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Community / Senior Center Advisory Committee Thursday, February 24, 2022 @ 6:00 PM Town Council Chambers Special Meeting

- 1. Call to Order
- 2. Roll Call
- 3. Audience of Citizens
- 4. Approval of Minutes, February 3, 2022
- 5. Presentation and Discussion with John Benigni, CEO Meriden-New Britain-Berlin YMCAs
- 6. Open Discussion
- 7. Adjournment

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Community / Senior Center Advisory Committee Thursday, February 3, 2022 @ 6:00 PM Board of Education Conference Room Regular Meeting

1. Call to Order

Chairman Luddy called the meeting to order at 6:11 p.m.

2. Roll Call

Attendance:

Members Present: Donna Bovee, Dave Cyr, Barbara Gombotz, Chairman Luddy, Tim Grady, Mike Urrunaga

Members Absent: None.

Staff Present:

Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Jennifer Ochoa Finance Director Kevin Delaney

3. Audience of Citizens

Tim Thurston, 100 Saw Mill Dr., Berlin – Mr. Thurston said it's important to consider that Berlin is in charge of deciding when and how the citizens have access to our facility. People outside of Berlin are deciding when citizens can use facilities, as occurs at the YMCA, and that is incredibly frustrating.

Dan Thurston, 16 Conlin Way – Mr. Thurston stated his appreciation for the committee and their hard work. Also, Mr. Thurston said when you go to site visits, they all look beautiful, but keep in mind that every town has their own reasons for everything. We need to be specific for Berlin's needs. Windham Community Center has a beautiful pool, but it's not a competitive pool and it can't be used for diving, because the high school already had a competitive pool. Let's do it right the first time if we build this. Mr. Thurston suggested also visiting the Shelton Community Center.

Ms. Bovee asked Mr. Dan Thurston about not having the ability to practice and has that been happening often. Mr. Thurston said sometimes there is no ability to practice as this past week. On a snow day our plans changed and the Berlin Swim team was told we can't use the diving board, or the pool. Others decide when Berlin can do their practices.

4. Approval of Minutes, January 20, 2022

Ms. Bovee moved to approve the January 20, 2022 Regular Meeting minutes.

Seconded by Mr. Grady.

Those voting in favor: Ms. Bovee, Mr. Cyr, Ms. Gombotz, Mr. Grady, Chairman Luddy, Mr. Urrunaga Vote being 6-0 (MOTION CARRIED).

5. Presentation and Discussion with Tom Salimeno, Public Building Commission – Mr. Salimeno was joined by the Town of Berlin Architect, Tom Arcari, from QA+M Architecture.

Chairman Luddy provided the meeting purpose. QA+M was awarded the RFP bid and proposed a community senior center facility based on the Statement of Needs that was given. The committee visited some sites to get ideas and gather best practices and is looking for things that maybe can be done differently. The committee's purpose is to learn and report back to the Town Council and get ideas on anything that might change in regards to escalation costs of material and delays that may change the project. The committee does not have an actual project yet and has not brought anything to vote.

Mr. Salimeno said there were a number of town owned properties identified as potential sites and the Public Building Commission was provided with a Statement of Need document for the proposed facility. The four properties were Patterson Way, Pistol Creek, Town Hall and Sage Park. The Public Building Commission put out the RFP and then hired Architect Arcari and his firm. Site selection was based on what was available to the town at the time and raw pieces of land were not looked at.

Architect Arcari said QA+M looked at the four available sites and did a detailed assessment of each site and ranked them from number one to four. Number one and two set themselves apart those being the Patterson Way site and the Sage Park site, based on infrastructure, size, access and numerous other factors that are in our study. Patterson Way set itself apart heads and tails above the other sites for a number of key reasons. Sites are ranked including, but not limited to the fact of size, but primarily its location is the most central to the population density in the community and easiest to get to from most parts of the community. Because of its adjacency to the high school and programming that's available, that provided opportunity for multi-generational programming and if there's going to be a recreation component there and the potential for a future pool being tied into the curricula. QA+M has done more than 30 senior community center projects and learned a lot over the years. This is by far the best site in support of a successful community center. A detailed programming study was done based on the Statement of Needs provided by the Commission on Aging and the Parks and Recreation Commission. Studies identified all the spaces needed in the center and QA+M augmented that a little based on prior experience and was able to open up on the sizes of space based on our prior experience and the physical needs the Statement of Needs from Parks and Recreation Commission was augmented throughout the process to more clearly identify that the aquatic center should include a competitive pool. There's a lot of concerns about that. Any schemes that we put together anticipated provision of a competitive type pool. All of the nooks and crannies have not been designed at this point, but if this becomes a real project, all of the little amenities and large key programming elements that make up a successful pool assembly would be taken into consideration and there would be further outreach for feedback.

After the programming study was done, QA+M did some concept designs for the site and building and put numerous programmatic concepts together, presented those to the Public Building Commission and made recommendations as to the configuration, particularly a two level building because it's a fairly large building that allowed us to hide the mass of the gym and the pool into the grade and allowed us to create separation of assemblies between some of the key senior center programs and some of the unique recreation programs so that both programs have their own identity, but can work together in the same building and reduce the footprint of the building. This allowed QA+M to keep the scale of the building relatively low, about a story, story and a half, at Patterson Way elevation. The effort of putting a concept design together was to generate interest for the project, start the public outreach project and to identify what the magnitude of cost would be for a project of the scale.

QA+M had a professional cost estimate done on the project in June 2020. That estimate identified costs for the project at about \$400 a sq. ft. and had the hard cost of about \$30M and soft costs of about \$6M for a total estimated project cost of approximately \$36M. That professional cost estimator does a significant amount of public work, then it was reviewed by local construction managers. That was viewed as a good benchmark cost to budget for this type and scale of a facility. QA+M took all of that information and held a series of public information meetings. Two in-person meetings at the high school and numerous online meetings. The meetings were with seniors, the Parks and Recreation commission, a number of public boards and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Feedback was solicited from the meetings that allowed QA+M to steer the project a little bit and that's where we've ended up in terms of a concept design. It's important to point out that as a concept design it's just that, it's a starting point and it has the benefit to morph into something that's really special for the community. Pursuant to all that activity, the Town of Berlin put this committee together to go out and view other facilities and do the research that's required to ultimately support and champion the project.

Chairman Luddy added that some of the places visited were QA+M projects, Newtown and Rocky Hill. Mr. Grady asked how accurate would that cost estimate be given the current economy and what we are looking at going forward. That estimate from last June is not going to be accurate today, or in the future. Architect Arcari said we're seeing significant fluctuation in the construction marketplace and can't tell you where that number is, but the more time that passes, the more things cost and that's relatively normal. The economy is seeing 7 percent inflation and added escalation in the construction marketplace. It's very likely that ballpark number of \$36M could easily be \$40M today and the longer it takes to get to a project, the cost of construction is going to increase. That is normal for a project of this type. These projects usually take anywhere from 3 to 5 years to go from idea to execution with all sorts of changes in the economy and construction marketplace. As a team, the committee needs to react and respond, that can be the reduction of scope, reduction of scale, looking for efficiencies and solicitation of more funds, or more support for the project. The committee needs to stay focused on what is the project, do we want to deliver and keep moving forward and then making adjustments as necessitated by the factors that you really don't have any control over.

