



WESTPORT

TOWN OF WESTPORT
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING
REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING PACKET
MAY 6, 2025
07:30 PM



REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING AGENDA

MAY 6, 2025
07:30 PM

Call

All Representative Town Meeting members and inhabitants of the Town of Westport are hereby notified that a meeting of the Representative Town Meeting members will be held at Town Hall, 110 Myrtle Ave. in the auditorium on Monday, May 5, Tuesday May 6, and, if necessary, Wednesday May 7, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. for the purposes listed below. If necessary, the meeting shall reconvene on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 to deal with any agenda items not disposed of at the adjournment of such meeting.

Anticipated to be addressed on Tuesday, May 6:

Attachment: [Resolutions.pdf](#)

1. Town Budget

To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the estimate and recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town of Westport for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.

Attachment: [Board of Finance Recommended Budget FY 25-26](#)

Attachment: [1 Police Fire Budget 2025-26.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 HHSCOM25-26budgetmeetingreport.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM Environment Committee Report.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 Transit District Backup Material Wheels2U.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 7 RTM Transit Committee Report.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM LMA and Finance Meeting Minutes - Westport Library Budget Request - 4.21.25.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM LMA and Finance Joint Meeting Minutes - Earthplace Budget Request - 4.21.25.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM Earthplace budget restoration info.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM Parks Recreation Committee Meeting Minutes.pdf](#)

Attachment: [1 RTM Finance Committee Budget Report.pdf](#)

2. Railroad Parking Budget

To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town Railroad Parking Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.

3. Sewer Budget

To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town Sewer Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.

4. Wakeman Town Farm Budget

To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Wakeman Town Farm Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.

5. Property Taxes

To take such action as the meeting may determine, to require that property taxes for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, shall be due and payable in four quarterly installments, and to designate the dates of the first days of July, October, January, and April as the dates upon which such installments shall be due and payable, and that all taxes in an amount of \$100 or less shall be due and payable in a single installment on the first day of July.

6. Motor Vehicle Taxes

To take such action as the meeting may determine to require that the motor vehicle tax shall be due and payable in a single installment.

7. Transit District supplemental appropriation

To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Director of the Westport Transit District, to approve a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$55,000 to the Westport Transit District Account for the services for the elderly and people with a disability.

Attachment: [_7 Transit District FY 25 Supplemental Appropriation Request.pdf](#)

**RTM Meeting
May 5, 6 & 7, 2025**

RESOLUTIONS

MONDAY

(1)

RESOLVED: That the Board of Education’s budget items as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting be adopted and the sum of \$_____ for the Board of Education Budget is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures.

(2)

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Superintendent of Schools, the sum of \$122,446 along with bond and note authorization to the educational facilities improvement fund account for the Board of Education FY25 building projects SHS-008; BMS-012; KHS-006; SES-003 included on Schedule BOE-1C and the sum of \$80,216 from the Capital and Non-Recurring Account Fund Account for projects DW-008, SHS-003, SES-006, and GFS-005 also identified on Schedule BOE-1C are hereby appropriated.

TOWN OF WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

A RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$122,446 FOR COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH VARIOUS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS TO FINANCE SUCH APPROPRIATION.

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, the Town of Westport, Connecticut (the “Town”) hereby appropriates the sum of One Hundred Twenty-two Thousand Four Hundred Forty-six and 00/100 Dollars (\$122,446) for costs associated with various school improvement projects hereinafter listed including, but not limited to, administrative, contingency, financing, legal and other soft costs (collectively, the “Project”).

Staples High School: <i>Design costs related to the replacement of boiler room pumps and BMS controls and other related costs.</i>	\$10,917.00
Bedford Middle School: <i>Design costs related to structural slab repairs, masonry and interior tile and other related costs.</i>	\$20,271.00

Kings Highway Elementary School:

Design costs related to boiler and pump replacement and other related costs. \$37,758.00

Saugatuck Elementary School:

Design costs related to the replacement of cooling towers and other related costs. \$53,500.00

Total	\$122,446.00
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Section 1. As recommended by the Board of Finance and for the purpose of financing One Hundred Twenty-two Thousand Four Hundred Forty-six and 00/100 Dollars (\$122,446) of the foregoing appropriation, the Town is hereby authorized to borrow a sum not to exceed One Hundred Twenty-two Thousand Four Hundred Forty-six and 00/100 Dollars (\$122,446) and issue general obligation bonds for such indebtedness under its corporate name and seal and upon the full faith and credit of the Town in an amount not to exceed said sum for the purpose of financing the appropriation for the Project.

Section 2. The First Selectwoman, Selectmen and Finance Director are hereby appointed a committee (the "Committee") with full power and authority to cause said bonds to be sold, issued and delivered; to determine their form, including provision for redemption prior to maturity; to determine the aggregate principal amount thereof within the amount hereby authorized and the denominations and maturities thereof; to fix the time of issue of each series thereof and the rate or rates of interest thereon as herein provided; to designate the bank or trust company to certify the issuance thereof and to act as transfer agent, paying agent and as registrar for the bonds, and to designate bond counsel. The Committee shall have all appropriate powers under the Connecticut General Statutes including Chapter 748 (Registered Public Obligations Act) to issue the bonds and, further, shall have full power and authority to do all that is required under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and other applicable laws and regulations of the United States and the state of Connecticut, to provide for issuance of the bonds in tax exempt form, including the execution of tax compliance and other agreements for the benefit of bondholders, and to meet all requirements which are or may become necessary in and subsequent to the issuance and delivery of the bonds in order that the interest on the bonds be and remain exempt from federal income taxes, including, without limitation, to covenant and agree to restriction on investment yield of bond proceeds, rebate of arbitrage earnings, expenditure of proceeds within required time limitations and the filing of information reports as and when required and to execute Continuing Disclosure Agreements for the benefit of holders of bonds and notes.

Section 3. The Bonds may be designated "Public Improvement Bonds," series of the year of their issuance and may be issued in one or more series, and may be consolidated as part of the same issue with other bonds of the Town; shall be in serial form maturing in not more than twenty (20) annual installments of principal,

the first installment to mature not later than three (3) years from the date of issue and the last installment to mature not later than twenty (20) years therefrom, or as otherwise provided by statute. The bonds may be sold at not less than par and accrued interest at public sale upon invitation for bids to the responsible bidder submitting the bid resulting in the lowest true interest cost to the Town, provided that nothing herein shall prevent the Town from rejecting all bids submitted in response to any one invitation for bids and the right to so reject all bids is hereby reserved, and further provided that the Committee may sell the bonds, or notes, on a negotiated basis, as provided by statute. Interest on the bonds shall be payable semiannually or annually. The bonds shall be signed on behalf of the Town by the First Selectwoman and the Finance Director, and shall bear the seal of the Town. The signing, sealing and certification of said bonds may be by facsimile as provided by statute. The Finance Director shall maintain a record of bonds issued pursuant to this resolution and of the face amount thereof outstanding from time to time, and shall certify to the destruction of said bonds after they have been paid and cancelled, and such certification shall be kept on file with the Town Clerk.

Section 4. The Committee is further authorized to make temporary borrowings as permitted by the General Statutes and to issue a temporary note or notes of the Town in anticipation of the receipt of proceeds from the sale of the bonds to be issued pursuant to this resolution. Such notes shall be issued and renewed at such times and with such maturities, requirements and limitations as provided by statute. Notes evidencing such borrowings shall be signed by the First Selectwoman and the Finance Director, have the seal of the Town affixed, which signing and sealing may be by facsimile as provided by statute, be certified by and payable at a bank or trust company incorporated under the laws of this or any other state, or of the United States, be approved as to their legality by bond counsel, and may be consolidated with the issuance of other Town bond anticipation notes. The Committee shall determine the date, maturity, interest rates, form and manner of sale, including negotiated sale, and other details of said notes consistent with the provisions of this resolution and the General Statutes and shall have all powers and authority as set forth above in connection with the issuance of bonds and especially with respect to compliance with the requirements of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended, and regulations thereunder in order to obtain and maintain issuance of the notes in tax exempt form.

Section 5. Upon the sale and issuance of the bonds authorized by this resolution, the proceeds thereof, including any premium received upon the sale thereof, accrued interest received at delivery and interest earned on the temporary investment of such proceeds, shall be applied forthwith to the payment of the principal and interest of all notes issued in anticipation thereof or shall be deposited in trust for such purposes with a bank or trust company, or shall be applied or rebated as may be required under the provision of law. The remainder of the proceeds, if any, after the payment of said notes and of the expense of issuing said notes and bonds shall be applied to further finance the appropriation enacted herein.

Section 6. In each fiscal year in which the principal or any installment of interest shall fall due upon any of the bonds or notes herein authorized there shall be included in the appropriation for such fiscal year a sum equivalent to the amount of such principal and interest so falling due, and to the extent that provision is not made for the payment thereof from other revenues, the amount thereof shall be included in the taxes assessed upon the Grand List for such fiscal year and shall not be subject to any limitations of expenditures or taxes that may be imposed by any other Town ordinance or resolution.

Section 7. Pursuant to Section 1.150-2 (as amended) of the federal income tax regulations the Town hereby expresses its official intent to reimburse expenditures paid from the General Fund, or any capital fund for the Project with the proceeds of the bonds or notes to be issued under the provisions hereof. The allocation of such reimbursement bond proceeds to an expenditure shall be made in accordance with the time limitations and other requirements of such regulations. The Finance Director is authorized to pay Project expenses in accordance herewith pending the issuance of the reimbursement bonds or notes.

Section 8. The Town of Westport, or other proper authority of the Town, is authorized to take all necessary action to apply to the State of Connecticut, and accept from the State or other parties, grants, gifts and contributions in aid of further financing the Project. Once the appropriation becomes effective, the First Selectwoman, or other appropriate official of the town, is hereby authorized to spend a sum not to exceed the aforesaid appropriation for the Project and is specifically authorized to make, execute and deliver any contracts or other documents necessary or convenient to complete the Project and the financing thereof. Any of the estimated amounts set forth for the school improvement projects above not required to meet the actual cost of any such project may be transferred to a different school improvement project set forth above by the First Selectwoman and the Finance Director, consistent with the applicable tax and other laws, as deemed necessary or advisable and in the best interests of the Town.

Section 9. The Committee is hereby authorized to take all action necessary and proper for the sale, issuance and delivery of the bonds (and notes) in accordance with the provisions of the Town Charter, the Connecticut General Statutes, and the laws of the United States.

(3)

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the First Selectwoman and a request by the Conservation Director, Section 2-55 of the Code of Ordinances of the Town of Westport, Connecticut is hereby amended, by increasing the land use fees to the extent they relate to the Conservation Department. (First reading. Full text of the proposed fee schedule is available in the Town Clerk's office).

(4)

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Director of Public Works, the sum of \$101,000 to the Capital and Non-Recurring Fund Account for the replacement of roof at the Parks and Recreation Administration building located at 260 Compo Road South is hereby appropriated.

(5)

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Director of Parks & Recreation, the sum of \$238,000 along with bond and note authorization to the Municipal Improvement Fund Account, for Site Analysis, Architectural study, schematic design, Land-Use permitting, and preparation of an Opinion of Probable Cost for a Parks Maintenance Facility is hereby appropriated.

TUESDAY

(1)

RESOLVED: That the First Selectwoman's Budget items recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting be adopted, and the sum of \$_____ for the First Selectwoman's Budget is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures and such sum shall be added to the amount appropriated for the Other Agencies and Organizations Budget and the Board of Education Budget.

(1)

RESOLVED: That the Other Agencies and Organizations Budget items recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting be adopted, and the sum of \$_____ for the Other Agencies and Organizations Budget is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures and such sum shall be added to the amount appropriated for the First Selectwoman's Budget and the Board of Education Budgets.

(2)

RESOLVED: That the Town Railroad Parking Fund Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting, be adopted and the sum of \$_____ is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures.

(3)

RESOLVED: That the Town Sewer Fund Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting, be adopted and the sum of \$_____ is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures.

(4)

RESOLVED: That the Wakeman Town Farm Fund Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting, be adopted and the sum of \$_____ is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures.

(5)

RESOLVED: That property taxes for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026 shall be due and payable in four quarterly installments and the dates upon which such quarterly installments are to be due and payable shall be the first days of July, October, January and April, subject to any applicable tax relief deferral programs; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED: That all taxes in an amount of \$100.00 or less shall be due and payable in a single installment on the first day of July, subject to any applicable tax relief deferral programs.

(6)

RESOLVED: That the motor vehicle tax shall be due and payable in a single installment, subject to any applicable tax relief deferral programs.

(1)

FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Town of Westport General Fund Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting, be adopted and the sum of the Board of Education Budget, the First Selectwoman's Budget, and the Other Agencies and Organizations Budget in the amount of \$_____ is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures and that for the purpose of raising a tax on the Grand List of 2025, the sum of \$_____ is hereby appropriated.

(7)

RESOLVED: That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Director of the Westport Transit District, the sum of \$55,000 to the Westport Transit District Account for the services for the elderly and people with a disability is hereby appropriated.

Remote Attachment:

[Board of Finance Recommended Budge ... own_of_westport_1743701351648.pdf](#) (LINK)

April 29, 2025

On April 23, 2025, The RTM Public Protection Committee conducted a public meeting in room 201 at 7:00 pm in Town Hall to discuss and vote to recommend to the full RTM Police, Fire, and EMS budgets for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

The Police budget came in at \$ 13,213,877 a 4.1% increase over the previous year (+\$514,694). The driver behind the increase partially due to additional officer provided for the construction of new Long Lots school. Plus, new license reader technology (Flock system),

EMS budget \$1,509,846 a 1% increase over the previous year (\$15,449).

