

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT BOF MEETING

Town of Chester, Connecticut
Chester Board of Finance/Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting
Budget Workshop
Thursday, March 21, 2019
203 Middlesex Avenue
Community Meeting Room

CALL TO ORDER

Virginia Carmany called the meeting to order immediately following the BOF Regular Meeting. In attendance included: Virginia Carmany, Jon Joslow, Mike Joplin seated for Rick Nygard, Charlie Park, John O'Hare seated for Dave Cohen, and Jennifer Rannestad. Also, in attendance included Selectman Grzybowski, Selectwoman Janecek and First Selectwoman Gister which were called into the Budget meeting.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS- None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Virginia Carmany made a motion to approve the minutes from the 3/7/19 meeting. Charlie Park seconded the motion. Discussion followed:

Several wordsmithing/typos were corrected relative to the 3/7/19 meeting minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

REVIEW OF LIBRARY DIRECTOR REQUEST

A copy of the Library's Director's request for additional hours for staff was included in the Board's packet and discussed. The Library Director was present and reported that increased programs and attendance at same initiated the request for an increase in hours for the Children's Librarian making it a full-time position. The Boards discussed the changing role of the Library in the community and the financial implications of same. The Library Director reported on additional items in the Library's budget request. The Board will take the Library's request for additional staff hours and other budget requests under consideration.

SECOND REVIEW OF DRAFT BUDGET REVENUE AND EXPENSES

FIRST REVIEW OF CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT REQUEST AND DRAFT CAPITAL BUDGET

Lauren reported that she and Peter have been meeting to discuss possible scenarios to counter the anticipated large increases in the school's budget request. Talking points included:

- Revenue – \$730,000 is in ECS in Governor's budget - \$109,000 more than budgeted in current year.
- Revenue – ambulance revenue assumes additional staff
- The status of the Car Tax in the Governor's budget is unknown.
- The status of Teacher Pensions in the Governor's Budget is still unknown. Some Towns are including a "placeholder" in their education budget to accommodate 25% of the current

obligation. For Chester, this represents approximately \$19,000 in the first year, \$27,000 in the second year and \$40,000 in the third year.

- Expenditures
 - BOF General Legal and Postage lines
 - Can these be funded via Contingency as needed?
 - Protocol for use of Contingency was discussed – BOS and BOF action is necessary for the use of Contingency.
 - If the funds are not utilized, they go back into the General Fund.
 - It was recommended that these items remain as budgeted.
 - P&Z Outside Clerical
 - New Board clerks has resulted in lower costs.
 - P&Z Advertising and Printing
 - Historically, they have not utilized the entire amount budgeted
 - Park & Rec Equipment Maintenance
 - \$9,145 was budgeted for flood repairs; however, this will be funded via the current year's budget.
 - FEMA provided estimates for work at parks and beaches and were enthusiastic about funding repairs (town would be reimbursed by FEMA).
 - Library Book Purchases - \$1,750 (10% increase) – can this be reduced?
 - Perhaps use of Trust to address the purchase of books.
 - Friends of the Chester Library has been purchasing books; however, donations are down.
 - The Trust Fund may be used to hire additional staff or to increase hours to staff.
 - Additional comments:
 - Reduction - \$1,000 – highway/equipment maintenance
 - CHC – regular payroll – adjusted with ambulance revenue
 - Fire Marshal – request to surrounding towns regarding Fire Marshal funding – results included:
 - Protocols vary - stipends, full-time employee, part-time employee
 - Duties determined per State Statute
 - Discussion regarding the historic yearly increases and overages to the FM budget
 - Jennifer recommend that the BOF “hold the line” on the Fire Marshal’s request and ask for additional clarification/data regarding costs.
 - Safety Services – additional 2 hydrants
 - Estimate is \$5,900 for two hydrants
 - Possibility that the Water Company’s linear feet estimates are incorrect
 - Region 4 – new numbers received will be incorporated and distributed.

Lauren reported that at this time, the budget is at 1.8 mills, 6.64%. The percentage increases, particularly in the General Fund is over 4%. Much of this is attributed to the tree budget. The possibility of using an outside contractor to address trees was discussed. The Tree Warden does not feel we would save money using a “big” contractor; however, there may be a savings realized if our current contractor uses additional staff per day.

Hazardous Mitigation Plan – this is listed as a line item under Emergency Management. There is a mandate that the Town have a Hazardous Mitigation Plan. The plan is due to be updated and there are

costs associated with same. The RiverCOG is developing a “team” to re-write the plans. It is expected that this will cost Chester \$3,900.00 for this work.

Region 4 BOE Budget

It appears, at this time, that the Region 4 budget is down below 3% (this includes a \$200,000 reduction to debt services); however, they are showing a significant increase overall. Virginia reported that grades 7 through 12 show a decrease of 83 students (this number was confirmed) next year with no reduction to staff realized. In fact, additions in staff have been requested (talented and gifted and social work staff). Future enrollment projections, per the BOE, will not be available until after the budget “stopped moving”.

Virginia expressed concern with the large projected increases to Chester’s share of the Region 4 budget but understood the need for a quality school system. Virginia reported that she did convey her concern regarding the Region 4 budget to the appropriate individuals.

Laruen reported that a large percentage of the increase is due to salary and benefits. Note that the numbers for health insurance are still not finalized.

The Region 4 budget increase was at 3.48% and has been reduced to 2.6% (reduction of \$175,000).

John O’Hare made a motion that the BOF and BOS send a request to the Region 4 BOE for an explanation for the request for additional personnel in a declining enrollment environment and for the BOE to provide financial projections for the next 4 years to support an analysis to be presented to the public. Charlie Park seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

It was noted that even though enrollments are projected to decline, classes in all of the disciplines must still be provided.

An Audience Member suggested that the Chester BOF discuss their concerns with the school’s budget with the Deep River BOF.

The BOF briefly reviewed the “working Capital document”. Project Adventure, the parking lot and a generator for the Town Hall are not yet included in Capital.

BOF members were encouraged to review the CES budget. This budget also reflects a \$200,000 increase due to Supervision District and ADM figures.

Lauren will send a budget update, including important dates, via the town-wide e-mail system.

ADJOURNMENT

John Joslow made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Michael Joplin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski
Clerk