Ms. Bovee asked, included in that \$35.7 million, there were some escalation and contingencies in the detailed list, but based on that, is it correct? Architect Arcari said he has the detailed list, but QA+M had contingencies and escalation factored in there, maybe it's not \$40M, maybe it is \$37.5M, guessing at this point, but the cost will continue to go up. Communities have to realize that as more time passes in any project process the cost will go up and time is money. Also, as our economy is escalating, revenues are going up. When you buy a community center 5 years from now, you'll be buying it with revenues from 5 years from now, as long as you're buying and selling and constructing in the same market. The cost of the center will be equivalently proportionate to the earnings that community has now. If the cost of the center 15 years ago was \$17M, or \$20M and everyone said that's a lot of money, but that's because everybody was making less at that time, it's all relative.

Ms. Bovee said as we look at costs, we have to consider thinking about what to recommend. There is a great list of square footage based on the rooms in the current design. Ms. Bovee asked Architect Arcari to provide something that compares Rocky Hill and Windham, etc., if we provide the list and room square footage. For example what is Newtown's aquatic center square footage compared to this plan. It's hard to understand if we should be reducing the conceptual design. If we reduce, that's going to be impact on dollars. How do you know how big it is to do what we do now, or hope to do in the future. Architect Arcari said that's really the million-dollar question. Yes, QA+M could try and put together some visual aids that compare the size of the proposed multi-function room at one center with the precise at another center that you visited to get a feeling for what they are. The Town of Berlin has done a lot of things as a community to make this proposed project cost effective. The town selected a site that is town owned, it has adjacent to infrastructure and other facilities which means you're reducing the overall project cost. The only way you can really reduce the rest of the project cost is to remove scope and it's not going to continue to cost less. Judicial choices are needed and you have a Statement of Needs that identifies specific needs and that was what the program was based upon. Architect Arcari thinks the committee should talk with both commissions about what things in your Statement of Needs could potentially be removed, adjusted, or modified. It should come from those sources because that's where the original program was established and ultimately could all of the spaces be skinnied down. Some of the spaces can and others can't, for instance the

aquatic center. If you want to meet all the programs that you're attempting, it's very difficult to make that much smaller. Could a gymnasium be smaller? Could you eliminate some multi-function spaces because they can be flexible? Could some of the spaces be smaller in the building? All of those things are probably yes, but you need to get the blessing from the end users of the facility. Chairman Luddy added that the committee discussed making a recommendation to the Town Council that the commissions work together and maybe there are some of these extra spaces that aren't used all the time by both groups and there's an overlap. Maybe we don't need 3 or 4 other rooms.

Architect Arcari said as you look at cutting scope, we can cut 10 percent of the square footage in the building and you can save \$4M, but if you want to cut a big chunk of the budget, you need to keep in mind that you need to make a significant cut in program. This may be an unpopular position, but have discussions about what can you absolutely do without and what can you not do without. One of the big elements in this program is the gymnasium, as a community you have other gymnasiums and not telling you to cut gymnasium, but you don't have a pool, a pool is an asset you currently don't have. Those are the types of discussions to start thinking about. That's what happened in Newtown and other communities. You can't make \$36M look like \$20M without making a significant cut to the program.

Ms. Bovee asked about the pool being between \$8M to \$10M. Architect Arcari said the pool was a little closer to \$5M to \$7M, \$9M to \$10M including the locker room. Gym was \$3M to \$5M. Ms. Bovee said those are the two big pieces. If anyone said cut the pool and gym, that's \$11M, you're left with meeting rooms, kitchen and the balance would be about \$20M. Architect Arcari added to keep in mind that a lot of the project cost is site work and infrastructure. No matter what you put on that site, you still have to do storm drainage, sanitary lines, power, generator and electrical service and boiler plant, all of that stuff has to be done. There are costs in infrastructure that just can't be removed. Also, this is a hard concept, but what we've experienced in other communities, Newington for example, their community center and town hall project. They originally looked at a building that was going to be about a 100k sq. ft. and cost about \$32M. The community couldn't come to terms with that cost and they re-studied and re-evaluated it. They changed consultants and eventually hired QA+M, but that process took about 5 years and by the end when they were getting ready to go out to construction, they were now building a 70k sq. ft. building for about \$32M. That 5 year time frame cost the community 30k sq. ft. in asset just because they waited. The cost of time is huge. If there's anything that you can do as a community, or a committee is advocate for quicker action. That's not always a possibility because everyone has to come to the table and everyone has to support it, but time is what costs more than anything. Keeping the process moving is essential to saving assets.

Chairman Luddy asked how many projects QA+M worked on when they went out to bid a design build bid where some cost ideas came out that way. For example, if we can't get a certain roof for this project down the line. Architect Arcari said that is the way the community has decided to go, but we are under contract only to put forward if the project goes forward after a successful referendum. We are currently under contract just to put together a design build package and the Town of Berlin likes that delivery method and they have done it successfully in the past. I don't see it done a lot on municipal projects, but it has a track record of working and there's benefits and attractions to that, but one of the benefits is it does allow a contractor's proposal based on specific design. The Town of Berlin may get a good number, but they may propose to cut things that you didn't necessarily want to see cut. The community has made that decision so far and it's possible that you'll get a slightly different product, but you'll see some savings are estimates based on a lump sum feed design bid build delivery method.

Mr. Cyr said the commission is fact gathering and needs to provide Town Council with impartial facts. What is this actually going to cost. It seems like the perfect storm to take what you might conceive as the original estimate, to blow it out of proportion. The committee has to provide Town Council with those facts and not sure what they are. Is it a 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 percent increase in cost. What is the industry telling you overall, or is it just too difficult to predict. Architect Arcari said he can't give that answer, but can try and engage QA+M's cost estimators and a construction manager to try and give you their perspective, but it's changing and fluctuating on a regular basis. There are industry projections that say 7 to 10 percent increases and some projections say it'll stabilize, but

never retract. Architect Arcari doesn't think it is possible to get a hard really stable number for a while and can't say what that time frame is going to be. Mr. Salimeno added we're also seeing a lot of uncertainty there, that's a crystal ball and there may be those facts that could be better found and that's the decisions on the programming which are the real harder decisions, size of the pool and gym. Changing or eliminating one makes the whole thing unworkable, but those decisions and facts have a big impact on the cost which none of us can crystal ball. Whether it's a year from now, or 3 years from now and making some of the efforts and decisions on some of those aspects. Those are community decisions that theoretically are within the control community and working with the cost estimates as time goes on. There are certain things that may be manageable and things that none of us have any idea or control of.