Fire Department \$11,166,421 a 1.3% increase from the previous year (\$146,010). Big future need will be a new ladder truck. Vehicles purchases will now be moved from capital to operating budget.

All three budgets well prepared, and costs kept down. The big driver in both police and fire costs is salary and benefits. We talked about future needs of both departments from employee retention to apparatus.

Both budgets were approved unanimously 8-0

Attendance – Public Protection Jimmy Izzo Chair, Louis Mall, Candace Banks, Andrew Colabella, Claudia Shaum, David Rosenwaks, Alma Sarelli, and Karen Kramer.

Police Chief Foti Koskinas, Deputy Chief David Farrell Fire Chief Nick Marsen, and Deputy Chief Matthew Cohen.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jimmy Izzo Chair
RTM Public Protection Committee

RTM Health and Human Services Committee**Westport Department of Human Services and Aspetuck Health District****Meeting:**

The Committee met on April 23, 2025, in an online meeting at 4:30 pm to review and vote on the proposed 2025-26 budgets, previously approved by the Board of Finance, for the Department of Human Services and the Aspetuck Health District, which had been previously approved by the Board of Finance. Members attending: Wendy Batteau (Chair), Jennifer Johnson, Karen Kramer, Ellen Lautenberg, Sal Liccione. Also in attendance: Elaine Daignault, Director of the Department of Human Services, Luci Bango, Director of the Aspetuck Health District.

Department of Human Services budget:

The Westport Department of Human Services comprises Youth Services, Social Services, and Senior Services. Its total Board of Finance-approved funding is \$1,7265,91.00, a 2.54% over last year. This change is attributable primarily to contractual increases. The Youth Services department shows the largest increase attributable to 3% contractual salary raises the cost of Positive Directions which ARPA funding has previously covered, and the new 213 phone service. Social Services shows a 0.63% increase this year due mainly to the need for copy machine upgrade, the rising need for a language line (and dearth of available translators - it was also noted that there is a real need for bilingual social workers), and the union-mandated salary increase for an administrative assistant. The Senior Services budget includes a 2.9% increase due to union contractual salary requirements of 2 "front office" administrative assistances. (As the Senior Center has become increasingly full, The lobby is often congested with waiting lines and the department hopes to add 5 hours a week to its part time assistant's schedule this year to ease the problem.) Other Senior Center expense details: the outdoor space has been improved with a pollinator garden through federal funds; the center will have to maintain it; they purchased a new electric car to delivery meals and to check the welfare of the homebound. The town budget covers the departments operational costs (building, utilities, etc.), but individual programs such as the Senior Center are self-sufficient. Importantly, the department also receives contributions and grants which, the committee noted, have in the past basically equalled the town's appropriation.

Discussion:

The HHS Committee and DHS Director Daignault had met in February, 2025, to discuss issues and trends in town human services needs and solutions, particularly in view of the current financial and regulatory uncertainty (for example, potential gaps in medical coverage, provision of students' meal programs, affordable housing changes, changes in grant rules). Ms. Daignault stated then that the DHS budget-use priority is always people first. If the town doesn't/can't provide some services, the department will guide people to outsources (such as Medicaid, renters' rebates, heating assistance). The question of Toquet Hall arose: the town's lease is almost up and the expected raise will force a move.

In the earlier meeting and at our budget review, members commented in the way the staff has continued to find creative ways to meet the needs of all constituents. The past year have seen upticks in requests from residents for help, resources, and in need for casework, crisis preventions, researching and making referrals, and other services. Facing an uncertain future, it is reasonable to assume the needs will rise. At the earlier meeting Mr. Klinge suggested (and other members supported) adding a "special needs" fund into the budget (Ms. Daignault noted that there is \$22K in the Social Services budget, but the committee thought this should be supplemented.) Ms. Johnson expressed concern about the increasing numbers of residents isolated by age, disability, inability to drive, etc., and suggested adding a senior center bus, as

Weston, Easton, and Redding have. (Note, since that meeting, Wheels2U has added daytime service to the Senior Center). Committee members all expressed concern about the work load and potential burnout of staffers, the necessary use of credentialed personnel in fulfilling other functions (eg grant writing), and our ability to continue some projects previously funded by ARPA and the nature of new and additional needs residents will face.

Committee Action:

The Committee recommended all RTM members read the budget narrative of the DHS to understand the scope of services it provides. On a motion by Kramer, seconded by Liccione, the committee voted unanimously to recommend approval to the full RTM of the Department of Human Services budget of \$1,7265,91.00.

Aspetuck Health District budget:

The Aspetuck Health District serves the towns of Westport, Weston, and Easton, and is funded proportionally by all three. The BOF-recommended Westport share of the budget is \$606,459. At \$11,891. over last year's budget, this represents a 2% increase. The budget requests per town are by population (\$21.73 per capita, using population figures of Westport: 27,279; Weston: 10,336, Easton 7,594). In addition, the District receives \$2.50 per person from the state. It was noted that Weston and Easton have approved their shares of the budget.

Discussion

The increase is largely attributable to the impact of inflation, particularly the cost of utilities, and the need to attract and retain credentialed staff. A sanitarian position had remained open for a considerable time and has been filled but the workload particularly regarding applications regarded to construction has increased. Adding a staff environmental health sanitarian would facilitate processes and shorten applicant wait-times. In addition to working with the town, the Department must post provide state-mandated services – the number and nature of which are increasing. It's unclear what this will mean in the context of changing federal requirements and funding possibilities.

With a new Director and Strategic Plan, the Heath District is in a period of flux. The plan has been completed and is under evaluation by the Director and the Board to guide future public health services and best practices. Committee members would have liked to see more detail on specifics expenses, revenues and goals, and expressed interest in following and helping the District find ways to meet some of its challenges as plans solidify. The aging District facility was a topic of discussion. One committee member thought the building should be redone but others noted it might be better moved to a new location; perhaps to a rented facility and/or to one of the other towns. Either would enable some capital costs to be borne by Weston and Easton (which now contribute only to operational costs). If vacant, the space might be used for other town needs. In any event, the state of the building is of concern. As future plans become firm, this is one of the issues to be addressed.

Committee Action:

On a motion by Liccione, seconded by Lautenberg, the committee voted unanimously to recommend approval to the full RTM of the Aspetuck Health District the budget of \$606,459.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wendy Batteau,
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee

Minutes: Environment Committee meeting to review the Conservation Budget

Date: 5/24/25

Time: 6:30 pm

Location: Zoom

Agenda: To review the Conservation Department 2026 budget

Attendees:

RTM Environment Committee members:

Ellen Lautenberg, Chair

Wendy Batteau

Kristin Schneeman

Claudia Shaum

Town Employees:

Colin Kelly, Conservation Department Director

Background: The Conservation Department serves as the environmental division of the Westport town government. The goal is to continue to protect, preserve, and improve the town's natural resources.

Colin Kelly presented the main budgetary needs of the Department:

The bulk of the expenses - 92 % - is the staff salaries and benefits. There are 5 full-time staff members and one part-time shared with the Planning & Zoning Department. The Administrative Assistant is partly paid by the Shellfish Commission.

Additional expenses include:

- \$5,500 for computers

- office supplies

- education/training

The Board of Finance approved a 2026 budget of \$517,505.00.

The motion was made by Kristin Schneeman to approve the budget; motion was Seconded by Claudia Schaum.

Submitted by:

Ellen Lautenberg

Chair, RTM Environment Committee



RTM FY 26 Budget Meeting May 6, 2025



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Overview



Westport Transit District Services

Wheels2U

Wheels2U shuttles to and from Saugatuck and Greens Farms train stations

E&D

Door-to-Door transportation for seniors and people with disabilities within Westport. (Elderly and Disabilities within town) (E&D)

TTT

Door-to-Door transportation for people with disabilities between Westport and Fairfield County communities to our west. (Town-to-Town) (TTT)

Westport Transit District services do NOT include the Coastal Link service operated by Norwalk Transit, Greater Bridgeport Transit and Milford Transit or ADA required services within the ¾ mile corridor on either side of the Post Road



Overview of the past year

- March 2024 - BOF approved the FY25 budget
- April 2024 - NTD launched their microtransit program; Via updated the software to accommodate NTD's new service
- May 2024 – RTM approved the FY25 budget
- Nov 2024 - WTD switched to Via's turnkey model and more fuel efficient and comfortable minivans
- Dec 2024 –promotional weekend service to downtown offered during the holiday season
- Jan 2025 – proposal to switch to hybrid and electric vehicles
- May 2025 – launching a pilot program to Senior Center, Jesup Green, and the Farmers' Market/Library



Proposed FY 26 Westport Assistance to the WTD

	FY 25 Approved Budget	FY 26 Proposed Budget	Change \$	Change %
Wheels2U	\$342,909	\$342,360	\$(549)	-0.16%
Elderly & People with Disabilities In-Town	\$44,452	\$ 80,938	\$ 36,486	82.08%
People with Disabilities Town-To-Town	\$58,090	\$68,544	\$10,454	18%
Total	\$445,451	\$491,842	\$46,392	10.41%



Restore Wheels2U Funding



Wheels2U Service Summary

Existing Commuter Service

Commuter shuttles to and from Saugatuck and Greens Farms train stations.

- Monday through Friday
- 5:30 AM to 10:30 AM and 4:00 PM to 9:30 PM
- Pick up and drop off anywhere in Westport but the ride must begin or end at a train station
- Fares are \$2.00

Upcoming Expansion Pilot

Pilot program starting May 13, 2025 providing service to the Senior Center, the Farmers' Market, and Jesup Green

- Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays
- 9 AM to 1:30 PM
- Pick up and drop off anywhere in Westport but the ride must begin or end at the Senior Center, the Farmers' Market, or Jesup Green
- Fares are \$2.00

“Westport has limited demand for fixed route service along Post Road. Areas outside of the Post Road corridor lack . . . demand to support fixed route service, but warrant microtransit service. Microtransit can provide better coverage . . . as it provides flexibility in routing, often providing direct door-to-door service for passengers.”

Draft Nelson/Nygaard State of the System Report --- See also list of CT towns with microtransit service in Appendix

For more information about how to use Wheels2U go to <https://www.wheels2u.org/westport>



Looking Ahead in FY 26

- Upon approval of the FY26 Budget - increase ridership in the commuter and the new pilot program
- Explore options to lower the high current cost of service for the Elderly and People with Disabilities
- Analyze data to acquire and implement a plan to minimize canceled and unaccepted proposals within the software
- Look into possible fare increases, weekly and monthly ride passes
- Study and scope future expansion (additional services) and feasibility study
- Continue reaching out to Westport merchants to provide a solution to the parking issue downtown
- Establish a plan to apply for grants or subsidies to current program and/or future programs



Restore Wheels2U Funding

The WTD recommends restoration of the \$342,630 Wheels2U budget cut by the Board of Finance

- Absent restoration by Westport's Representative Town Meeting (RTM), Wheels2U's on-demand, group ride, door-to-door service to and from Westport's two train stations and the Wheels2U pilot program providing service to the Senior Center, the Farmers' Market, and Jesup Green will end on **June 30, 2025**
- The RTM will be asked to restore the full funding for Wheels2U at the RTM's May meeting

Note: Door-to-door services for the elderly and people with disabilities will not be affected by the Board of Finance cut



Proposed FY 26 Westport Assistance for Wheels2U

	FY 25 RTM Approved Budget	FY 26 Proposed Budget	Change \$	Change %
Wheels2U	\$342,909	\$342,360	\$(549)	-0.16%

- Westport’s cost for FY 25 through March is **only \$7.11 per ride**
- Budget for FY 26 **includes electric vehicles** and two hybrid wheelchair accessible vans
- FY 26 budget **includes continuing pilot program** to the Senior Center, the Farmers’ Market, and Jesup Green
- “Westport has limited demand for fixed route service along Post Road. Areas outside of the Post Road corridor lack composite demand to support fixed route service, but warrant microtransit service. Microtransit can provide better coverage in low-density and low-demand environments, as it provides flexibility in routing, often providing direct door-to-door service for passengers.”

Draft Nelson/Nygaard State of the System Report

See also list of CT towns with microtransit service in Appendix



Wheels2U Facts and Figures

Wheels2U Is Delivering Peak Performance in Ridership and Reliability

- Provided over 22,650 rides for over 1,280 individuals from July 1, 2024 (start of the fiscal year) through April 30, 2025
 - 2,535 rides in April 2025 vs 2,022 in April 2024
- 88% of ride requests have estimated arrival times under 20 minutes; 73% are under 15 minutes; the average is 11 minutes
- 58% of rides are shared rides on average through April 30, 2025
- Turnkey service model adopted in November 2024 provides greater operating flexibility and efficiency using quieter, more comfortable, vehicles
- Service is consistently rated 4.8 out of 5 stars
- Westport was first town in CT to convert fixed routes to microtransit; other towns are now looking to Westport as model.

