

Citizen's Guide to the Windsor Town Budget



In Windsor, the method we use to determine our town budget is an open process. Every citizen who is registered to vote – property owners and those who rent – is welcome to participate in determining the town budget.

This is where your involvement is really important because your vote really does count. What you think makes a difference, right here in your home town. Please take the time to vote on your town's budget.

This guide provides basic information about the budget process and, while understanding the process may not change how you feel about taxes, it can help you take part in the ongoing conversation about taxes and the services they pay for.



Budget Workshops for Windsor Residents



January 20: 6:30 PM	Town Hall Council Chambers	Superintendent presents Board of Education proposed budget. Public comment at beginning and end of meeting.
January 28: 6:30 PM	Town Hall Council Chambers	Informational Budget Meeting for Windsor Residents presented by Town Manager Peter Souza.
February 25: 6:30 PM	Town Hall Council Chambers	Informational Budget Meeting for Windsor Residents presented by Town Manager Peter Souza.

The following Community Budget Forums are being sponsored by Windsor CT Votes and the Windsor League of Women Voters. Town Manager Peter Souza and Superintendent of Schools Dr. Craig Cooke will provide the latest budget information and answer questions from residents.

March 29: 6:30 PM	Town Hall Council Chambers	Community Budget Forum
April 7: 6:00 PM	Poquonock School Gymnasium	Community Budget Forum
April 21: 10:00 AM	Senior Center/L.P. Wilson Community Center	Community Budget Forum
April 28: 6:30 PM	330 Windsor Avenue/Caring Connection	Community Budget Forum
May 4: 7:00 PM	Town Hall Council Chambers	Community Budget Forum

A message from the Town Manager

The annual budget process always presents choices that have to be made and Windsor's FY 2017 town budget will be no different. Moving forward, our grand list growth is projected to experience peaks and valleys, we need to remain cognizant of our asset management investments and serving the needs of our aging population while balancing opportunities for our youth. Like every town and city in the country, public safety is always a priority.

This "Citizen's Guide to the Windsor Town Budget" explains the process. I hope you will find it a useful introduction and accept it as an invitation to participate in creating a budget that maintains the services that we as Windsor residents expect. I am pleased to announce that several community budget forums will be sponsored by the Windsor CT Votes and Windsor League of Women Voters in the weeks leading up to the budget referendum. School Superintendent Dr. Cooke and I look forward to visiting various locations in town to participate with residents in these forums to answer questions, ask for ideas and discuss the budget.

Working together, we can succeed at making the tough choices that result in a budget that serves the need of our community and one that we can all be proud of.

Peter Souza
Town Manager

Get involved with the process

Creating a budget that maintains important services, provides a good education for our children and doesn't raise taxes to unacceptably high levels is not an easy thing to do and it simply can't be done without citizen input. The town manager and the town council want to know what you think as they prepare our town budget.

You can do that in a number of ways. First, you can attend any town council meeting and make yourself heard. If you aren't comfortable with speaking before a group, you can send a note or email the town manager or the town council outlining your ideas and concerns. What's most important is to be heard.

You don't need a background in accounting or a degree in public policy. You do need to have enough interest in Windsor's future to come out and voice your concerns, needs and opinions.

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Every comment and communication is appreciated and will be considered.

Remember, everyone has a stake in this process. If you don't pay real estate taxes because you rent, your landlord does pay taxes and that will eventually affect you. If you don't have children in the Windsor School system, you should still have an interest in the quality of our schools because good schools are part of the foundation of every successful community and have a positive affect on the value of your home.

Windsor's General Fund expenditure budget for Fiscal Year 2016 is \$106,384,140

Board of Education – \$66,025,950
General Government – \$966,020
Safety Services – 9,976,810
Recreation & Leisure Services – \$1,412,430
Human Services – \$787,460
Health – \$477,170
Library Services – \$1,590,340
Development Services – \$1,799,370
Community Development – \$92,500
Public Works – \$5,277,280
Information Services – \$436,140
Administrative Services – \$2,152,930
General Services – \$10,785,020
Town Support for Education – \$4,604,720

How our town budget works

Beginning in December each year, town employees begin to review programs and services to estimate how much it will cost to operate the town in the 12 months beginning July 1. That money comes from property taxes, federal and state grants and from town agencies that collect fees.

At the same time, the town makes an estimate of how much it will have to spend to maintain and/or enhance the services that residents and businesses expect.

Also during this period, the board of education and the Windsor school's administrative staff estimate how much it will cost to operate the schools and school-related services for the next year.

The town manager then takes the estimate of the income the town expects along with the estimates of spending from the town staff and the board of education and presents them to the town council. This is called the Town Manager's Proposed Budget and it's really just a starting point.

Next, the town council examines the budget and conducts budget hearings with all town departments throughout the month of April to discuss and suggest changes. When the town council approves the final budget, it is put up for a vote at what is called an Adjourned Town Meeting Referendum, more commonly known as the "budget referendum."

The voters in Windsor are then asked to vote "yes" or "no" on the proposed budget. If the budget doesn't win approval, town staff and the Board of Education, through the Town Manager, modify and resubmit their proposals to the Town Council and then once again, to the voters. Only after the voters have approved the budget can it become the income and spending plan for the town.

Reducing Energy Costs

In the last five years, by converting to more efficient fuels and utilizing solar, we have reduced the costs to operate our schools and six town buildings by more than **\$730,000** over a five year period.



Seniors and Veterans – You may be eligible for reduced taxes ...