Architect Arcari said a lot of communities are doing projects in these turbulent times and the projects face challenges financially and those communities are dealing with them by making adjustments. Are we making scope adjustments, are we looking for additional funding as the project goes forward. They are getting good information during the process to set a baseline that they can work from. Mr. Cyr added it is important as a committee in our report to Town Council that these issues are there and they're very unpredictable whereas during what you described as normal times, the change didn't happen as rapidly and there weren't so many factors and variables that were impacting the cost of the project.

Mr. Cyr said the site plan shows there are 251 parking spots. The Putnam facility has 183 parking spots and they are maxed out with no more room. Is there room for additional parking in the plan. Architect Arcari said QA+M planned in overflow parking, which would be like lawn parking. It is a real challenge to not over park a site. You want to try and park the site for what is considered an average demand and then have overflow parking, or lawn parking for unique demand. QA+M is making an educated guess at 251, ideally it would be less, but it could be more and there is room on the site for that.

Mr. Cyr asked about the design showing an exit on Lower Lane and if cost is estimated into the figure, or is that something for the future. Architect Arcari said that was projected as an emergency egress path with allowance in the estimate for that, but it's not estimated to be at this point a town road. The land isn't actually owned. There is an easement at that point and it is projected as a future concept and something would have to come to fruition. Mr. Salimeno asked would that be a significant cost aspect of the overall \$35, \$36 million dollars, or is it probably relatively minor makeup. Architect Arcari said it's a relatively small cost number as an access drive.

Ms. Bovee said there is some flooding at the back of Lower Lane that occurs and when you build a road going out the back you have to take care of any flooding that might occur. Are there additional costs. Architect Arcari said QA+M would certainly address any floodway, or flood storage capacity issues, but that would be expected. Mr. Cyr said we don't own that land currently where that proposed driveway is. Mr. Salimeno said that is correct. Mr. Cyr added the cost is then based on how much the person wants to sell it to us for.

Mr. Cyr asked would you have preferred to start out with a level lot to design this and would that have impacted, or lowered the construction costs. Architect Arcari said every site has its own unique solution because this site is accessible from both sides of the site at grade, the cost to build this facility is actually less as a two-story structure than as a spread out one story structure. Less foundations, concrete and roof structure and without a lot of the typical infrastructure costs. Also, not a significant number of stair assemblies for egress. The elevator offsets some of those savings, but overall, I think the reduced footprint results in less cost to the project as opposed to the same general concept spread out over a dead flat site.

Mr. Urrunaga asked when we're looking at reduction of scope and size after talking to the community, is it easier for us to come to you with the reduction in program, or can we do something like we want this square amount of square feet. What can we do with the program and which way does it work easiest, or can you do both. Architect Arcari said we can do it both ways and there's a third way and a lot of communities come to us and say we think we can only get support for \$23.5M and need to find a way to get to a number. Architect Arcari is not a fan of trying to design to a number because as time passes that goes out the window anyways. QA+M can help in the process and there are spaces to gain efficiencies, for instance this particular design has 4 large multi-function

spaces, maybe it can work with 3 and program the center accordingly. Maybe some spaces can absorb reduction in square footage, or lose a multi-function classroom. Maybe some of the common area can be reduced. There are places where I'd tell you I think we could reduce the program size and not lose significant amounts of functionality to the center, or not lose key components of the center programmatic components

Ms. Bovee asked Mr. Salimeno about an email regarding the grant from the state that is controlled by PBC. Could this committee use some of that grant towards hiring someone to help us fundraise and to lead us in a direction? Mr. Salimeno referred Ms. Bovee to Finance Director Delaney and said he will ask for the grant paperwork to better understand it and confirm the information with Ms. Bovee.

6. Presentation and Discussion with Kevin Delaney, Town of Berlin, Finance Director -

Finance Director Delaney said in 2010 the town was around \$26M in debt. Looking at surrounding communities like Newington, or Rocky Hill that have done a fair amount of borrowing recently, most are going to be in the \$15M to \$30M of outstanding debt range. They pay it down for a few years and maybe do additional work, but kind of stay in that window. Thinking about best practice and where you'd want to be as a community, 3 to 5 percent of your operating budget should be debt service, or lower. In 2016 the Town of Berlin was just shy of \$108M and about 13 percent of the operating budget. From 2017 to now, the current condition is about \$73M with no new borrowing this year. That's a substantial reduction and it's around the same amount of money for the cost of this project, \$34M to \$36M. The Town of Berlin's ceiling after fiscal year 2026 is \$40M. That \$40M of outstanding debt is about 4 percent of the budget going to debt service and allows borrowing about \$4M a year with a 10-year life cycle. There's quite a few things you can do with that kind of money.

With borrowing there's 3 elements in debt. First is the statutory. The rules are what the state has established and statutory limits to what a town is permitted to borrow. Then local economy and the ability to pay. The willingness to pay is subjective, the town has an ability to pay, but they may not be willing. From a statutory standpoint if we were to do this project it would fall under general purpose. The state looks overall and says given the local economy the Town of Berlin could borrow up to \$567M for example and we're okay with that. It's about \$62M today and that's principle without interest, which is why the numbers are a little bit different. That's sort of all up magnitude, then break it down and say this much is the amount you can borrow for general purpose. Everything you would do generally in the town. Schools have a separate limitation that's actually higher because there's a recognition that school construction is tens of millions of dollars. Also, things like sewers and water because you have to maintain that infrastructure and urban renewal. General purpose is where this falls, the numbers out of the most recent financial audit show \$182M of borrowing capacity and in the general purpose area is \$22M. The first threshold of thinking about borrowing, Berlin has ample statutory capacity, \$182M vs. \$22M. Theoretically, the Town of Berlin could borrow \$160M and be within statutory limit of general purpose. General purpose is everything that's not related to Berlin Water Control, or school. Roads, bridges, dam, or anything at Sage Park is not considered school because it's not on school property. While it's adjacent to a school, but not on school property, it's considered general purpose. Everything the town needs or wants to do is related to general purpose.

The second piece, the local economy and the ability to pay. If you were to look at per capita and per household income, debt level, the unemployment rate, all of the economic factors that rating agencies look at and that we look at in the audit and supply to the state, Berlin has from an objective standpoint the ability to pay. There's nothing that says economically that the residents and businesses of Berlin could not support \$36M or even \$40M. The economics of the town would support borrowing this much money.

The third piece is a subjective decision. The Town of Berlin went out to vote and the high school project was voted down and then voted in. The police station was voted down. It's the third question that people get to go to the polls and whether they can afford it or not, it's their decision to say yes or no. That's where the economics are of the town. The debt level is high, but has come down dramatically, it's trending in the right direction and there's a concerted focus by the Council and the Board of Finance to really focus on paying that debt down. This obviously would reverse that. The other side of it is you would have a beautiful community senior center. The Town of Berlin would have a lot more debt, but also have a great building and asset.