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Wheels2U Facts and Figures

Public transit is a necessity - not a luxury - for many living and working in Westport

Based on a February 2025 survey of Wheels2U riders:

- Reverse commuters take 23.1% of all rides going to 35 unique destinations, with most concentrated in the downtown area. Eliminating Wheels2U would disrupt workforce access and deeply harm Westport's business community
- 22.22% of riders do not have *any* access to a personal car, with many more only having shared access
- 16% reported having an annual household income of \$100,000 or less; see Westport demographic data in Appendix
- 50.6% worked in a variety of jobs, including childcare, retail, healthcare, and education, other than finance and business services. Another 6% were retired
- 97% of riders said they would be disappointed if Wheels2U went away

13



New Turnkey Service Model

- Single vendor operations—Via provides vehicles, drivers, software, maintenance, and support services
- Reduced vehicle hourly rate—new minivans do not require special licensing for operation
- Budgeted 13,211 vehicle hours in FY26 (includes 244 service hours credit for RR parking worth \$18,249); pay only for vehicle hours actually used
- Elimination of deadhead hours and miles results in:
 - Better customer demand response (we can pick up customers at 5:45 AM and 4 PM and accept rides until 10:30 AM and 9:30 PM)
 - Reduction in fuel and carbon emissions
 - More efficient use of purchased service hours
- New, more comfortable vehicles—minivans replace minibuses



New Turnkey Service Model

- Provides increased scheduling flexibility
- Can change vehicle use weekly vs. once every four months; reduces cost (e.g., fewer vehicles during school vacations)
- Enables the WTD to invest in a pilot program providing:
 - Expanded operating hours to 1:30 PM Tuesday through Thursday
 - Additional pick-up and drop-off locations at the Senior Center, Farmers' Market, and Jesup Green in addition to the train stations
 - Future enhancements include connecting with the Coastal Link on the Post Road
- Expanding service to Senior Center to 1:30 PM is a step towards transitioning to less costly and more flexible on-demand, door-to-door services for seniors and residents with a disability (vs. the current more costly E&D service which requires riders to arrange rides the prior day), resulting in additional savings



Wheels2U's services are desired and appreciated by Westporters

- The RTM has received over 375 emails from Westport residents and organizations urging the restoration of funding. These organizations and individuals include:
 - Bike Westport
 - Sustainable Westport
 - Downtown Plan Implementation Committee
 - Commission for Senior Services
 - Homes With Hope
 - Westport Downtown Association
 - New Residents
 - Long-time residents
 - Individual commuters and non-commuters
 - Realtors
- Two Town-wide surveys found overwhelming support for the shuttle service from both commuters and non-commuters



Wheels2U benefits the Town

Sustainability

- Wheels2U supports the Town goal of Net Zero 2050
- November 2024 transition to more fuel-efficient minivans and no deadhead hours is projected to save 4,100 gallons of fuel annually, or 80,000 lbs of CO² emissions in FY 25
- Wheels2U is a long-term foundation for “Green” transportation - to meet this goal, FY26 is budgeted for fully electric and hybrid vehicles to further reduce emissions and enhance sustainability

Economic Development

- Wheels2U supports the success of local businesses by providing a cost-effective way for those commuting to work in Westport to easily go to and from the train stations and their business or place of employment, wherever in Westport that may be
- In the long term, Wheels2U reduces the need for additional parking at the train stations, reducing capital and ongoing maintenance costs
- Wheels2U differentiates Westport from other towns, supporting the real estate market and enhancing the “Westport brand”

Value-Add to Westport Residents

- Door-to-train platform service means Westporters don’t need to rely on personal vehicles or find parking at the train stations far from the train platform; this is especially beneficial at night and in inclement weather
- Helps reduce traffic congestion—especially important during the three years The Hamlet will be under construction
- Starting May 13, 2025, helps senior citizens and others access downtown destinations



Wheels2U benefits the Town

- Wheels2U helps promote diversity, inclusion, and equity
 - Supports and attracts new residents to Town who don't have a car or who prefer a public transit alternative (e.g., millennials, young families)
 - Provides access to and from the train stations for lower income residents and workers commuting into Town who can't afford a car for commuting or to use alternate private services such as Uber
 - Makes it easier to find sites for affordable housing; it can be located anywhere, not just at the train stations or along the Post Road
 - Is a motivating factor for many families in choosing Westport over other Fairfield County towns



Wheels2U is a Public Service and a Westport Asset

- Wheels2U should be treated as a public service, not as a business. Public transit is *almost always* heavily subsidized
- The 2017 Town Plan of Conservation and Development said:

"Westport should strive to preserve the service provided by the [Westport Transit District] for those who need it, those who use it because of the convenience it provides, and for those who like to know the service is available for the situations where they may need it." (italics added).

- The Downtown Master Plan and other recent studies also support more public transportation in Westport



The Ultimate Goal:

Integrate WTD's Wheels2U, E&D and TTT services into the Town's overall strategy for traffic, parking, bicycles, and pedestrians to help meet the Town's transportation goals and needs

WTD is developing a 5-year plan in connection with Nelson/Nygaard and the Norwalk Transit District; see draft key findings in the Appendix



FY 26 Proposed Budget



Proposed FY 26 Westport Assistance to the WTD

	FY 25 Approved Budget	FY 26 Proposed Budget	Change \$	Change %
Wheels2U	\$342,909	\$342,360	\$(549)	-0.16%
Elderly & People with Disabilities In-Town	\$44,452	\$ 80,938	\$ 36,486	82.08%
People with Disabilities Town-To-Town	\$58,090	\$68,544	\$10,454	18%
Total	\$445,451	\$491,842	\$46,392	10.41%

Increases due to:

- Increase in projected ridership for E&D and TTT services
- Cost per ride for the E&D and TTT services increased due to new union contract and inflation



FY26 WTD Budget Proposal

	<u>Wheels2U</u>	<u>Westport E&D</u>	<u>Town-to-Town</u>	<u>Total</u>
Contract Service Hours	12,967			
Parking credit in svc hrs	244			
Annual Service Hours	13,211			
EV Cost Per Hour	\$ 74.79			
FY26 Projected Trips		1,574	1,008	
Cost Per Ride		\$ 75	\$ 75	
Annual Service Cost	\$ 969,802	\$ 118,050	\$ 75,600	\$ 1,163,452
NTD Admin Fee	\$ 15,000	0	0	\$ 15,000
Turnkey Initiation	\$ 66,667	0	0	\$ 66,667
Marketing	\$ 15,000	0	0	\$ 15,000
Total Annual Cost	\$ 1,066,469	\$ 118,050	\$ 75,600	\$ 1,260,119
Fare	\$ 2.00	\$ 3.50	\$ 7.00	
Rides	30,000	1,574	1,008	
Total Fares	\$ 60,000	\$ 5,509	\$ 7,056	\$ 72,565
Cost Net of Fares	\$ 1,006,469	\$ 112,541	\$ 68,544	\$ 1,187,554
Anticipated State Portion	\$ (664,109)			
Anticipated Muni Grant Proposed Westport Portion FY26		\$ (31,603)		
	\$ 342,360	\$ 80,938	\$ 68,544	\$ 491,842
Westport Portion FY25	\$ 342,909	\$ 44,452	\$ 58,090	\$ 445,451

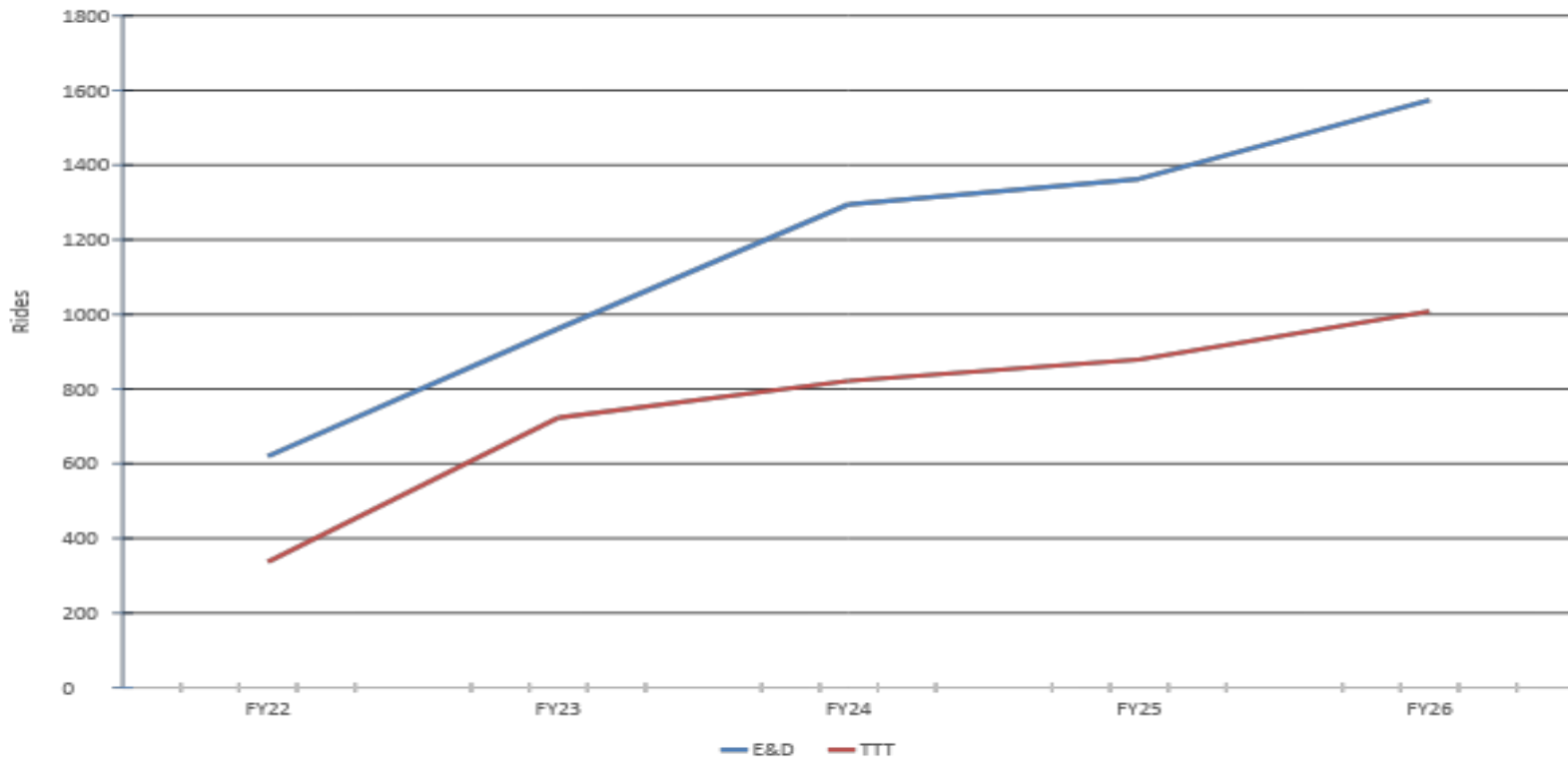


Key FY26 Budget Assumptions:

- 3.2% projected increase in annual W2U service hours, including 244 service hours credit (worth \$18,249) in exchange for parking 7 vehicles at Saugatuck train station
- W2U costs are based on electric and hybrid vehicles
- E&D and TTT costs per ride increased due to new driver contracts and inflation
- Project increase to 30,000 W2U rides due to proliferation of 4-5 days per week return to office policies
- E&D and TTT rides have been increasing at a three-year average rate of 15%, projecting an increase to 1,574 rides for E&D and 1,008 rides for TTT.
- State funding formula for W2U is least of:
 - 67% of annual cost net of fares
 - 100% of annual cost net of fares
 - \$664,109 for FY26



E&D and TTT Ridership (Historical & Projected Data)



FY25 are annualized rides
FY26 are projected rides



Cost Analysis FY25 (July 1 2024 - March 31 2025)

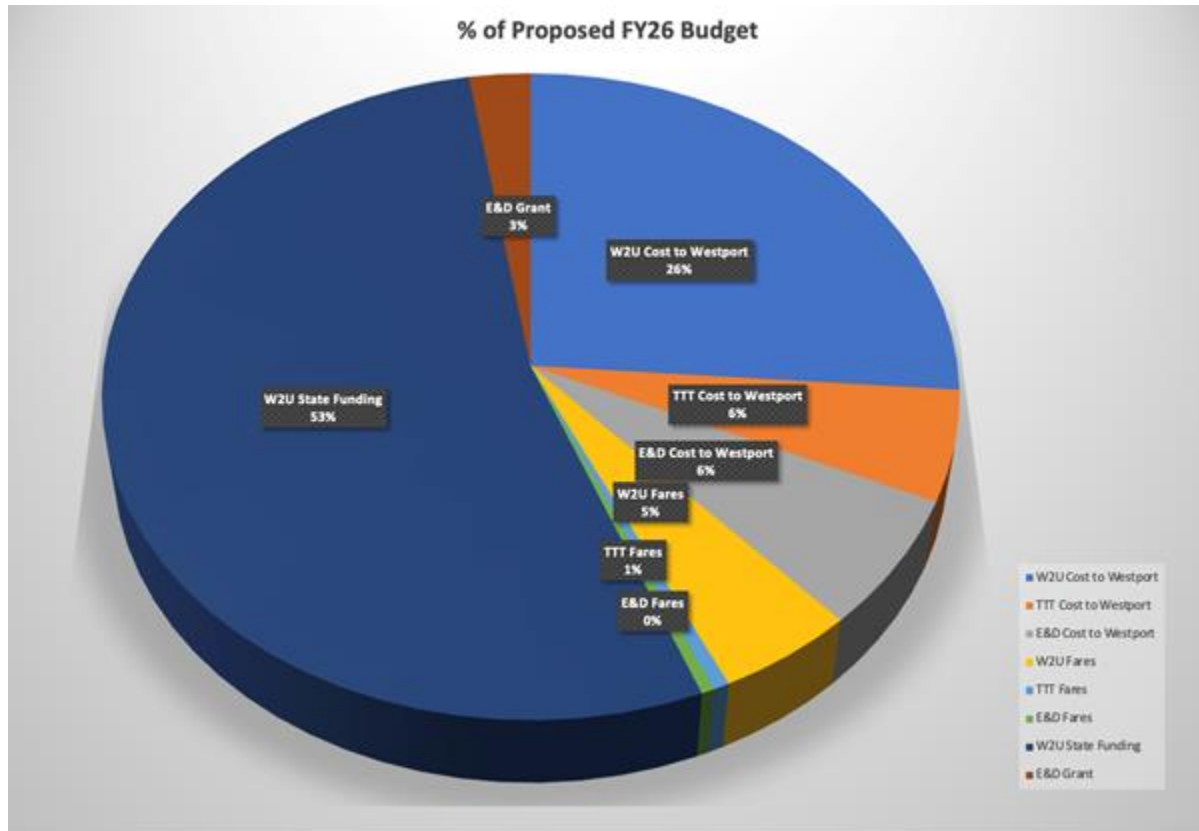
Service	# of Rides	# of Unique Riders	Cost / Ride
Wheels2U	20,097	1,227	\$7.11
Town To Town	632	35	\$83.38
Elderly & People with Disability within Westport	1054	37	\$56.75

We are currently looking into possible ways to lower the E&D cost.

