg has put together a primer on town meetings which can be found by clicking [here](#).

1. What is a Town Meeting?
 - a. In short, a Town Meeting is an event and an entity. As an event, it is a gathering of the town’s eligible voters, and is referred to as "the Town Meeting.” As an entity, it is the statutory legislative body for Woodstock.
2. Do all towns have Town Meetings?
 - a. Most, but not all towns in New England have Town Meetings.
3. What does a Town Meeting decide?
 - a. A Town Meeting decides three major things.
 - i. It sets all annual spending for the General Government and the Woodstock School District at the Annual Town Meeting and Referendum vote. This is held each year on the first and second Tuesdays of May.
 - ii. It votes to appropriate any additional money that is not included in the annual budget.
 - iii. It votes on the town’s local laws, which are called ordinances.

Additional information on Town Government, such as structure, boards & commissions, and more, can be found by clicking [here](#).

Transfer Station

1. What is the revenue for the transfer station vs the expense for the transfer station?
 - a. There is approximately \$50,000 difference between current budget and the Transfer Station becoming self-funded. The town has discussed it being self-funded and is working to increase prices gradually.
2. Personal trash service runs approximately \$700 per year.

3. Transfer station permits are currently priced at \$200 per year for Woodstock Residents or \$105 for Seniors.
4. A resident noted that he sees many cars with out of plate license plates at the Transfer Station and this means that we are losing tax revenues via motor vehicle tax.
 - a. There are many reasons for this including Woodstock residents driving company cars. Permits are the revenue collected by transfer station and residency and registrations are checked when permits are issued.
5. A resident emailed the following: Before I left for 20 years, we had the town dump. The transfer station is a huge improvement and a fantastic service for those who care to take advantage of it. It should never be run at a loss. I kid people that our bill went up 50% this year to \$105. I have never checked the cost of Willy Waste as you called it. Even though they come by our street each week, I prefer social hour at our facility. I do not think anyone would stop paying for a sticker if the price is raised to the breakeven point. I would also never want to see us go to pay as you go or pay per bag. The price should just be kept in line with costs to run the facility.

Woodstock Academy

The Woodstock Academy is an independent school, and serves residents from Brooklyn, Canterbury, Eastford, Pomfret, Union, and Woodstock. The respective towns' taxpayers pay student tuition through municipal taxes, and state ECS funding, and therefore state agencies categorize Woodstock Academy as a public-school option. The school also accepts tuition-paying students from surrounding towns and states as day students, and students from around the country and the world as residential students. The mission of the Woodstock Academy is to prepare all students by providing diverse opportunities through a rigorous curriculum and a variety of programs in order to cultivate the necessary skills to become lifelong learners and global citizens.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. A resident asked about the building going on at the Woodstock Academy. It seems a lot of the budget cuts are major, meanwhile the academy continues to build. The funds we are cutting would be better allocated to the lower schools or the EMS.
 - a. Hans Frankhouser is the sending town rep for WA and sits on WA committees. He replied that the WA has the same increases in budget and challenges to deal with as any other school system.
2. Why aren't the tracks and fields available to be used by the public? We pay taxes which go towards the academy tuition, so we should be able to walk on the track and use the fields.
 - a. Bentley Athletic Complex and the track and fields at South Campus are owned by the Woodstock Academy. As such, they are private property. The fields at the Bentley Athletic Complex are available to be used, but there is a process to request their use. They are used very regularly by organizations and citizens.

3. Does the Woodstock Academy pay any taxes on the houses that are on their property?
 - a. The academy pays taxes on the houses they collect rent on. They have sold most of the homes they own.

Woodstock Fair

The Woodstock Agricultural Society, Inc. was founded in 1859 to educate, promote and preserve the local agricultural industry, rural heritage, and the home arts. A private, non-profit 501(c) 3 organization, its mission is accomplished through the annual presentation of the Woodstock Fair, a 4-day agricultural fair, always Labor Day Weekend. Situated on approximately 55 acres, the Society has a large infrastructure including but not limited to, three historic buildings, four large barns, horse show area, roadways, and water, sewer, and electrical systems to maintain.

- In 1999 construction for the new cattle, sheep and poultry barns was completed.
- In 2015 and 2018 respectively, the Society completed the restoration of the two oldest buildings original to the fairgrounds, the Main Exhibition Hall built in 1874/1885 and the grandstands built in 1888.
- The Woodstock Agricultural Society is self-supporting, receiving no local, state or federal funding.
- Each year the Society awards \$12,500 in scholarships to area students attending Woodstock Academy and Killingly Vo-Ag.
- The Society distributes approximately \$75,000 annually in cash premiums to exhibitors.
- The Society pays approximately \$250,000 annually in payroll that goes back into the local communities.
- In 2022, the Society increased the admission price for the first time in over 12 years.
- Independent of other entities (i.e., NDDH, tent provider, etc.), the non-profit vendor rental fees have not increased in over 12 years and the profit vendor rental fees were last increased in 2018.
- Concessions fees are posted annually on our website <https://www.woodstockfair.com/>
- The Society has limited onsite parking and is fortunate to have two large dairy farms adjacent to the fairgrounds, in addition to local neighbors and the South Woodstock Baptist Church, that provide private parking for fairgoers.
- The Woodstock Fair continues to be a family friendly tradition for our expanded community.

From the January 17, 2023 meeting and emails:

1. A resident asked if there is anything that can be done surrounding the Woodstock Fair to support the town as they do not pay taxes.
 - a. It was noted that the Woodstock Fair is separate entity and has no ties to the town operations.
2. A resident stated he researched and found that the Town may be able to charge entry fee tax on fair tickets. While the fair itself has Non-Profit status, it is clear that much of the activity there is for profit, via for-profit vendors. This would certainly require further discovery. A possible revenue source for the town should not be dismissed offhand. The

fair has an impact on our roads and on the general quality of life in Woodstock while it is underway, which has value.

- a. There is a tax-exempt exception. As the fair is a non-profit, the applicable statute may not apply.
3. Russ Downer stated that the fire and EMS negotiate yearly contracts with the Fair.
4. Richard Baron noted there is an ordinance in town that allows billing for services for events along with building official.
5. A resident noted that Woodstock Fair runs on mostly volunteers/community service.
6. A resident asked: Is there anything that could be done with the Woodstock fair to raise funds for the town? To my knowledge (I could be wrong) they do not pay taxes but also none of the money raised there goes to the town. The rising prices there for a booth makes it difficult for even our community to be able to sell/ raise money. (Similar comments):
 - a. The fair should be holding more events to generate funds as well more than just ag.
 - b. Why can't a certain percentage of the gate \$ from the fair go to the town? We put up with traffic and other disruptions.
 - c. What are the chances that the Woodstock Ag society would be willing to increase the ticket price by \$1 and then make a tax-deductible donation to the ambulance in the amount of the number of tickets they sell? I believe the yearly attendance may be close to what the ambulance needs in excess funds, and this would also make the people of the town less angry towards the fair for not helping the town.
7. A resident emailed the following: Everyone thinks the Woodstock Fair prints money. It does not. It is a non-profit that has income and expenses like any other organization. Fixed expenses must be paid whether the weather on Labor Day Weekend is good or bad.