Mr. Cyr asked if between 3 and 3.5 percent of the budget is an average debt for a community. Finance Director Delaney said 3 to 5 percent would be best practice. Mr. Cyr added at the 2026 level, if we continue our debt reduction at the current rate, we would have an almost \$40M debt level of 2026 and that is 4 percent. Finance Director Delaney said 4 percent if you assume small growth in the budget. If the budget grew to \$120M like at Cheshire, the debt level could be higher for the percentage, but at a reasonable growth like we've seen in the budget at about 4 percent. Mr. Cyr said our current debt of \$81M is sort of double where we're supposed to be. Finance Director Delaney said this year's budget is about 8.6 percent of the budget. Mr. Cyr added then that is sort of not best practice. Finance Director Delaney said it is probably investing about \$6M more in budget dollars every year in debt service than best practice would indicate. That's \$6M you could potentially put in capital to offset taxes. The Town of Berlin is much higher than it would ideally want to be. Finance Director Delaney said that in Hartford County on a per capita debt basis, the Town of Berlin is in the top 3. New Britain and Hartford are ahead of us, the rest are behind on a per capita basis, not just true dollars, but on a per capita. Mr. Grady asked how wise would it be to pile on \$40M more and where would it put us on the list. The Town of Berlin would probably still be below because both of those communities have sustained, Hartford has the advantage that Connecticut taxpayers are paying that bill. Mr. Cyr added if the Town of Berlin is 3rd behind those, we are not doing too good. Also, what impact does debt have on our bond rating and what do financial people say when they see we've dumped another \$40M on the number. Finance Director Delaney was discussing that part next. Ms. Bovee asked of the \$82M of current debt how much is the high school. The high school represents about half, \$40M. Over the last 10 years there have been a few events. The McGee Middle School air quality issue was about \$9M bonding. The other side of the high school project, purchase of Pistol Creek was about \$5.5M, also roads, bridges and fire trucks.

Ms. Bovee asked Finance Director Delaney to include how they look at some of these huge capital outlays like if we were going to do a new community and senior center. Finance Director Delaney shared the actuals and Berlin hasn't bonded since June of 2020. This report was in the heart of the unknown as opposed to where we are now. The previous year the Town of Berlin had received its first AAA bond rating, the highest bond rating you can receive in the height of all of the uncertainty, the pension, the debt, everything else S&P affirmed. They have a lot of confidence in growth. The committee reviewed the S&P handout and its components. The process is similar to going for a mortgage, they are going to look at your financials at that point in time because that's the best information they have. They also want to understand how likely it is over the 10, 20, 30 years that you are borrowing that you are able to continue this. This indicates to rating agencies that you have a clear path forward. The Town of Berlin made the statement that we know our debt level's high, but we invested in the high school and did some other things and making a conscious effort to pay it down. They start to see that pattern and look at the economy. There's not much we can do about the Connecticut economy, it is really looking at the state's racket of debt. When the state was hurting, their rating was brought down. When the Town of Berlin received its first AAA bond rating, the state had a downgrading of two downgrades. The Town of Berlin actually overcame the economy in large part because we have things like this. We have a 10-year capital plan with a lot of measures. The \$40M itself would not adversely impact in isolation the way they look at it. What they're going to look at is does that mean that the community is willing to raise the taxes to fund servicing.

Then the second question they ask is does the town have the capacity to cut costs to pay. Then it really comes down to a question of if your local economy can support it and all the objective numbers will say it. It's that third characteristic of what's the track record of the community in raising taxes, or raising other funding sources to fund these items that's going to be the biggest question from the rating agency. \$40M is a lot compared to where we sit where we should be, but when they start thinking order of magnitude, \$40M million is not huge. The question is if the town is willing to continue to do the risk. There could be a bondholder who's running a pension fund in San Francisco that picks up our financials as they just went up in debt. What did their taxes do, what's going on in that community. They might not know anything about Berlin, but they have pension obligations and want to buy our bonds today. They want to know that we're going to make all those payments every year because that's where they're paying out their annuities. That's going to be their overarching question. Finance Director Delaney referenced page six of the S&P document, it says "the town continues with its debt reduction plan, may issue additional debt for ongoing school and infrastructure improvements, however management expects to issue less than \$5M annually, which we have done, and may

debt position to deteriorate given its long-term strategy leverage and rapid amortization of debt." It would certainly be different than what they have seen the last few years, a different message, but if the town is willing and able to absorb that cost they can have confidence in what's moving forward, but they would look to see what's happening. If taxes aren't moving, if the debts coming down and that's the pattern, they're going to be thrilled. If they were to pick this up for June for an issue, I'm confident we would be reinforced at AAA, because everything is consistent with what we've said. The financial condition continues to improve and the town is managed well. They are going to ask the question what does that \$40M do to the rest of your capital plan. That's probably the bigger question. The \$40M is not going to rock the boat as much as the other things you need to do. The HVAC project at the schools, you start to look at the portables, lighting upgrades that we want to do with other schools. Then roads and bridges to give you some perspective. Berlin has 37 bridges in town, that's the most in this area. We're going to have more bridges to do. They're going to ask the question what does this do to the rest of your plan because you can't just ignore the infrastructure in the rest of your town for 10 years as you pay this down. We have to answer if you are willing to pay, what does it do to the rest of your plan.

Mr. Cyr asked if there is a potential for a downgrade. Finance Director Delaney said absolutely if we don't have a good response. Finance Director Delaney said he does not see a way, unless you're prepared to make substantive structural reductions to pay for this. I'm talking about programs that probably would have to entertain to offset this cost, but to a material degree. Looking at the budget you'd have to evaluate a school, magnitudes of \$3M to \$4M a year of principle. It is probably 1.5 to 2 mills of an increase at least early on until your interest rate interest goes down. If you spread it out over 20 years you're looking early on at about a mill and a half that's absent of anything else. That doesn't account for normal operating cost increases, or any other increases, so if you were to try to offset some of that you would have to go after larger items. The Town Council probably has to consider it in the perspective of other things. What is it you want to do with the Police Department. What is it you want to do with other aspects of your schools and what is the appetite to fund it i.e tax increases.

Ms. Bovee said if the community wants to invest in a senior community center and costs are \$40M by itself, that wouldn't bring down the rating, but you'd have to have a story behind it in order to fund it. The Town of Berlin did have these projects we've decided we're not doing, or we are doing them and we can afford those other projects. You have to put it all together just like you do when you do your major bonding. Finance Director Delaney reviewed the other proposed bonding over the next 10 years. These are necessary, but they are not a community senior center. The library and community center roof, the town hall roof. These are things that if we don't start taking advantage of or addressing, they eventually will start to leak and create problems. We're saying \$5M a school for HVAC, even if we use the ARPA money, you're looking at \$10M to do the other two remaining elementary schools. The Town of Berlin has to start evaluating and replacing boilers and windows at the schools and needs to do something with the pools and the pool buildings. Also, the senior center roof and then you start to look out a little bit further. The Town of Berlin will start to revisit those as we go to the latter part of the 10year plan. This is a draft right now because we're obviously going to adjust, but stick to that strategy absent the potential new ones. Those new ones are decisions that the elected bodies need to make, not staff and that's of course the community senior center. If the conversation has moved from new police station to renovations, the numbers we're seeing are \$4M to \$5M to renovate the area and give the police more of a modernized police department. Then there's been talk and looking at what to do with the clubhouse at Timberlin Golf Course, that's probably a multi-year project. Hunters has been going back and forth for a while. There are three big items. The rating agency would look at this and say what's your plan. That's where there has to be a plan between the Town Council and the Board of Finance. A lot of these pieces are Board of Education vetted, it's expensive to maintain a school.