The costs per ride are Westport's portion, net of fares, state funding and grants.

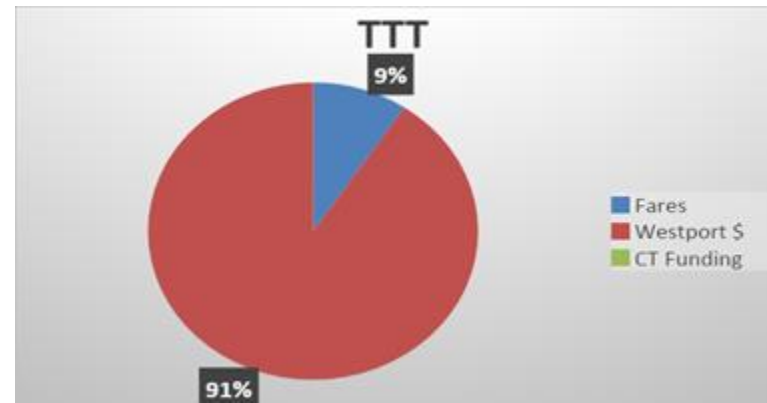
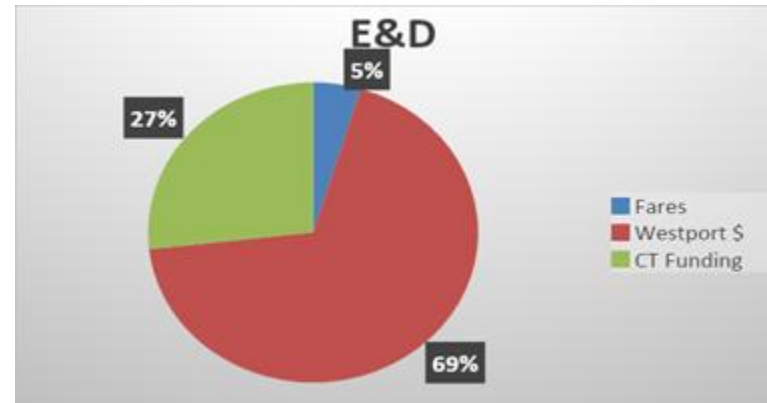
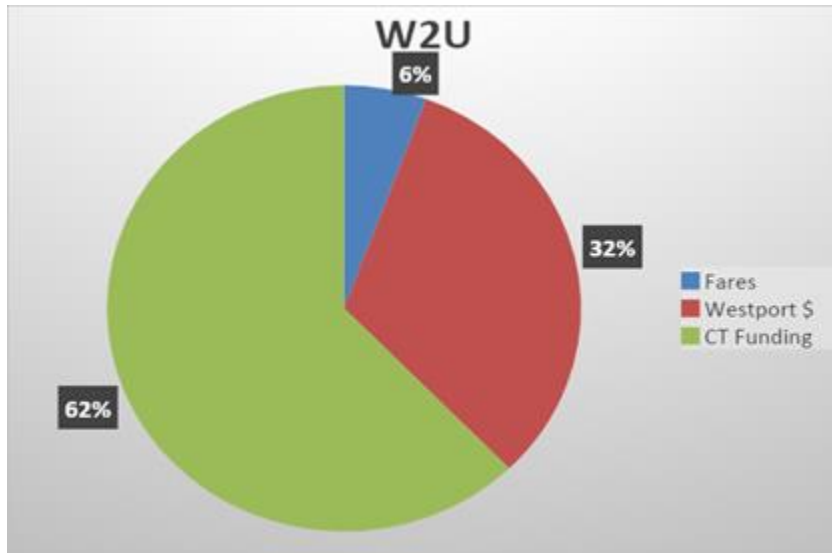


FY26 Budget Funding by Service & Source





FY26 Budget Funding by Service and Source





Appendix



Town of Westport Income Stats

- \$279,884 -- Income needed to meet the 50% needs / 30% wants / 20% debt repayment budgeting rule for a two-parent household with children ([SmartAsset Calculator](#))
- Westport's median household income is \$236,892. (2020 census, 2021 inflation adjusted)
 - 23.6% of households earn less than \$100k income (2020 census, 2021 inflation adjusted)
 - 12.1% of households earn between \$100k – \$150k (2020 census, 2021 inflation adjusted)
- \$163,699 -- Income needed to meet basic living costs for a Fairfield County household of two adults and two children ([MIT 2025 Living Wage Calculator](#))
- 29% of Westport households are cost-burdened, meaning they spend at least 30 percent of their total income on housing costs. (CT Data Haven)
- 17% of Westport households are severely cost-burdened, meaning 50% of income is spent on housing costs. (CT Data Haven)
- The Federal Poverty Level for a family of four in 2021 was \$26,500
 - A little over 6% of Westport's population is below the FPL of \$26,500 (2021 census)
- ALICE Household Survival Budget for CT in 2021 was \$106,632. (CT United Way)
 - ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) is a national, data-driven research initiative that reveals a hidden crisis in our communities. ALICE is a mismatch between earnings and the cost of basics.



Westport's Cost per Ride per Service FY22 – July 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025 for Wheels2U and to March 31, 2025 for E&D and TTT

	W2U \$/Ride	E&D \$/Ride	TTT \$/Ride
FY22	\$ 13.15	\$ 43.46	\$ 71.04
FY23	\$ 9.46	\$ 32.62	\$ 60.32
FY24	\$ 10.11	\$ 54.52	\$ 71.97
FY25	\$ 7.11	\$ 56.75	\$ 83.38



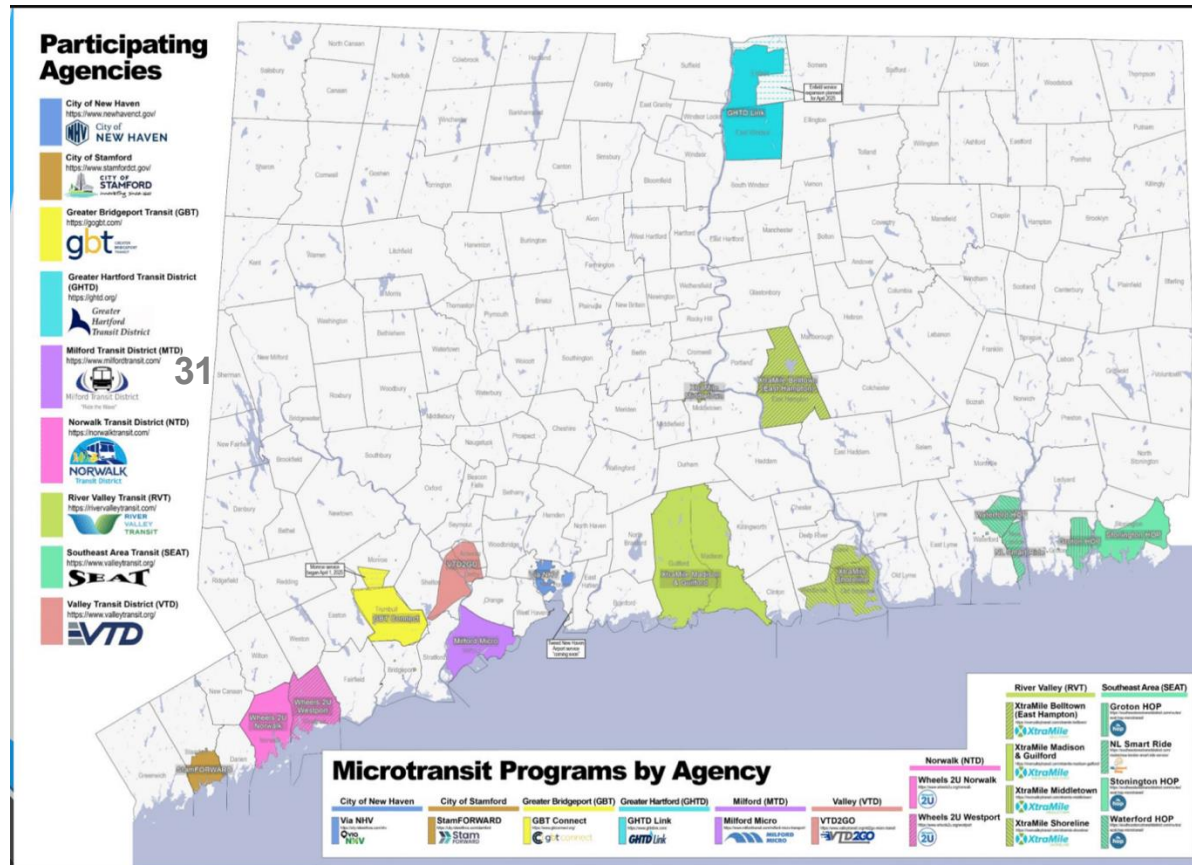


Historical Shuttle Ridership Levels

- FY 26 Target: 30,000 rides
- FY25 projected: 28,500 rides
- FY24 Actual: 28,426 rides
- FY23 Actual: 27,870 rides
- FY22 Actual: 18,087 rides
- FY19 Actual (last full fiscal year before Covid): 39,020 rides
- FY18 Actual: 39,094 rides



Towns in CT with Microtransit Program







Connecticut Towns With Microtransit Services

Transit District	Towns With Microtransit	Transit District	Towns With Microtransit
Westport Transit District	Westport	Norwalk Transit District	Norwalk
River Valley Transit	East Hampton Essex Guilford Madison Middletown Old Saybrook Westbrook	Southeast Area Transit	Groton New London North Stonington Stonington Waterford
Greater Bridgeport Transit	Bridgeport Monroe Trumbull	Valley Transit	Ansonia Derby Shelton Stratford
Greater Hartford Transit	East Windsor Enfield Windsor Locks	City of New Haven	New Haven
Milford Transit District	Milford	City of Stamford	Stamford

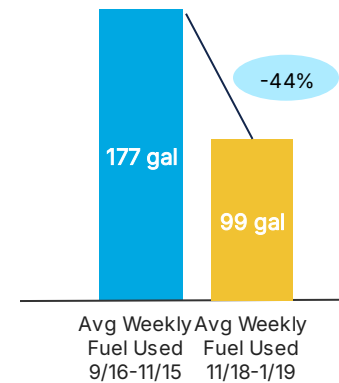


Wheels2U Westport – Benefits

Projected saving of 4,100 gallons of fuel annually, or 80,000 lbs of CO² emissions, is equivalent to:

-  8.5 household vehicles
-  4.9 homes' annual energy usage
-  84.4 barrels of oil consumed
-  2,945,790 smartphones charged

Estimated Weekly Fuel Usage





Key Findings by Nelson/Nygaard

Key findings of the draft State of the System report on the Westport market for transit service:

- While demand for transit service is limited, WTD service aligns very well with where there is demand for transit service.
- Wheels2U service currently requires passengers to include a train station as their origin or destination. However, this service has capacity to redistribute resources and provide access to additional locations within the community.
- Coastal Link service, operating on Post Road, provides robust fixed route service. This service is funded by Norwalk, Bridgeport, and Milford. Westport receives the direct benefit of this service without contributing to its operations.



Nelson/Nygaard Five-Year WTD Recommendations*

Key Recommendations from the draft the *State of the System* report:

- Wheels2U service can provide greater access and connectivity than a comparable investment in fixed route service due to overall low composite demand. **Wheels2U service should be expanded to operate with increased span, including mid-day service.** Wheels2U can provide greater flexibility for riders, offering improved passenger response times than fixed route services that are bound by a schedule. Comparable investments in fixed route service may yield even higher cost per passenger due to low composite demand and an inflexible service model.
- Wheels2U service should allow for open origin/destination pairs. **Composite demand shows demand in areas beyond the train station origin/destination requirement.** At a minimum, Wheels2U should be expanded to allow additional connections to Post Road.
- Westport and NTD should explore alternative operating contracts for microtransit, including **"turnkey service" which can reduce operational costs** by reducing unproductive times such as deadheading.