A Guide to Tax Reductions and Benefits Available to Qualified Windsor Residents is a pamphlet that describes a variety of exemptions and benefits available to individuals meeting the income and/or age guidelines as determined by State of Connecticut regulations. To get your copy or to learn more, visit the town's website at townofwindsorct.com or call the Town Assessor's office at 860-285-1816.

Volunteers play an important part in helping to control our costs

Last year, the Windsor Public Library and the Wilson Branch Library benefitted from 4,385 hours of volunteer help. Our Social Services and Senior Services departments welcomed 10,200 hours of volunteer help. This is equivalent to 7 full-time positions.



The budget is about choices

In making budget choices, the town council has to face certain realities. There are many new services that we would all like the town to provide but that we simply can't afford. In fact, some years we may not be able to afford some things that we have enjoyed in the past.

There are certain expenses that must be included in the budget at some level. For instance, we must have police services and schools. This is a question of the level of service delivery that our residents have a right to expect.

If we choose to reduce what we are willing to pay for these and other essential services too far, our town will change in ways that none of us want.

There are other "fixed" costs in the town's budget that continue to rise, and that the town is obligated to absorb. High on the list are the MDC's fees for sewer service, utilities, salaries that are mandated by collective bargaining agreements, and health insurance costs for town and school employees.

The Mill Rate: Calculating your taxes



One "mill" produces one dollar for each \$1,000 of property assessment. For example:

If your house has a current fair market value of \$200,000.
 (The assessment" is 70% of its current market value: \$140,000)
 The current Mill Rate is 30.92 – $140 \times 30.92 = \$4,328$ in tax.

The Town's Household Budget

- Your Household – The Town
- Mortgage or rent – Debt service
- Taxes – Mandates, required services
- Utilities, food, gas – Utilities, gas, salaries, benefits
- Savings account – Fund balance, reserves
- Maintenance projects – Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Phone, Cable, Internet – Technology, replacement equipment
- "Nice-to-have" items – Enhanced services/programs

Our town's budget increases each year to meet rising expenses and service demands.

In the past **10 years** our budget has increased by an average of **2.57% a year**.

The budget is an annual opportunity to make our town even better

The reality is that the choices we make as to how much income we can expect and how much we can spend this year, have an affect on future years as well. If, for instance, we elect to reduce the size of our public works department to the point where we could no longer maintain one or more of our parks or town buildings, we would be placing the extra cost of reclaiming those facilities on some future year's budget.

The reverse is also true. If we include a new service of some kind in our budget now, we could be obligating ourselves as a community to continue it in future years.

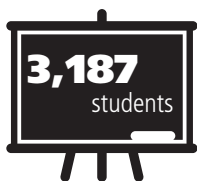
The taxes we pay on real estate, automobiles and other personal property have a long-term influence on our town. We must be aware of our residents' ability and willingness to pay for services. If our tax rate is perceived as being too high, residents living on fixed incomes will move away and those shopping for new homes will avoid us. Businesses, that now pay approximately 40% of all town taxes, may relocate to areas that are cheaper. The vitality and diversity that make our town such a good place to live would quickly disappear.

Like any household or business, we have to be careful about what we borrow. We must repay money that we, as a community, made a decision to borrow in the past. The money used to renovate Windsor High School and the Windsor Public Library are good examples of this. Future Capital needs include the Public Safety Complex and street paving.

Also like any family, we need to maintain a savings account. For the town, that's called our Fund Balance and it represents revenues that we have collected over the years but did not spend. It is tempting to dip into those savings to cover our ongoing expenses but that may not be fiscally responsible because the size of our Fund Balance is closely watched by the financial community and various government agencies. If our Fund Balance gets too low, our credit rating will be affected and it may cost us more to borrow in the future.

Our challenge then, is to figure out just how much, if anything, we can spend on each service the town provides.

After the town manager presents his budget to the town council in late March, the council will begin evening meetings with various town departments. The public is always welcome at these meetings, which are televised on WGTN, Channel 96. Once the town council votes on a final budget, it sets the date of the referendum.



Windsor Public Schools enrollment is up this year

This year, our schools welcomed **3,187 students**. This is **42** more students than a year ago. Windsor public schools are financially responsible for 671

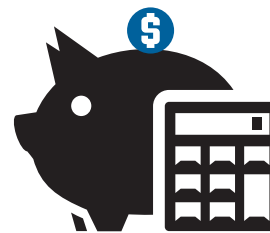
more students attending regional, magnet or special education programs outside the district.

Windsor's revenues for Fiscal Year 2016 are \$106,384,140

General Property Tax – \$88,290,620
Licenses And Permits – \$629,230
Fines and Penalties – \$40,000
Revenues from use of Assets – \$513,830
State School Aid – \$13,367,400
State Grants in Lieu of Taxes – \$1,724,060
Other State Grants – \$45,000
Federal Grants – \$0
Revenues from other Agencies – \$113,750
Charges for Current Services – \$734,650
Other Revenues – \$25,600
Opening Cash/Reserve Fund – \$900,000

The town's website, townofwindsorct.com is also a great resource for learning more about the budget. You can view a videocast of budget meetings live or view archived meetings and stay updated on meeting schedules to keep pace with the process.

For complete definitions of both expenditures and revenues, visit townofwindsorct.com/budget



We've been careful about our town's saving account

In the past five years, our Fund Balance has averaged **16.4%** of the annual budget helping to affirm our triple AAA credit rating.



Windsor High School graduates have a bright future

Of the 2015 graduation class...

56% – Students attended 4-year schools

25% – Students attended 2-year schools

9% – Students attended technical schools

6% – Employment

4% – Military