Ms. Bovee asked when the \$6M received from ARPA is coming in and have we decided how we are using it. Finance Director Delaney said the assumption is that \$5M of it would go to HVAC at Willard as the first school. It doesn't have to be done that way, but that's the thought. Willard's the oldest system and larger. They're using that as a benchmark for the other two schools. Because they should cost a little less. One will go in one year and another the next year. The Town of Berlin has some big ticket items for existing infrastructure. The HVAC has been on the docket for several years. HVAC first came up three years ago after a study was done. We were

looking at \$2M to \$3M a school. That might have been light at that time, but we're definitely seeing magnitude. Another question is can we get the materials and parts that are needed. The rating agencies will also look at that even when you pay for all of this, you now have a much more substantial building and many more programs to fund through your operating budget. The rating agencies are going to look and say what is your budget.

Chairman Luddy added if the committee get this to referendum, there's the possibility that we decide that we're not going to invest in the two pools. Finance Director Delaney said that's one of the reasons why the pools and pool buildings are a little further out. The assumption is by FY26 there will likely be a decision. It's a different offering to your community sitting at an outdoor pool in the middle of the summer for 6 or 8 weeks. That's kid's summertime jobs. It is really going to be up to everybody to decide what's not because it's a different experience. Ms. Bovee asked what is the recommendation for amortizing the debt. Finance Director Delaney said the 10 year, because at 10 years your buildings start to require more. Most places are bonding for 20 years because it just reduces the burden. The challenge you run into with the 20 years is what we're living with. The high school was bonded through 4 tranches. Four different bond offerings because there's no reason to borrow \$47M all at once if you're only going to spend \$10M in a year. Finance Director Delaney has done 3 bond issuances for the Town of Berlin. Those 3 bond issuances will be paid off before the first tranche of the high school is paid off. We will have borrowed for a number of things over these 5 or 6 years that we will fully own before the first tranche will be paid off. You're reducing the annual debt payment, but by stretching it out. Going out 20 years does reduce the pain a little, but I always believe in accelerating. If you can afford it, do a 15-year mortgage instead of 30 year because you're going to pay a lot less in interest. It is just like your home mortgage if you did a 30 year you can assume to pay more interest than your actual mortgage. The 20 year bonds are generational bonds because your basically bonding for the generation from when a child enters school, until they graduate. The Town of Berlin is paying that bond for the high school the entire time that child is in school.

Ms. Bovee asked if the interest rate is 4% now. Finance Director Delaney said that's kind of where we are now. If we get a 4% interest rate on the \$36M, we'd probably be borrowing more in the neighborhood of \$32M to \$34M. It would probably be that much kind of premium that we would get and borrow a little bit less, but still paying millions of dollars in interest.

The third part is the willingness. Voters have every right to say I hear everything you're saying, but I'm not willing to pay that and it is their right, or willing to pay. Looking at the QA+M presentation, it is a beautiful community senior center and long needed for the swim team. Mr. Cyr added that Amanda Kelly at the Putnum YMCA gave the committee their annual budget. They have a 46,000 sq. ft. facility and their projected budget for 2022 expenses is about \$2.2M operating budget annually. That would be an annual operating budget of almost \$3.4M for Berlin based on our size. What do we do with that, bond it, pay it out of the mill rate, or do we charge the people that go to the facility a fee to be a member. Now we just asked them to pay for a \$40M building and then they're going to come and say we want to use it, but you have to join because we have to pay operating expenses. Mr. Grady said that is exactly how it works. Mr. Cyr said you have to convince the people. Newtown has a membership for the pools. There's a small fee for joining the senior center, but for the pools you definitely need a membership. Pools suck a lot of money. Newtown runs their 54,000 sq. ft. facility and is net-net expenses less revenue that they brought in and their revenue fees are much less. Ms. Bovee said we have that information, now we absolutely have to look at it and figure out what our operating budget would be.

In the FY22 general fund budget, the senior center has a minimal amount of revenue, it's not intended to be a revenue generator. When you look at wages, fringes, direct and indirect cost, which is the utilities, electricity and water. Those items that go into the existing facility, the total cost is \$430k to run the series. Finance Director Delaney said with today's 33.93 mill rate, that's the equivalent of 0.18 mills. Senior Center Director Doyle does a great job with a very limited budget. The Parks and Recreation budget has \$145k of revenue. Keep in mind that element includes basketball, pool passes and summer camp. Those are the big 3. If the pools went away you would probably lose that, but probably switch it to the other passes and then running it between wages and fringe benefits. Direct cost of operational costs and things like water and electricity, you are looking at \$650k. On that scale it's 0.21, the senior center and the parks and recreation community center budgets of 33.93. That is a third of a mill for this group, but it's about \$1M of expenses, if it costs \$3.4M, we say roughly \$3.5M to run with some

overlap. There is existing staff, the existing infrastructure costs of electricity, water etc. and those will remain consistent. Running 2 outdoor pools for 6 to 8 weeks is dramatically different than running 3 pools all year round. Water and electricity alone will be substantially more expensive. Finance Director Delaney can't provide numbers until we know what it is we are running with, the programs, timing and testing, but these are things to think about.

There are some revenue considerations for the family, or individual membership needs. There's potentially league fees for basketball courts and adult basketball, volleyball and pickleball leagues. We can collect money on swimming lessons and have them all year round. There's a potential to get more funds from people outside of Berlin. There is potential to sell advertising for tournaments and holding tournaments. Then there's food sales and having a little cafe area. In issuing bonds, because they're tax-exempt, from an IRS perspective majority represents 90% of your purpose. The square footage is typically what the bond council would use and it needs to be for governmental purpose. You can't lease out space with tax exempt bonds to somebody who might be running a private business. You have to limit that to no more than 10% in order for the bonds to still qualify as tax exempt. Those are areas where I think you could potentially reduce the cost to the taxpayers.

Many of the people who would pay this would also be your taxpayers. Scalise Field is rented out for different adult leagues. Things you have to consider from a cost perspective. There's management, managing today's community center would be dramatically different than managing the community center that QA+M put together. The Town of Berlin would offer a lot more, but it's going to require a lot of people to help do things. Program costs will go up to add more programs. Superintendent of Recreation Dennis would be a source of knowing what it costs to actually run a program. Then you're using the facility year-round and offering things especially youth related yearround. Lifeguards are needed year-round. Custodial staff will be needed with more space and more activities. Plus there will be locker rooms, pool water quality and if there is a café, the health inspector will be in more. There is more insurance to running a pool and having a couple basketball courts. By running a pool you have to ensure there is a greater risk, people do get injured, especially if you have a diving board. It is a risk. There's equipment, utilities are going to go up and there is maintenance of the facility itself. The parking lot, grounds, actual building, pumps and other things involved with the pools, lights and other work that feeds into Public Works Ground Maintenance. There would be transportation savings for the Board of Education. The swim team is bused to wherever they practice and that is a cost. There's real savings and government savings. If you really want to incorporate it in it's a true offset, it has to be actually a real reduction. Finance Director Delaney advised working with the Board of Education directly on exactly what it costs. There is a lot of cost there and its certainly going to be an impact to the taxes. There's no way to get around it, but the design is a beautiful facility and has a lot of positives. If you were to do the senior center there's the potential to convert the existing senior center into additional senior housing and utilize another half of that facility.