* *Bold added for emphasis*



Nelson/Nygaard Five-Year WTD Recommendations*

- **Current ridership on Wheels2U service has the opportunity for growth.** While Nelson\Nygaard recommends maintaining microtransit service, service should be monitored to ensure that microtransit services are not overburdened. Nelson\Nygaard recommends establishing performance metrics that define acceptable waiting time, passengers per hour, and missed trips. These metrics will help define when the service is unable to meet demand and should be re-evaluated. Nelson\Nygaard recommends monthly monitoring with a deeper analysis every 3-5 years to ensure system performance and responsiveness.
- **WTD should consider the expansion of microtransit as the community grows,** especially in coordination with the development of affordable housing.
- **Microtransit is a tool that can help connect people to employment opportunities and daily living activities.**

* *Bold added for emphasis*

**Tuesday, April 22, 2025, 7PM
RTM Transit Committee & Westport Transit District Meeting**

In attendance for the meeting:

RTM Transit Committee

- Dick Lowenstein
- Sal Liccione
- Melissa Levy
- Peter Gold
- Ross Burkhardt
- Jennifer Johnson
- Andrew Bloom

On the evening of Tuesday, April 22nd, the RTM Transit Committee and Westport Transit District met in room 210 of the Westport Library to review and make recommendations to the RTM on the following items:

1. The 2025-26 budget request for the Railroad parking, including a discussion of railroad parking permit revenues.
2. The 2025-26 budget request to restore funding for the Westport Transit District.
3. The 2024-2025 budget request for a supplemental appropriation of \$55,000 for transportation services for the elderly and people with a disability.

And finally, to discuss the new expansion of Wheels2U service to the Senior Center, the Farmers Market and Jesup Green/Westport Library commencing on or about May 12, 2025.

ITEM #1

To begin, Chief Foti discussed that the 1.9M budget is a .1% increase in the railroad budget and that it was presented to the BOF workshop and their budget meeting and also at the RTM Finance committee meeting and that there is nothing that has changed from year to year. (P339 of the budget book)

The main focus currently is the elevator. It is currently in working order, however it still needs more work and is slated for refurbishment in July.

Peter Gold asked about any future capital projects coming up

In the near future, there will be more elevator work.

Looking down the line over the next 5-10 years depend on timing and timing of other projects:

Greens Farms station - Lot 1 it used to be an old landfill and incurred a lot of settling. Not in great shape. The upside is that it keeps people driving slowly and cautiously, but it will need to be addressed.

Saugatuck Station - Lot 4 is currently inundated with heavy equipment and will need to be completely reconstructed with new lighting, drainage, repaving and cameras. When it's repaved there is a chance that there might be a couple of spaces lost, but this will be determined by engineering at the time of reconstruction.

At some point there will need to be a discussion about the full replacement of the elevators. This will be a huge expense, but if the platform elevation changes there is no other solution.

The funding for these projects would either come out of the reserves or it would be bonded as has been done before - (Previous project for Lot 1 was bonded, Previous projects for Lot 7 on Franklin, repaved of Greens Farms were all paid for by reserves.)

Jenny Johnson asked how much is in the reserves currently and Foti replied somewhere around \$350,000 for everything.

There was some discussion about the elevators being out and when and for how long, but they are currently working right now.

Jenny Johnson then asked about the lease on the buses because she thought that the lots were at capacity.

Chief Foti explained that they don't consider the lots to be at capacity. To his recollection, the only time it's been at capacity was when the lot was closed on the south side of the train tracks because of the large Eversource project. That is the only time that there hasn't been parking available at Greens Farms Station.

Foti explained that the bus lease continues to be temporary based on the Board of Ed. He doesn't feel they are at capacity. Parking is available on both sides and at both stations and that parking permits do not specify a certain location and therefore at capacity would include all of the parking spots at both stations. They are not at capacity.

Chief Foti stated that only Westport buses are allowed to be parking at the station.

A question was asked about the Avis agreement. Foti explained that Avis currently has 20 spots and they are carved out, they can't park anywhere else, if they do, they get a ticket and the parking ticket is more expensive.

Dick Lowenstein opened up the discussion to members of the public.

Dara Lam expressed her concern about the Hamlet project purchasing 70 spots and taking spots off the market and that potentially their 650 employees could also fill up those lots which would take spots away from the Westport commuters. She asked if there is any conversation happening around this.

Rick Smilow also expressed his concerns about the parking and its relationship to the Hamlet project. Specifically, Lot 7 being leased by the state and that it is up in 6-7 years. How will there be enough spots for the Westport commuters. He asked that the RTM Transit Committee have a dedicated meeting as transit relates to the Hamlet project.

Chief Foti responded to their comments by explaining that since 2011 he has been a strong advocate for the Westport commuters. He has kept pricing down, increased parking by over 20% without buying any land. The railroad division's mission has not changed. They have said far more no's than yes's to their proposals for parking. There are some rumors going around that he wanted to address. None of the staff nor him are investors or working for the Hamlet.

They have told ROAN that they could not promise what there would be in the future, but that there are currently 70 unused parking spots TODAY. There is no waitlist today. They also can not discriminate who purchases a permit. They have to abide by the laws and regulations.

Chief Foti explained further that he told ROAN that if he was still sitting in his seat 5 years from now and the parking continues to be adequate and there is no waitlist and they are able to buy 70 spots, he would ask that in an effort of working with the railroad division that they would only get spaces that they can park at Lot 7. So, 70 premier spaces would not be taken away from our commuters against the train tracks. That is the only thing we've said to ROAN on the Hamlet Project. That is the current policy.

Dick Lowenstein asked, who could change that? There was some discussion, but no definitive answer. Maybe the Board of Selectperson acting as the traffic authority?

Chief Foti said, if you read Ira Bloom's report, an entity can buy parking spaces. He is only going on what the town attorney says. He is not making any decisions. He is only following what the town has mandated.

There was a motion made to request the appropriation for \$1,952,158.00. Peter Gold made a motion and Sal Liccione Seconded.
6 in favor, 1 abstention.

ITEM #2

Karina Betfarhad presented the Westport Transit District budget request. She explained that the WTD offers 3 different services:

- 1) Wheels2U - This is a commuter service from anywhere in Westport to either train station as well as in the reverse.
- 2) Elderly & People with Disabilities - This service is run by Norwalk Transit, needs to be booked in advance and will take riders anywhere within Westport
- 3) Town-to-Town (TTT) - This service takes people with disabilities West from Westport all the way to Greenwich. This also needs to be booked in advance and is operated by the Norwalk Transit.

Wheels2U has gone through some important transitions over the last year. Westport is the first town in Connecticut that switched to microtransit from previously fixed route service.

In April 2024, Norwalk Transit began to offer microtransit within the Norwalk town line. They decided to offer this service on an app called VIA and asked Westport to join them and update the app we used to VIA. In the long run it was a good idea, but in the short term it caused some challenges. They lost a lot of their data and lost some ridership. So, the focus had to turn to communication and helping riders sign up for the new app and also understanding it. It was taking a lot of time and effort.

Around the same time, VIA offered them a turnkey service to operate the buses. They would provide the software, drivers, mini-vans, support and marketing and it would be less costly than what we were paying at the NTD. Using Norwalk as an example of what it would look like, they felt confident that making the switch would yield positive results and a decision was made to try out a new way of doing things.

In December of 2024, there was a pilot program launched to help holiday shoppers get around town and do their shopping. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough of a lead time and the participation wasn't what they anticipated however, it showed potential.

In January 2025, there was another positive change. The mini-vans were upgraded to fully electric/hybrid for all of the handicap accessible vehicles. The financial gain from the previous switch to VIA allowed them to make this change while still keeping the budget \$550 under the annual.

In mid-May 2025, the plan is to launch the first full pilot program that will go to the Senior Center, Jesup Green which includes the Library and Lower Main Street, and Farmer's Market on Tues/Wed/Thurs.

Sal Liccione asked why the buses aren't going to the downtown area.

Peter Gold explained that they looked at the resources they had available to provide additional services and they wanted to find a way to see how they could serve the most people with the services. With their previous limited success utilizing the service to go downtown, they determined that the areas they chose would be the best first step.

The idea is to try it out and if it works out, they can try to expand it. They are currently working on a limited budget and also need to consider the constraints of maintaining their current schedule.

They determined that these three areas would benefit from the service that they have the resources to provide and would give them the most rides for the dollars they have to invest.

Jenny Johnson said that microtransit is supposed to solve a problem. She doesn't believe that there is a problem that needs to be solved related to getting access to these areas and that the problem is access and different options available to get to and around downtown.

Peter explained that the elderly and disabled service is used by 37 people. He stated that there are a whole lot more seniors that want to go to the senior center than 37 people.

The issues with the elderly and disability service is that it has to be booked a day in advance, the window for pick-up is much longer wait time, it's a bit more expensive to the rider and it is extraordinarily more expensive to the town of Westport.

He believes that serving the seniors and bringing them to the senior center and being able to take them to the farmer's market and to Jesup green/library will be a good thing.

Peter Gold said that he welcomes everyone's input and requests and explained that if they had infinite resources, they would add all of these new stops right now, but they had to make choices and this is where they are starting.

Jenny would like to have a broader dialogue because we will not move forward with our transit needs unless and until we stop looking only at Westport. She wants another conversation and will not support the budget because we haven't had the discussion.

Peter Gold said that he agrees with a lot of what she is saying, but explained that a lot of it is not within his control. For example, he can't control how the state reimburses our town or any town.

Ross Burkhardt made mention of a discussion from last year. The state had set up a micro transit last mile services in certain towns to help commuters that get off commuter services and get to the last mile of their home. It is supposed to be subsidized 100% by the state. He wondered why aren't we going back to the state and asking them to subsidize it?

Ross mentioned that the other question is that one of the things we should be considering is linking up with Coastal Link and that these people could be brought to their last mile too.

The conversation was brought back to the motion in front of us.

The motion was made to recommend to the full RTM to restore the budget of \$342,360 that was cut by the Board of Finance.

Sal Liccione made the motion, Melissa Levy seconded it.

5 in favor, 1 recusal - Peter Gold and 1 no - Jenny Johnson.

Sal wanted it noted that he wants main street to be connected and added to the Wheels2U stops and that he wants the transit committee to meet with the DPIC, Maxx Crowley and Matt Mandell and that he is very disappointed that downtown is not already part of the new stops.

The Motion to approve the full budget of \$491,842 that includes the elderly and disabled.

Melissa Levy made the motion, Andrew Bloom seconded it.
5 in favor, 1 recusal - Peter Gold and 1 abstention - Jenny Johnson

ITEM #3

Peter Gold explained that they have a supplemental request as they had to go back to the Board of Finance to ask for an additional \$55,000 to cover the cost of the elderly and disabled services in Town To Town for the current fiscal year.

The problem that they are having with the services is that they are extraordinarily expensive per ride. It is Town To Town \$83.38 and Elderly and Disabled \$56.75 per ride.

One of the ideas we are considering to bring down the cost is moving some of the elderly and disabled rides to wheels2u. Another idea is getting a proposal from VIA instead of Norwalk Transit District.

The supplemental appropriation request is for \$55,000. He is hoping this will cover the costs.

Sal Liccione made a motion to recommend approval of the supplemental appropriation and Andrew bloom seconded it.

6 in favor, 1 recusal - Peter Gold

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Melissa Levy, RTM District 2

LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ARTS & FINANCE JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

WESTPORT LIBRARY BUDGET

April 21, 2025 6:00 PM - Location: Room 201 – Town Hall

LMA COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kristin Mott Purcell – Chair
Candace Banks
Dick Lowenstein
Julie Whamond
Melissa Levy
Karen Kramer

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Seth Braunstein, Chair
Nancy Kail
Melissa Levy
Don O'Day
Pam Kopack

REPRESENTING THE LIBRARY:

Bill Harmer, Westport Library Executive Director
Scott Bennewitz -- Chair Finance Committee, Board of Trustees
Pat Wieser – President, Board of Trustees
Meryl Kaplan – Director of Finance

Library Museum and Arts Committee met to review and vote on the Westport Public Library's Fiscal year 2025/2026 budget request of \$6,309,849.

Bill Harmer and Scott Bennewitz provided a brief update on the Westport Library and budget:

- The Westport Library is Five Star Library.
- The Library hosted 340,000 visitors last year
- Versofest had 4,500 attendees and is becoming a profit center for the Library.
- The Library is officially the loudest library in the country achieving a 107.1 decibel reading.
- Conference rooms continue to be a great draw with over 86% utilization in the past year.
- The Summer learning program, which is staffed by Westport teachers, served over 1,200 kids last summer.
- The Library circulated over 300,000 physical and over 70,000 digital books in the last year.
- The reference Librarians answered over 135,000 questions last year
- Booked for the Evening was a huge success and sold out again this year.
- Verso University is up and running and has hosted over 30 programs funded by a private donation.
- Budget request for FY 25/26 is \$6,309,849 which represents a 6% increase of \$355, 017. The represents 76% of the Library's total budget. The Library's commitment is \$1.7M which is a 4.5% increase year over year. The Library's contribution to the budget has increased by 45% since 2019.

- Key cost drivers personnel and benefits. We were underpaying our Librarians so increased their pay 3.5% for FT and 4% for PT. They are still below industry standards.
- Healthcare is up 18%
- Materials costs are up 11%, mostly driven by digital offerings.
- Technology, including cyber security, costs are up as is the cost of utilities.
- The Library's FTEs are 2 above their level 25-years ago.

Questions:

- What are you liquid reserves – not sure but is included in the audited financial statements that are posted each year on the website.
- Dick made a statement...the Library expense budget, including all operating costs acknowledges that the pension appropriation is part of the budget which would make the town's support 78.6%, a slight increase to the current 78.3%. Scott answered that the pension is part of the town budget, but if you combine them, that number sounds accurate.
- Do you have any federal grants? Not at this time
- Healthcare costs? Lockton, the Town's consultant, recommended a 17.8% increase to the healthcare pool and that the Library be pooled with Town employees to provide a smoothing of expenses which are now distributed across a larger pool of employees. This should alleviate the need for incremental support which the Library requested last year due to significant unexpected healthcare expenses.

For Finance, Pam Kopeck motioned and Melissa Levy seconded the motion to approve the Library budget of \$6,309,849 for FY '25/26. The motion passed Finance unanimously.