7. Discussion regarding rescheduling of John Benigni, CEO Meriden-New Britain-Berlin YMCAs –

Chairman Luddy received a call from the Meriden YMCA saying they were impressed with the amount of questions they were given and asked for more time to be better prepared to come in and speak with the committee. Director of Community, Recreation and Park Services Ochoa said Thursday, February 24 the room is available and she will notify Mr. Benigni at the Meriden YMCA to reschedule.

8. Open Discussion

Mr. Cyr asked about the revised list of dates for referendum deadlines, the original days were crossed off with handwritten dates added. Town Council has for a drop dead date of May 17, for the Town Council to get underway on bonding. The Town Council wanted to put it out to referendum in November 2022. Starting the bond process on May 17 gives the Town Council adequate time to review. The committee should commence the preparation of our package to deliver to Town Council on April 1. That gives 6 weeks to analyze everything we've done. Because if we don't deliver this in time, the referendum date would be missed.

Finance Director Delaney said those dates assume Town Council has August off every year, but the Town Council can hold a special meeting to review it. The first step in the process is for the Town Council to direct the Town

Manager to engage Bond Council to draft a bond ordinance. Finance Director Delaney works with Bond Council on a draft and comes back to the next meeting. The Town Council then makes the decision whether to move forward with this ordinance, they open it up at the next meeting for a public hearing. The public can come in and talk about the ordinance and the project. At that meeting the Town Council would take up voting for moving it forward and say we would like to move forward on the ordinance. If the ordinance is \$5M or more, which this is, it goes to the Board of Finance. Part of what we worked on is the timing of when the meetings are for each of these groups so that it goes as quickly as possible to the Board of Finance. If either body decides not to move it forward, it never goes to referendum. Both of those bodies have to say we'll move it forward. Then it goes to referendum. The reason that you have to be a month out is because Town Clerk Wall needs to take this information and add it on an absentee ballot. The committee could pick up a few more weeks as the Bond Council is developing and could decide they are not comfortable moving it forward. It buys a little bit more time for the work to happen.

Mr. Cyr added we need to allow more time because people are very busy with the budget cycle. The committee has been working on this since September. The Town Council will need time to review the work. Finance Director Delaney said the Town Council's meeting is April 5. That is the date the Board of Finance will deliver the budget for the first referendum for the Town Council. That will be the 5th day after the annual hearings happen and where Finance sends their budget. The committee would be handing this information on the same night that the Town Council is reviewing for the FY23 budget. Mr. Cyr said to give Town Council 6-8 weeks for everyone to review it. The committee can do a presentation to Town Council and then they make their decision. Because we're just the fact-gathering group that gives the information. Ms. Bovee said the task list was Town Council approved and will be included when the committee makes their presentation. It will be both a written document and presentation.

Ms. Bovee said there is a need for the committee to meet more often and hit their task list. Also, Ms. Bovee is concerned about not having done any public outreach yet and thinks there will be an appropriate time for someone to meet with businesses, seniors, the schools etc. What do the people want. Tell them the mill rate increase by assuming this amortization and discuss the operating budget and membership costs. All of that will provide a sense of what will and won't work and we all want something that's going to go to a referendum. The Town of Berlin will also have Architect Arcari do more public outreach. Mayor Kaczynski said that is the plan, but we need the information from the committee to inform the public of all the facts which we just received. Once we have all the information and options, then we go to the people and say here's what this group has come up. What are you going to outreach when you don't have the numbers to tell them.

Ms. Bovee added if the committee is done April 1, then we begin public outreach. Mr. Cyr added that April 1 is the best date to allow time to for review. Mr. Urranaga said the committee is meeting with John Benigni on February 24. There is scheduled meeting on March 3. The committee could probably meet one or two more times in March, but have a scheduled meeting on Aprill 7. Mr. Cyr added the committee may end meeting every week In March. Mayor Kacyznski said even if you missed the 1st, it's important enough that the committee can have a special meeting for the presentation to the Town Council. Maybe we do the special meeting at the high school. People can go to that meeting and see the presentation and that would be the first outreach. Mayor Kaczynski said advertise it, get it out there. Then there would be another one after we've deliberated at the council level.

Ms. Gombotz said regarding the outreach, the Commission for the Aging has requested a meeting in April to have a presentation and would like to do that at the senior center during the day. They would like to ask questions and seniors are very big voting block and they want to know what we are doing and how we are going to do this. They want to be provide feedback and don't always want to stand up and speak. It would be a presentation and written questions. Ms. Gombotz was thinking of having a similar brief presentation like what Architect Arcari had done and wants the seniors to see what the committee is presenting. They are saying April because of weather and would not want to meet during bad weather. The idea is to provide feedback before the committee comes to final conclusions given to the Town Council. Mayor Kaczynski said the day you make your presentation, Town Council is not making any decisions. No decisions will be made on anything until we get your report. If we do a smaller version of the report at the senior center so they don't have to go to a high school presentation, they would have all the info and then they can ask questions which we're going to listen to and incorporate in our review as a council. It needs to be a special meeting, they can present the report to the council in a big forum, you get out to

the public right away. The meeting would be at night around that same time frame, within a week of that. Maybe do a smaller one at the senior center during the day, after the big one and have a smaller one the next day, or something like that. That would be a public forum that the Town Council would hold. Ms. Gombotz added she doesn't think it should be at the high school. Mayor Kaczynski said the location could be changed from high school to middle school if it is easier to get to for everyone. We want the public to come and see it to make a decision. Mayor Kaczynski will definitely accommodate and envisions doing a meeting at the senior center during the day, one at night then we could have another one end of April, beginning of May. Mayor Kaczynski hesitates to do a partial report for them. The committee will decide next meeting dates on February 24 and compare calendars.

Mr. Urranaga said State Representative Larsen reached out asking for information to see if there are any federal funds freed up for this, but this is certainly not a shovel ready project.

Ms. Bovee asked State Representative Veach if we put a pool in and provide swimming lessons are there any educational funds tied to the children's school education as another avenue perhaps on state funding. State Representative Veach said she will include State Representative Abercrombie and Senator Lopes on that inquiry, both of them being senior ranking in some of those areas. State Representative Veach is on the Education Committee and that's the first she has heard, but it's always worth the ask.

9. Adjournment

Mr. Cyr moved to adjourn at 8:30 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Urrunaga.