For LMA, Karen Kramer motioned and Dick Lowenstein seconded to approve the Library budget for budget of \$6,309,849 for FY '25/26. The motion passed Finance unanimously.

LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ARTS & FINANCE JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

EARTHPLACE BUDGET

April 21, 2025 6:00 PM - Location: Room 201 – Town Hall

LMA COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Kristin Mott Purcell – Chair
Candace Banks
Dick Lowenstein
Julie Whamond
Melissa Levy
Karen Kramer

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Seth Braunstein, Chair
Nancy Kail
Melissa Levy
Don O'Day
Pam Kopack

PRESENTING:

Tony MacDowell – Executive Director, Earthplace

Tony provided a brief update on Earthplace and a review of this year's budget request of \$105,000 for Fiscal year 2025/2026. He noted that the Board of Finance reduced their approved budget by \$25,000 and asked the LMA and Finance committees to consider restoring the \$25,000 to approve the full budget request of \$105,000.

Key points reviewed/discussed:

- The \$105,000 from the Town represents 2.5% of Earthplace's budget and is a very meaningful component of their overall funding.
- The current cost of Earthplace's partnership with the town costs each resident \$3.79 per year.
- Earthplace is 57 years old and has been running nature and educational program ever since.
- Earthplace had over 17,000 trail walkers visit their trails this year
- Earthplace provides the Town with access to over 84 acres of open space
- Harborwatch is a 38 year-old asset of Earthplace which adds tremendous value to Westport and the surrounding towns.
- Earthplace has embarked on a \$3M capital campaign to build a new falconry, a new classroom and to rebuild the current birds of prey exhibit.
- Tony will be retiring and plans to lead the capital campaign
- Tony's request: "Restore and maintain town support at its current level of \$105,000 per year to ensure that Earthplace and Harbor Watch can continue their partnership and provide preferential nature and environmental educational value to Westport residents."
- Supporting document from Earthplace is attached.

Questions:

What would you do without Town funding? We spend a good portion of our budget maintaining open space and providing access to all residents. If we lose that funding, we may have to consider limiting access to the property to save money.

You have been a resource for this community. Thank you for your service and support.

Explain the work of Harbour Watch. Harbour Watch monitors the rivers and water quality, provides educational programs and has added a fishing line collection program.

Grant revenue for non-profits may be in question, will you need to rely more on the Town contribution in the future? Yet to be seen, but yes we need the Town funding now and possibly even more in the future.

Why is Earthplace treated one way but the Library another? They are both getting Town funding.

What is your liquid reserve? \$1M

Voting

For Finance, Melissa Levy motioned and Nancy Kail seconded the motion to recommend that the RTM restore \$25,000 to the Earthplace budget and approve the full budget of \$105,000 for FY '25/26. The motion passed Finance unanimously.

For LMA, Melissa Levy motioned and Candace Banks seconded the motion to recommend that the RTM restore \$25,000 to the Earthplace budget and approve the full budget of \$105,000 for FY '25/26. The motion passed LMA unanimously.

Earthplace and the Town of Westport: A 60-year Public-Private Partnership

Background

Earthplace was founded in 1958 by conservationists led by **John Ripley Forbes - an American naturalist who lived in Westport**. Their first step was to join together open lands from neighbors in the Old Hill area of Westport into a 62+acre nature sanctuary. Soon after, the current museum building and nature center opened as the Mid-Fairfield County Youth Museum.

In the Early 60's – **nature educational programs blossomed** including the country's first nature-based preschool. Nature programming for school age children became a popular school field trip and family attraction. The Westport Board of Education helped fund these program initiatives beginning with an annual appropriation of **\$4,400 from the board of ED budget**.

History of Town Support

In the mid- 60's – **Allen Raymond joined the Nature Center board** and quickly recognized the value to the town of their educational programs and open space, and funding support shifted from the Board of Education to the town budget.

In the early 1970's the appropriation was **\$30,000/year** which represented **21% of revenues**. The Nature Center kept growing, and so did the town appropriation by about 3% per year. Financial support also increased from private and other public sources as the importance and popularity of nature education grew.

By 1999 Town support reached \$67,000 and increased steadily by 2-3% per year reaching \$79,000 in 2006, \$81,000 by 2010, and **\$85,000 by 2012** based on the perceived value of nature education to the Westport community.

By 2013, Earthplace was in financial difficulty having burned through most of its cash reserves, and the Board explored selling parcels of land to raise cash. To help, the town increased support to \$95,000, which remained unchanged for the next 10 years. In 2022, the town raised their appropriation to \$105,000 where it remains today. **The current cost of this partnership for residents is \$3.79 per year.**

During this period of growth for Earthplace, the breadth and impact of educational programs increased dramatically, improving community resources and our value proposition.

Our request to the RTM:

Restore and maintain town support at its current level of \$105,000 per year to ensure that Earthplace and Harbor Watch can continue their partnership and provide preferential nature and environmental educational value to Westport residents.

Delivered Value:

Nature Programs for the 2024 calendar year:

Program type	Cost	Number of engagements
Westport Farmers' Market tabling; Plein Air Painting on the Trails, other town tabling events, hosting community volunteer events, Environmental Learning Series, jUNeday	Free	315
Daily birds of prey feedings, Story Time, Winged Wonders, Saturday Craft	Free with admission	6691
(39 events) Educational programs: Gardening, foraging, wildflower identification, birding, ecology, outdoor exploration, environmental theatre	Under \$20	402
School and Scout Programs	(at cost)	1852
Trail use	Free	17,000

Harbor Watch Services to the Town of Westport:

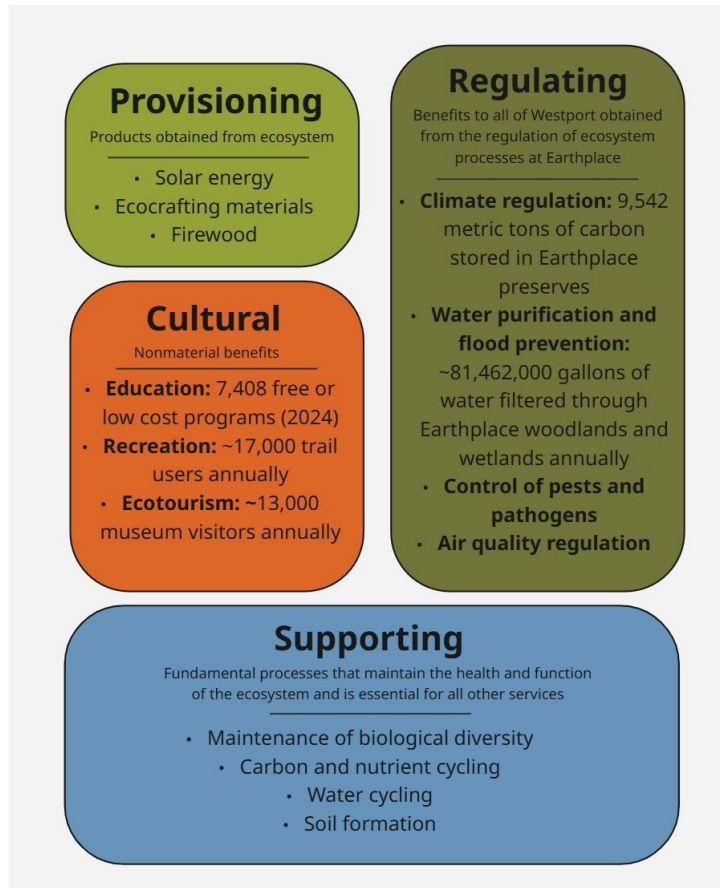
Value to Westport

River monitoring and pollution track-down (May through September)	\$15,000
Dissolved oxygen study and Unified Water Study in Saugatuck Harbor (May through October)	\$10,501
Education programs (virtual, in-person, and trawling)	\$10,094
Total Cost	\$35,595

Public Support for Regional Nature Centers:

1. Earthplace – \$3.5 Million
 - Town appropriation of \$105,000 or 3.0% of revenues
 - Harbor Watch also receives funds from the Conservation Dept. and shellfish commission
2. Stamford Nature Center - \$3.2M
 - Receives - \$320,000 operating support—or 10%
 - Town provides IT and HR support
3. New Canaan Nature Center - \$1.5M
 - Receives no operating support
 - Town owns the buildings and property, through letter of agreement.
 - Town maintains grounds (mowing & plowing) and provides capital maintenance for the buildings including HVAC
4. Greenburgh Nature Center (Scarsdale, NY) -- \$1.4M
 - Receives \$337,000 in operating support or 24%
5. Trumbull Nature Center – \$247,000
 - Receives \$135,000 in state grants (DEEP, Econ. Dev.)

Intrinsic Value of a Nature Center in Westport:



05/01/2025

RTM Parks & Recreation Committee Meeting (Zoom)

Agenda To discuss and vote on the following:

1. 2025-2026 Parks & Recreation Budget.

2. To approve an appropriation in the amount of \$238,000 along with bond and note authorization to the Municipal Improvement Fund Account 30503310-500468-10145, for Site Analysis, Architectural study, schematic design, Land-Use permitting, and preparation of an Opinion of Probable Cost for a Parks Maintenance Facility.

****Due to the meeting of 4/29 being improperly noticed as determined by our town attorney, the notes from the RTM Finance Meeting are included for transparency purposes. The original vote was invalid. ****

Attendance

- Andrew Colabella
- Andrew Bloom
- Chris Tait
- Don O'Day
- Jimmy Izzo
- Seth Braunstein
- Julie Whamond

Members of the Public

- Jennifer Johnson
- David Floyd
- Jeff Wieser

Administrative

- Erik Barbieri
- Rick Giunta
- Peter Ratkiewich

Ms. Johnson, acting as a member of the public, called the maintenance facility a controversial issue, even when she was a parks recreation commissioner. Her concern was about the location of Longshore but asked the minutes to reflect that the facility is not located on Longshore.

Mr. Barbieri stated that this is not site specific, therefore, the appropriation is for Stantec to look at all properties throughout Westport owned by the town.

Mr. Tait reminded Ms. Johnson that the appropriation is again, not site specific, that the now expanded appropriation is architectural and schematic design with a needs analysis that is for three properties chosen by the consultants, Stantec.

Mr. Keenan brought up how to go into a design process and telling experts where you can and cannot is the incorrect process. It is restrictive and limits their effectiveness and expertise.

Ms. Johnson argues that the preservation of open space as one of the multiple goals and asked that it not be on Longshore, and minutes reflect such thoughts and personal opinion.

Mr. Tait and Mr. Izzo reminded Ms. Johnson that this is an appropriation for design, and BOF approved of this, with no conditions, and that the main goal is the approval of money for design, which needs analysis and schematics. All town properties are an option for experts to look at.

Mr. Colabella stated that this fiscal appropriation is higher than the original because of the current facts and the information presented in the 8-24 reversal was not good enough but it is exactly what we're going for now. He also stated that a negative 8-24 does not preclude the land from future use and therefore is still on the table as a viable choice.

Planning & Zoning is strictly a planning mechanism by law.

Mr. Colabella also stated that the current facility is pre-existing and accessory to the park of Longshore.

Mr. Colabella also stated that at the BOF finance vote, Neil Cohn, a Planning & Zoning member spoke out and stated that if even if the commission had the architectural schematics and designs, **"WE"** still would have voted it down. Although he is a single vote, it is worrisome that the decision could be "baked."

It was asked by Mr. Colabella & Don O'Day that Neil Cohn recuse himself from the future 8-24 vote for a maintenance facility, because it is a prejudgment and now a conflict of interest.

Mr. Colabella stated that the health, safety and wellness but sustainability growth in town cannot happen until this building is brought to standards of today.

Mr. David Floyd, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Commission, eluded that the recent couple of months for this project was met with unnecessary obstruction and that eliminating any sites is restrictive and is not conducive to an efficient answer. Saying no to other options or saying no to one with no other options is not helpful.

Mr. Don O'Day asked for Peter and Erik to comment on the comment of "splitting up the maintenance facility efforts."

Mr. Ratkewich has been running six different operations for eight years as director and stated that he could not think of a more inefficient way than splitting up the assets and needs of the employees. Peter alluded to the current fact the current maintenance staff already must walk from their building to their vehicles in LOT F, working out of a 2000 square foot building on a 15,000 square foot allotted piece of land. Splitting up the crew, materials, vehicles, equipment, your building inefficiency into the operation. Peter stated we know what we need to run an operation, and splitting is not only not an option, but those have never run an operation. It is efficient to have everything in proximity. Mr. Ratkewich stated to listen to the experts and what they have been doing for decades.

Erik Barbieri agreed with everything Mr. Ratkewich did but also stated that with a need for open space, paving or taking over multiple places or spaces to have multiple lock rooms, washing bays, parking for be more costly and detrimental to the need for open space. Confining everything to one place is efficient.

Don O'Day stated that for the splitting up, should not be an option and be reflected in the minutes. He also stated that when Jimmy and Andrew brought the petition, he stated that if we don't overturn the PZ decision, he believed that the facility would never be built on Longshore, and two RTM members said it was not true. Ms. Johnson was one of them. Further, Don stated that this preventative measure would have to be made on the floor before the full RTM and hopes that is not the case.

Mr. Izzo stated the spot in Longshore is a licensed satellite brush dump site and that it will always be one and that it is not open space, correcting a statement put out by Sustainable Westport, misinforming the public. We are all for sustainable equipment, but that it comes with a sustainable building.

Ms. Johnson agrees with the need to be efficient but states you cannot quantify open space, but its up for negotiation and there should be a compromise.