Vote being 6-0. MOTION CARRIED

Submitted by, Alina Brown

> Received on 2/11/2022 at 9:22:58 AM by Town Clerk Kathryn J Wall

Town of Berlin Debt Review with Community/Senior Center Advisory Committee February 2022

Requested Topics

- 1. Impact of \$36,000,000 project to the Town's mil rate?
- 2. Impact of \$36,000,000 bonding to the Town's bond rating?
- 3. How to determine operating costs & how will that cost affect the mil rate?
- 4. Cost saving ideas?
- 5. Process to hire a consultant?

Town of Berlin Projected Mil Rate Impact of Community/Senior Center February 2022

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Town of Berlin Other Proposed Bonding - Next 10 years February 2022

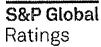
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	Library/CC Chiller Replacement			\$2,100,000		
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	Rescue Trucks					\$1,009,000
	Paper Goods Pond Dam			\$450,000		
	Pool Building - Percival			\$750,000		
	Pool Building - East Berlin				\$750,000	
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	Senior Center Roof				\$750,000	
	HVAC - Griswold/Hubbard	\$5,000,000				
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	Boiler - Hubband			\$500,000	\$500,000	
	Boiler - Willard			\$500,000	\$500,000	
	Boiler - Griswold			\$500,000	\$500,000	
	Window Replacement - McGee				\$2,100,000	
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	Police Station Renovations	\$5,000,000				
	Community/Senior Center	\$18,000,000	\$18,000,000			
	Clubhouse @ Timberlin					
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Town of Berlin Operating Cost Considerations February 2022

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Summary:

Berlin, Connecticut; General Obligation

Primary Credit Analyst

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Summary:

Berlin, Connecticut; General Obligation

Rating Action

S&P Global Ratings assigned us 'AAA' long-term rating to Berlin, Count's general doligation (GO) bonds, issue of 2020. At the same time, we affirmed our 'AAA' long-term rating on the town's GO debt outstanding. The outlook is stable

The town's full faith and credit secures the bonds. Proceeds from the bonds will fund various authorized capital projects throughout the town.

Credit overview

Berlia recorded another surplus in fiscal 2019 (ended June 30), holistering reserves to nearly \$16.6 million, or about 16% of operating expenditures. We believe the flexibility, coupled with reliance primarily on property taxes to fund the budget, somewhat insulates the town from a material deterioration in credit quality as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic and recession. However, as uncertainty remains over the ultimate economic fallout from recession, the stable outlook reflects our view of management's entrenched strong financial management policies and practices, which we believe will continue to result in positive financial results. Furthermore, the town's low fixed costs equal to 10.7% of total governmental expenditures limits debt service, pension, and other postemployment benefits from crowding out other operating costs.

We rate the town above the sovereign because we believe it can maintain better credit characteristics than the US in a stream account, based on its predominantly locally derived revenue base and our view that pledged revenue supporting debt service on the bonds is at limited risk of negative sovereign intervention. The rating above the sovereign is based on our enterm 'Ratings Above The Sovereign: Corporate And Government Ratings—Methodology And Assumptions,' published Nov. 19, 2013, on RatingsDirect.

The rating reflects our view of the town's

- Very introng economy, with access to a broad and diverse metropoblan statistical area.
- Very strong management, with strong financial policies and practices under our financial management assessment methodology.
- Adequate budgetary performance, with operating surpluses in the general fund and at the total governmental fund level in fiscal 2019.

- Very strong budgetary flexibility, with an available fund balance in fiscal 2019 of 18% of operating expenditures;
- Very strong laquidity, with total government available cash at 23.4% of total governmental fund expenditures and 2.6x governmental debt service, and access to external liquidity we consider strong.
- Strong debt and contingent liability position, with debt service carrying changes at 9.1% of expenditures and not direct debt that is 76.9% of total governmental fund revenue, as well as low overall net debt at less than 3.0% of market value and rapid amortization, with 71.8% of debt scheduled to be retired in 10 years; and
- · Strong institutional framework score.

Environmental, social, and governance factors

We analyzed the town's environmental, social, and governance factors relative to its economy, management, budgetary and financial measures, and debt and long-term liability profile, and consider them in line with the sector

Stable Outlook

Downside scenario

While unlikely, if the town's finances become imbalanced, leading to a draw on reserves, with no plan to correct in a timely manner, we could lower the rating.

Credit Opinion

Very strong economy

We consider Berlin's economy very strong. The town, with an estimated population of 20,569, is located in Hartford County in the Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford metropolitan statistical area, which we consider broad and diverse. The town has a projected per capita effective buying income of 142% of the national level and per capital market value of \$153,714. Overall, the lown's market value grew by 0.8% over the past year to \$3.2 billion to 2020.

Berlin is a primurily residential community that over the past several years has experienced diversification through development in the nonresidential sectors, lackating an Eversource training facility and relocation of an aerospace companent manufacturer. Perhaps most significant is the Town Center Project, which is in the final stage of permitting, and will contain residential as well as commercial space. Various recent public infrastruction projects, including upgrades to the town's train station and tracks as part of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield regional rail service expansion project, have increased interest in development in Berlin. Consequently, a new proposed transit-oriented development project around the train station could result in appreciable mixed-use development, which would add to the tax base.

Several initiatives are underway to support the business community's recovery following the sudden stop stemming from the governor's stay-at-home order to control the community apread of COVID-19. These include various marketing campaigns to encourage residents to buy locally. The management team has regularly engaged in conversations with business owners and reports that only one local restaurant does not expect to reopen. In addition, building permit activity remains steady as a result of video inspections and officials report that no projects underway have delayed or sloved development plans. Although we believe that the town's economy may be posted to remain

stable, the macroeconomic conditions as discussed in S&P Global Economics' report "An Afready Historic US Downturn Now Looks Even Worse," published April 16, 2020 on RatingsDirect, may lead to some softening in the recu

Very strong management

We view the towe's management as very strong, with strong financial policies and practices under our financial management assessment methodology, indicating our view that financial practices are strong, well embedded, and likely sustainable.

Management's use of conservative budgeting essumptions to determine revenus and expenditures demonstrates. Berlin's financial policies and practices, Management uses five years of historical data to identify tax collection and growth trends, and uses the governor's proposed budget as a general guide to determine state aid revenue. On the expenditure side, management plant for year-over-year lixed costs and adjusts for growth in contractual obligations in its assumptions and then prioritizes appropriations based on community needs. The town also monitors budget-to-actual performance, delivering a report to the board of finance monthly to address variances and propose budget amendments when necessary.

Management's maintenance of a rolling 10-year, long-term capital improvement plan that identifies capital project priorities and internal and external financing sources strengthens policies and practices. Management presents the plan before the board of finance to inform annual budget discussions. Although state statistics strictly limit investment instruments that the town can utilize, management maintains an investment policy for short-term holdings and interest income, referenting state law.

The town implemented a formal, live-year financial plan that details assumptions and that feeds into the annual budget. Bertin also adopted formal debt management and reserve policies. The furner outlines uses for debt, along with setting debt limits (relative to the grand list and operating budget) and amortization requirements. The reserve policy calls for maintenance of unassigned general fund reserves at no less than 11% of budgeted expenditures and includes the acceptable use of reserves to cover expenditures as well as a replenishment clause. Officials report that if protects its information technology systems from cybersecunty breaches through the use of cloud-based data management, regular backup of servers, and network firewalls to prevent breaches.

Adequate hudgetary performance

Our assessment of the town's adequate budgetary performance reflects uncertainty over potential budget challenges facing the town stemming from the recession. Although the town has historically operated with surpluses, the unknown effect of the economic fallout could exente weakness in fiscal 2021. The town had operating surpluses of 1.7% of expenditures in the general fund and of 4.6% across all governmental funds in fiscal 2019. General fund operating results of the town have been stable over the past three years, with a result of 0.8% in 2018 and a result of

We adjusted audited results to account for recurring transfera from the general fund to the capital projects fund while removing expenditures for capital projects funded with bond proceeds. Following three years of operating surpluses stemming from conservative budgeting and careful in-year monitoring, fiscal 2019 ended with a subsequent surplus resulting from one-time revenue derived from tax sales and personnel savings from unplanned vacancies.

The state has reduced intergovernmental aid to municipalities in prior periods of fiscal stress, and we expect that this could occur again in the face of the current recession. However, the town and school department previously established a working group to address the loss of state aid, and we believe these efforts position the town to undertake budgetary maneuvers to ensure fiscal balance as a result of its forward-looking planning and collaborative budgeting with the school board. Furthermore, the town's long-term financial plan includes ongoing reductions in state aid to offset the upcoming uncertainty.

Management reports that fiscal 2020 will likely end with a small simplus despite an amendment for a pension contribution from the unassigned fund balance to lower the not liability. As the budget is funded 85% with property taxes, a large portion of revenue was collected prior to March, when the stay at-home order was implemented. Furthermore, with school facilities closed and very limited costs associated with the town's COVID-19 response, management believes that expenditure savings will offset any revenue loss or delay.

The fiscal 2021 adopted budget totals about \$91.5 million, a small decrease from the amended fiscal 2020 budget. The budget appropriates approximately \$425,000 in fund balance as revenue, primarily for debt service and pension funding. This amount is lower than in previous years, when the appropriation generally exceeded \$1 million. Intergovernmental aid is budgeted to decline to about \$13.1 million, or 13.3% of budgeted revenue, consistent with its strategy adopted in 2018. Although state budget conversations over the past peveral years have included shifting a portion of the teachers' pension system annual coars to local achool departments, we do not believe this would materially affect Berlin's finances should it be enacted within the next several years.

Although we anticipate that uncertainty over the effect of the recession on the town's budget will remain a concern, as reflected in our publication." The COVID-19 Outbreak Weakers U.S. State and Local Government Credit Conditions," published April 2, 2020, we believe Berlin's financial management tools will result in at least adequate operating results within the outbook period.

Very strong budgetary flexibility

Berlin's budgetary flexibility is very strong, in our view, with an available fund balance in fiscal 2019 of 18% of operating expenditures, or \$16.6 million

The town has maintained what we consider very strong budgetary flexibility through the maintenance of reserves in excess of 15% of expenditures over the past several years. Despite annually appropriating fund balance in the budget, the town has consistently outperformed and contributed to reserves at year end. Management reports that the same will occur in fiscal 2020. Although we believe the town's flexibility will remain very strong, management is pursuing potentially utilizing some reserves in fiscal 2021 to support the school board's fall reopening plan to prepare facilities to ensure students are healthy and safe.

Very strong liquidity

In our opinion, Berlin's liquidity is very strong, with total government available cash at 23.4% of total governmental fund expendatures and 2.6x governmental debt service in 2019. In our view, the town has strong access to external liquidity if necessary given its regular issuance of debt over the past 20 years.

The town has no variable-rate or direct purchase debt, and management has confirmed it has no contingent liquidity

risks from financial instruments with payment provisions that change upon certain events. Investments are subject to strict state guidelines and each is invested in low-risk assets, including the state's short-term investment fund or short-term certificates of deposit. For these reasons, we expect the liquidity profile to remain very strong over the next two years.

Strong debt and contingent liability profile

In our view, Berlan's debt and contingent liability profile is strong. Total governmental fund debt service is 9.1% of total governmental fund revenue. Overall net debt is low at 2.8% of market value, and approximately 71.8% of the direct debt is scheduled to be repaid within 10 years, which are, in our view, positive credit factors.

Following this bond issue, Berlin has approximately \$79.3 million of total direct debt with no short-term debt outstanding. This also includes \$8.8 million remaining from a roughly \$10.4 million, 20-year capital lease for a multifaceted energy saving program. We note that the town expects to realize energy savings that it will use to finance the annual lease payments. Longer term, this program will belp mitigate future cost increases associated with energy usage and consumption. The town also has approximately \$9.6 million in overlapping and underlying debt, primarily as a result of being a member of the Mattabassett District, which provides water pollution control.

The town continues with its debt reduction plan and may issue additional debt for ongoing school and infrastructure improvements. However, management expects to issue less than \$5 million annually and may de-authorize a portion of its authorized debt, as projects have come to completion. We do not expect the town's debt position to deteriorate given its long-term strategy to de-leverage and rapid amortization of debt.

Pension and other postemployment liabilities

We do not believe the town's pension and other postemployment (OPEB) liabilities present a credit pressure. While the functed ratio of the town's single-employer plan is very low, the plan was closed to all employees in 2000 and the town bas made additional contributions to the plan from its unassigned fund balance to reduce the pension exposure. Furthermore, the combined net habilities for pension and OPEB are approximately \$15 million, which we view as manageable relative to the size of the town's budget.

As of June 30, 2019, Berlin administers pension benefits through a single-employer, defined benefit public employee retirement system.

- The plan is essentially funded on a pay-as-you-go basis with a funded ratio of 17% and a not pension liability of \$7.4 million
- . There were 19 retirees and 13 active employees in the plan.
- Retuces may also opt for a lump-aum payment, which can create some unpredictability in costs, but management
 reports that it would issue notes if needed for each flow purposes.
- Teachers and other certified personnel are eligible to purticipate in the Consecticut State Teachers' Retirement, a
 cost-sharing, multiple-employer system. The state makes contributions to the plan.

Despite the low funded rano of the single-employer pension plan, the town contributed more than 200% of its

minimum funding and 400% of its static funding, indicating of the low costs associated with the plan. Furthermore, with the plan closed to new members and low discount rate of 3.5%, we believe the cost trajectory is manageable, particularly given the town's budgetary flexibility to absorb higher costs.

Berlin provides single-employer, self-insured OPEBs to certain eligible retirees and their spouses. Eligible retirees are required to contribute 100% to the cost of receiving OPEB medical benefits, so the town's OPEB liability is an implicit rate subsidy. As of June 30, 2019, the net OPEB obligation was \$7.7 million.

Strong institutional framework

The institutional framework score for Connecticut municipalities is strong

Related Research

2019 Update OI Institutional Framework For U.S. Local Governments

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