Mr. Tait stated that is exactly what we are doing, quantifying all the options, opening the space that maintenance currently occupies that is now split between two properties taking away recreational area and parking. We cannot make decisions if we do not have the facts. The current maintenance facility location will become open space. Wherever it is relocated, it will be occupying land that was once open space or turning land into another use.

PR Vote:

Motion: Andrew Colabella, Seconded by Jimmy Izzo

Unanimous Vote

2.) 2025-2026 Parks & Recreation Budget.

Mr. Barbieri thanked Rick Giunta and the staff for his service and putting together the budget, roughly 4.6%. Mr. Barbieri highlighted the minimum wage hike, reflecting higher costs, inflation in supplies and promotions.

Rick Giunta is retiring from Parks and Recreation and was thanked by all for his years of service to the town.

Motion: Jimmy Izzo, seconded by Andrew Colabella

Unanimous Vote

Minutes from the 4/29 Meeting attached on the next page

04/29/2025

RTM Finance and Public Works Committee Meeting

Meeting via Zoom

Upon the request of the Director of Parks & Recreation, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$238,000 along with bond and note authorization to the Municipal Improvement Fund Account 30503310-500468-10145, for Site Analysis, Architectural study, schematic design, Land-Use permitting, and preparation of an Opinion of Probable Cost for a Parks Maintenance Facility.

For RTM Finance: • Seth Braunstein – Chair, RTM Finance Committee • Nancy Kail – RTM Finance Committee • Don O’Day – RTM Finance Committee • Pam Kopack - RTM Finance Committee • Ari Benmosche - RTM Finance Committee

For the Town: • Peter Ratkiewich – Director of Public Works • Eric Barbieri – Director of Parks & Recreation • Rick Giunta – Deputy Director of Parks & Recreation

On Tuesday evening, April 29th the RTM Finance committee met with P&R Director Eric Barbieri to discuss a request for \$238k to cover Site Analysis, Architectural study, schematic design, Land-Use permitting, and preparation of an Opinion of Probable Cost for a Parks Maintenance Facility. Our discussion during this meeting also included helpful input from Public Works Director Peter Ratkiewich and P&R Deputy Director Rick Giunta. There was unanimous agreement that a new maintenance facility for staff is desperately needed.

We spent a few minutes discussing the previous history of this request and stressed that these funds are not site specific. This study will allow the town to understand exactly what is needed in terms of the specifications for the building. It will provide an objective overview of the requirements for the new structure and will incorporate basic considerations like the number of staff people, the number of vehicles and pieces of equipment utilized by the Maintenance Department as well as more dry storage to allow for the safe and environmentally conscious storage of certain materials that need to be treated with care. Keep in mind that currently the Department’s equipment is all outdoors being exposed to elements which is significantly reducing the effective lifespan of the equipment. Not only will a new facility allow employees a safer environment up to the standard that our valued employees deserve, but it will also allow for better maintenance set up with lifts that are critical to the repair and maintenance of the equipment. A new facility should also include basic locker rooms, a meeting room, limited office space and a washing basin. Every effort will be made to ensure that the new building adheres to minimum requirements and does not in any way end up being a "Ferrari." The intent is to

provide basic items that are up to standard. Included in the cost is an analysis of three sites for feasibility - the town will submit a list of the ~120 town owned properties which will be winnowed down to the top three. We also learned that the contingency amount in the budget would allow Stantec to potentially analyze any non-town-owned sites that would become available. Stantec was chosen through a quality bid selection.

Members of the public commented/questioned:

- Will all town properties be considered = yes, every site will be included in the analysis.
- Will the consultant consider splitting the function into two sites instead of one larger site? This would be a less-than-optimal outcome that would require greater expenditure, and greater supervisory oversight, and would be far less efficient and potentially require even more open space to be consumed.
- A member of the public insisted that Sustainable Westport must have a seat at the table as to how the maintenance building is developed.
- All meetings with the consultants need to be public meetings.
- A member of the public felt that it should not just be Town employees that should be considered - residents should be considered too.
- Encourage the process to have a broad view and not just consider town owned sites..."creative thinking" is required. Why not state-owned sites too? o Timing and cost are critical and negotiations and approval by the state will delay the process and consideration of non-town owned sites would invariably require increased costs as the property acquisition costs would likely be quite significant and would also require additional lengthening of the approvals process.
- Want more public discussion earlier when it comes to the specific site considered. o The public has had opportunities throughout the process to attend meetings and voice their opinions.
- Are there shared services between golf course maintenance and parks maintenance? There is minor overlap but the vast majority of work is done independent of each other.
- Are parks employees subcontractors or town employees? No, they are town employees.
- Could a non-town owned property be purchased or leased to move the shed to? It could but timing and costs would need to be considered.
- How many employees are in parks maintenance? It is about 20 at peak levels.

- Who will make the decision? It will be at the discretion of the First Selectperson and then subject to all of the required town approvals. The consultant will work with staff to make recommendations to the First Selectperson.

- An urging that the public be given input into where the shed should be sited, not have it be driven solely by the expert consultants hired by the town.

For Finance: Nancy Kail motioned and was seconded by Pam Kopack and the appropriation request was recommended unanimously by a vote of 5 - 0. Respectfully submitted by, Seth Braunstein Chair of the RTM Finance Committee

Respectfully Submitted by:

Andrew Colabella, RTM, District 4

Westport Representative Meeting
RTM Finance Committee
Report on the 2025-2026 Town Budget
For the RTM Meeting, May 6, 2025

As stated in the Town Code, the RTM Finance Committee studies Town revenues and financial policies and practices, exclusive of individual department budgets. The Committee works with Town officials to secure adequate reports for the RTM. The Finance Committee further studies the Town's current financial position, the financial aspects of the annual budget, capital requirements and long-term financial planning.

We started our formal review of the Town's financial position early in this new year with the Boards of Finance and Education, and other members of Town government and the RTM. We followed closely the deliberation of the Boards of Finance and Education at their various budget workshops and meetings. While individual department budgets have been reviewed and voted upon by appropriate RTM Committees, the Finance Committee met on April 21st and May 1st to discuss the aggregate budgets that the larger body will be asked to scrutinize and ultimately approve this evening. At many points, other RTM Committees joined us when department budgets or budget items under their purview were discussed.

As we move forward tonight to the final steps in this budgeting process, it is worth taking a moment to recognize that inflation continues to be a factor which impacts all of us in our daily lives and remains apparent in the budget we are considering this evening. Additionally, Westport continues to successfully assimilate several new residents (and the highest number of new elementary school students of any town in the state) post Covid, while working to ensure that we maximize opportunities for equal access to housing. Other factors which have an impact on the budget include rising healthcare costs, town infrastructure needs, uncertainty from Federal Government actions and changing town demographics (in addition to new families, a large portion of seniors are aging in place and a significant portion of residents earn less than \$100,000 per year). From the Board of Selectman, the Board of Finance, the Board of Education, to the department heads and all of the incredibly dedicated employees and volunteers our town is so fortunate to rely upon, there has been an unwavering focus on attending to the well-being of our community and providing an exceptional level of service.

We met with the Town Administration on Monday, April 21st. First Selectwoman Jen Tooker and Finance Director Gary Conrad joined us to review the Town of Westport's General Fund Budget and we were also joined by the Directors or deputy Directors of a number of town departments as well as Lee Caney from the Board of Finance. This report, covering the Town Budget only, is the second of two reports prepared by the Finance Committee (the first report focused on the

BOE's budget and presentation and was presented by fellow Finance Committee member, Don O'Day, last night). The RTM Finance Committee also met on Tuesday, April 29th (on Zoom) with School's Superintendent Thomas Scarice and Chief Financial Officer Elio Longo, Director of Human Resources John Bayers, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services Michael Rizzo along with Board of Education Chair Lee Goldstein to review the BOE budget. As mentioned, the report on the 2025 - 2026 Education Budget was presented to the full RTM on Monday, May 5th, 2025 (last night) and the RTM unanimously voted to approve that budget.

I'd like to thank the Finance Committee and fellow members, our Chair Seth Braunstein, Ari Benmosche, Rachel Cohn, Noah Hammond, Pam Kopack, Melissa Levy, Don O'Day and Michael Perry for their time and effort in reviewing the budgets. And as a Committee, I'd like to thank all the individuals, named and not named in this report, for their patience in helping us deal efficiently with the many intricacies of the budgeting process and for remaining focused on the best interests of our community.

BACKGROUND

The preparation and approval of the budget is at least a five-month exercise involving the Town Administration, the Boards of Finance and Education, and the RTM, among others. The approval by the RTM is the culmination of reviews by the Town, various boards, and RTM committees. Our reviews this year, as always, balanced the many priorities of the Town, namely:

The maintenance of:

- 1) our superior educational environment;
- 2) Town Services and Safety; and
- 3) our relatively modest tax burden.

Other related budgetary drivers that impact the town and deserve consideration in these discussions include:

- 1) the appropriate funding of our future pension and OPEB obligations;
- 2) the responsible maintenance of the Town's outstanding debt levels and how that impacts our credit rating and additionally, how higher interest rates will increase our borrowing costs in the foreseeable future as we emerge from a period of historically low interest rates;
- 3) State mandates (including efforts to pass one size fits all zoning laws that don't fit all towns well), and local efforts to expand affordable housing.

4) the impact of potential federal and state budget cuts, increasing healthcare costs, overall economic uncertainty caused by Federal Government actions and as mentioned throughout this report, inflation.

At our April 21st Committee meeting, Board of Finance Chair Lee Caney presented the Town Budget, as approved by the Board of Finance (BOF) at its March 25th meeting. Each of the departmental budgets were reviewed with specific variances noted YOY. The total town budget request is \$87,377,040 which represents a 3.64% increase over the previous budget. A key offset to this year's relatively stable increase relates to the great success Westport has had in managing its large OPEB and pension liabilities. The progress on improving our funding levels towards these obligations has been quite remarkable and in fact, once again this year we will NOT need to make a contribution to OPEB Trust but rather will pay out the required \$2.2 million benefit amount from the currently over-funded OPEB account itself, with the remaining \$2.7 million coming from the General Fund as a "Pay as You Go." This helps ameliorate the impact on the Town budget from operational increases detailed below. Through consistent and conservative annual contributions to the pension and OPEB liabilities we are appropriately funded and should continue to maintain a disciplined approach to be certain that we can keep the promises we've made to our town employees and retirees. With the OPEB Account having built up over the last thirteen years from \$0 to \$103.4 million, the account is now 107.7% funded. This "catch up" in funding of this liability is one of the Town's great successes of the past dozen years and deserves to be recognized as a source of Town strength provided by the taxpayers.

In terms of some of the more significant operational variances, we noted:

- Public Works increase of 2.33% which is largely driven by supply chain issues, inflation (especially road materials due to oil prices), labor costs and reincorporating the Engineer position that was in last year's IT budget as a GIS specialist.
- Public Works Safety increase of 2.64% which is largely driven by an additional security officer dedicated to Long Lots elementary during the construction period for that school as well as additional manpower costs, equipment costs (cameras to read license plates) and increased costs for vehicle replacements.
- An increase in the Parks & Recreation budget of 4.64%, mainly driven by supply chain issues and inflation for field maintenance materials.
- An increase in Pension, OPEB & Insurance of 9.56%, driven by Pension Fund contributions, insurance costs and new employee expenses as the Town filled positions created by retirements. As earlier mentioned, the total Pension, Health and Insurance

Benefits increase was partially offset by the OPEB Trust payment for OPEB health claims.

- A decrease in Debt Service costs of 4.56% as the Town was able to pay down \$11.5 million of debt and new debt issuances on construction and public works projects were delayed due to a slower than anticipated approvals process. The Town anticipates a November 2025 debt issuance, assuming the Long Lots School project is approved prior to that date.

As we pointed out last year, and as we are all experiencing in our own lives, the operations of running our town continue to be impacted by rising prices. We heard a common theme across many town departments detailing the many and varied ways in which inflation is playing an increasing role in driving higher expenses. While the town has been strategic with respect to how we purchase certain products and services we are inevitably forced to contend with the rising cost of goods; whether it be fuel related, services related, materials related, or labor related. Attracting and retaining good people has clearly become more challenging. Rising healthcare costs are also driving increased expenses and are not expected to abate any time soon. Supply chain issues and timing of approvals were also driving factors in budget variances. Another theme we again saw evidenced this year was a need to invest more in technology and we expect investments in that area in future budgets.

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Moving beyond the operating items associated with the Town's budget, we also reviewed the "Other Organizations" budgets which cover the Health District, Library, Earthplace and the Westport Transit District. In total, the "Other Organizations" budget is \$7,145,790 (+ 1.01% YOY). The BOF approved budget for these items included two reductions from originally requested amounts from Earthplace (a reduction of \$25,000) and the Westport Transit District (a reduction of \$342,046, essentially the entire Town contribution to the WTD's Wheels 2U program). Details regarding Other Organizations are below.

Health District – \$606,459 budget, representing a 2.0% YOY increase.

Library - \$6,309, 849, representing a 5.96% YOY increase, driven by providing competitive compensation to PT staff, rising circulating materials costs and rising healthcare costs.

Earthplace – \$80,000, following the BOF's \$25,000 reduction, resulting in a 24% YOY decrease.

Westport Transit District (WTD) – \$149,482, following the BOF's \$342,360 reduction, which represented a YOY decrease of 66%.

As expected, there was significant discussion of the BOF cuts to Earthplace and WTD budgets and whether to restore funding for these organizations.

Earthplace's Tony McDowell, presented to the Committee and highlighted: the organization's Harbor Watch waterways research and monitoring activities that various Town departments rely upon; its 84 acres of open space available to all in Westport; and its numerous education and nature programs. Tony McDowell concluded with a request to restore the \$25,000 in funds.

The WTD's Co Directors, Peter Gold and Karina Betfarhad, also presented to the Committee and focused their remarks on Wheels2U, highlighting that:

- A new W2U turnkey provider is delivering more and better services at lower costs;
- Ridership has increased;
- Larger vans have been replaced with smaller EVs, supporting town Net 0 goals;
- A new pilot program to the Senior Center, Farmers Market and Jesup green has potential to incorporate elderly or disabled riders who are now using a much costlier WTD service;
- W2U serves a diverse group Westporters and non Westporters;
 - 23% of riders reverse commute and use W2U to get to work in Westport
 - 22% have no access to a car or may share access
 - 16% have annual household incomes of \$100,000 or less
- The budget request for W2U is lower this year than the previous year.

The WTD Co Directors concluded with a request to restore the Wheels2U funds.

The Finance Committee moved to vote on the Earthplace and WTD requests and unanimously voted to recommend restoration of the Earthplace funds of \$25,000 and the WTD W2U funds of \$342,360, to the full RTM.

*Should restoration of both organization's funds approved by the full RTM, the Earthplace budget would be \$105,000 and the WTD budget would be \$491,842.

While there was less discussion of the other two organization budgets - the Health District and Library - the BOF signaled greater scrutiny of all the Other Organization budgets in the 2026-27 budget cycle.

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

With all of that as background, The RTM Finance Committee voted unanimously, (6 – 0), to recommend the full 2025 - 26 Town budget of \$87,377,040 to the RTM, with Seth Braunstein, Noah Hammond, Nancy Kail, Pam Kopack, Don O'Day, and Melissa Levy voting on all items.

Again, we also voted to recommend to the full RTM approval of the “Other Organizations” budget of \$7,513,150, restoring the funding for both the Earthplace \$25,000 and the WTD’s Wheels2U service \$342,360 that the BOF cut.

BENEFITS ASSESSED ORGANIZATIONS

Additionally, we reviewed the three benefits-assessed budgets which do not form a part of the General Fund Town Budget. The Finance Committee again voted unanimously (5-0), to recommend approval of these Funds’ budgets to the RTM at a meeting held on May 1, 2025 with Ari Benmoche, Seth Braunstein, Nancy Kail, Pam Kopack and Don O’Day voting.

These three separate accounts are FUNDED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE USERS and DO NOT affect the Town’s tax situation or the mill rate, as will be set by the BOF in mid-May. Further details on these funds are as follows:

1. The Sewer Fund - \$6,143,945, up 4.5% from 2024-2025. This increase is driven by sewage collection and treatment costs plus equipment maintenance costs. It was noted that a \$3.2 million reserve will most likely cover emergency repairs.
2. The Railroad Parking Fund - \$1,952,158, an increase of 2.78% YOY, driven by expenses required to repair and maintain the elevator at the station and by inflation – specifically rising electricity rates. It was noted there is currently no waitlist for RR Parking and there has been a 22% increase in parking spaces from reclaimed spaces previously leased to other entities. In addition daily parking use is at 250 cars/day, far below the 400/day limit.
3. The Wakeman Town Farm Fund - \$645,336.25, an increase of 16.4% (or \$87,000), driven by adding staff and a bookkeeper and increasing hours for existing staff. The Farm maintains an active program of classes and events.

TAXATION IMPLICATIONS

Once the final Town of Westport and Board of Education budgets are adopted by the RTM at our meetings this week, the Board of Finance will then be able to set the mill rate for the 2025-26 fiscal year. To recap, the mill rate will use the following inputs; Selectman’s Budget of (1) \$87,377,040 (2) Other Organizations expenses of between \$7,145,790 and \$7,513,150 (depending on whether or not the Earthplace \$25,000 and Wheels2U \$342,560 in cuts are restored); (3) BOE Debt Service of \$6,456,038 and (4) an overall Board of Education requested budget of \$150,371,920 * plus BOE-related budgets for (a) Program Expenses/Stepping Stones Preschool of \$243,970 and (b) Aid to Private/Parochial Schools of \$243,970. These amounts represent changes to last year’s final budgets of;

- 1) Town Budget: +3.64%

- 2) "Other Organizations": 5.82%
- 3) Education Operating Budget: +4.70%
- 4) Total General Fund Budget: +3.86 %.

There are certain adjustments before the amount needed to be raised by taxes can be determined. There are non-budgeted expenditures consisting of pending labor and litigation settlements which will be somewhat offset by any turn backs from the current fiscal year.

The total amount to be raised in taxes is reduced by non-tax revenue items which include the following items. FY '26 Non-Tax Revenue projections are expected to be \$27,827,718, an X% (or \$709,794) YoY increase, driven by higher General Fund interest income and P&R revenues.

- Prior tax collections; \$0
- Revenues from the Parks & Recreation Department; \$295,865
- Licenses & Permits; \$7,094
- State Grants; -\$15,525
- Education Programs; \$67,360
- Service Charges and Misc. Revenues: \$147,360

When the BOF sets the mill rate they determine any contribution from the General Fund balance. When possible, the BOF uses this balance to reduce taxes while keeping the fund in a previously set range of 9-11% of total budgeted annual expenses. This range is an important feature in the Town's discussions with the ratings agencies. We need to balance a level of available "rainy day funds" with an undertaking by the Town to keep tax rates as low as possible so that current taxpayers are not disproportionately funding future obligations. The Board of Finance will determine in late May the contribution, if any, from the General Fund. In setting the mill rate this year, the BOF faces an economic landscape that has clearly been impacted by inflationary pressures that make operating expenses higher and by rising interest rates that increase our debt costs. We should all also be mindful of the significant capital expenses the town will be incurring in the next few years as we replace Long Lots School, analyze our complete stock of educational buildings, [review town infrastructure], and contemplate the future of our emergency services/public protection facilities.

PROJECTED TAXES 2025-2026

The BOF will set the mill rate with the factors that are known in mid-May. The current mill rate of 18.62 experienced a very small increase YOY. As you can see in the table below, the town completed its most recent revaluation four years ago (a process undertaken every 5 years) which was based on property values just prior to the pandemic and will undertake its next revaluation in 2026. Note that a revaluation does not affect the total taxes paid by residents.

What does this mean to the taxpayer?

The historic tax charge on a home with a market rate of \$1,000,000, and a consequent assessed value of \$700,000 has been as follows:

2010-2011 (mill rate: 0.01485):	\$10,388	
2011-2012 (mill rate: 0.01743):	\$12,201	
2012-2013 (mill rate: 0.01791):	\$12,537	
2013-2014 (mill rate: 0.01807):	\$12,649	
2014-2015 (mill rate: 0.01794):	\$12,558	
2015-2016 (mill rate: 0.01809):	\$12,663	
2016-2017 (mill rate: 0.01686):	\$11,802	
2017-2018 (mill rate: 0.01686):	\$11,802	
2018-2019 (mill rate: 0.01686):	\$11,802	
2019-2020 (mill rate: 0.01686):	\$11,802	
2020-2021 (mill rate: 0.01671):	\$11,697	
2021-2022 (mill rate: 0.01807):	\$12,649	Revaluation (without which the Mill Rate = 0.01695)
2022-2023 (mill rate: 0.01806):	\$12,642	Essentially the same as a decade ago
2023-2024 (mill rate: 0.01835):	\$12,845	A 1.55% increase YOY
2024-2025 (mill rate: 0.01862):	\$13,034	A 1.05% increase YOY

Apart from a few Litchfield County rural communities, our mill rate is among the lowest in the state. It compares favorably to neighboring towns.

OTHER FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taxes, and any potential increase in the tax rate, are always a principal consideration of the RTM Finance Committee at this time of the year. There are also other issues which are important to mention here.

For Fiscal Year End (FYE) 2025, total debt will be \$87.8 million, a large decrease from last year driven by debt repayments and the postponement of a May bond issuance for Long Lots School and other projects. The postponement is caused by construction delays which in turn were caused by slower than anticipated receipt of necessary approvals. It is anticipated that the Town will instead issue \$35-\$40 million in bonds in October for Long Lots School and other capital projects. The interest rate for the November issuance is expected to be 3.4%-3.5% - a

stable rate vis-à-vis previous bond issuances. While current Town debt levels significantly lower than peak debt levels in FYE 2006 (\$177.1 million), we are likely to contend with higher debt levels over the next decade as our capital investment is going to be significant (see discussion above of new school and potential new fire/police buildings). It is also important to recognize that while Interest rates remain favorable vs. higher historical levels for long term debt issued and refinanced by the Town, interest rates have increased over the past few years and the cost of future bonding for the town will likely continue to increase from recent historically low levels.

Employee pension funds are re-evaluated every year. Total funding is 96.5% of the most recent July 1 2024 actuarial liabilities valuation. As of July 1, 2024 the market value of the pension fund was \$409 million (up from \$386 million at the close of the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023).

Additional items that will be factored in:

- The 2024-2025 annual results should end in a \$2.0 million gain for the General Reserve.
- Historically low interest rate levels have allowed the town to smartly refinance debt that had higher rates which has resulted in reduced financing costs (but again, we note that interest rates and the cost of future borrowing will likely increase).

All of these considerations will help impact the generation of the mill rate later this month. As we have learned, a consistently conservative and prudent approach to capital spending should allow the town to handle the inevitable, unanticipated expenses that are certain to emerge. We must remain vigilant to ensure that we are able to finance our excellent schools at a pace which over the last many years has far outpaced inflation; be responsible stewards of the town's infrastructure assets (which are beginning to show their age); recognize the challenged condition of the finances of the State of CT; prudently manage increasing healthcare and insurance costs; navigate periods of economic uncertainty; and maintain a vibrant Town that continues to attract residents looking for the best place to live in the world. As with others before me who have delivered the annual Finance Committee Town Budget report, I believe we are up to the task.

The RTM Finance Committee appreciates the assistance it has received in this budget cycle from Jen Tooker, Gary Conrad, Thomas Scarice, Elio Longo, John Bayers, Lee Caney, the Board of Education, the Board of Finance, all our Town's Department Heads and our fellow RTM members.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Kail, RTM Finance Committee, D9

Supplemental Appropriation Request
For Elderly and Disabled and Town-To-Town Services

April 2, 2025

The Westport Transit District is requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$55,000 to fund its Elderly and Disabled service and Town-to-Town service for people with a disability through the remainder of FY 25. If the supplemental appropriation is not approved the Westport Transit District will be forced to cancel these services effective on or about May 5, 2025 due to a lack of funds.

How the Supplemental Request is Determined

The \$55,000 request is determined as follows:

- As of the end of February 2025 the Westport Transit District spent \$53,904.03 for its Elderly and Disability service, which is 121% of its FY 25 budget of \$44,452 for this service, resulting in a shortfall of \$9,452.03 through February.
- Based on the average of the monthly charges through February for Elderly and Disability service, an additional \$26,952 is needed to fund the Elderly and Disability service for the remaining four months of FY 25.
- As of the end of February 2025 the Westport Transit District spent \$48,355.52 for its Town-to-Town service. This is 83.25% of its FY 25 budget of \$58,090 for only 75% of the fiscal year. Based on the average of the monthly charges for the Town-to-Town service through February, it would cost an additional \$26,952 to fund the Town-to-Town service for the remaining four months of FY 25. This amount is reduced by the \$9,734 remaining in the Westport Transit District's budget for this service, resulting in the need for an additional \$14,724 to fund the Town-to-Town service for the remainder of FY 25.
- The sum of the \$9,452 needed to bring the Elderly and Disabled service current, the \$26,952 needed for the Elderly and Disability service for the remaining four months of FY 25, and the \$14,724 needed for the Town-to-Town service for the remaining four months of FY 25 is \$51,128. Adding a contingency of \$3,872 should ridership on these services exceed the average monthly ridership brings the supplemental appropriation request to \$55,000.

Why the Elderly and Disability Service and the Town-to-Town Service are over Budget

It is exceedingly difficult to predict with any degree of accuracy how many people will use these services and how often each person will use them. Given the very small number of people who use these services, the addition of only one or two people needing to go to the doctor or other location such as the Senior Center weekly can make a large difference in the cost of these services.

As it prepares its budget each February, the Westport Transit District annualizes the ridership of each of these services for the first six months of the current year and uses that as the number of rides in the following fiscal year. For example, when preparing the FY 25 budget in February 2024, the Westport Transit District annualized the rides for each of these services for July through December 2023. Given the budgetary process timeframes, this is the most current data available when preparing the budget.

	Budgeted FY 25 Trips (FY 24 Trips Annualized)	FY 25 Trips Through January 31, 2025	Budgeted Trips Through January 31, 2025
Elderly and Disabled	1,179	799	466
Town-to-Town	952	471	555

The number of riders using these services, while small, is also increasing year to year.

Fiscal Year	Riders Elderly and Disabled Service	Riders Town-to-Town Service
2022	29	24
2023	29	21
2024	47	39
2025 through January 31, 2025	37	28

The number of people using these services is not equal to the sum of the riders on each service as a few people use both services. Also, riders on these services may bring personal care assistants with them when they ride. Personal care assistants ride for free and are not included in the number of riders using the service.

Going Forward

At this point it should be noted that the Westport Transit District is looking into ways to reduce the cost of these services going forward. These currently include expanding Wheels2U’s operating hours to 1 PM and service destinations to include the Senior Center

and Jesup Green to move riders from these expensive services to the much less expensive Wheels2U service, and outsourcing these services to Via, the Westport Transit District's partner for Wheels2U.