

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, April 4, 2019
203 Middlesex Avenue
Community Meeting Room

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Those in attendance included: Peter Evankow, First Selectwoman Gister, Selectwoman Janecek, Richard Strauss, Mike Joplin, Jon Joslow, Jennifer Rannestad, John O'Hare, Selectman Grzybowski and 3 members of the Audience of Citizens.

AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS- None.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

On a motion made and duly seconded the minutes from the 3/21/19 were unanimously approved as revised.

Note the proper spelling of Mr. Joslow's name: Jon Joslow.

UPDATED EXPENDITURE BUDGET

Copies of the updated budget were included in the BOF packet and discussed. The report included updated Region 4 and CES figures. Items of discussion included:

- Park & Rec Equipment Maintenance - \$9,145 – removed as repairs resulting from the storm damage will be done prior to the start of the next fiscal year.
- Library Book Purchases – request of \$1,750 – a portion was approved and a recommendation was made to use funds from the “Friends of the Chester Library” or from the “Gwendolyn Ornter Trust” for the remainder. The Town does receive an annual 990 form relative to the Trust, as appropriate.
- Fire Marshal – increases requested were partially funded. The Fire Marshal indicated that additional hours are necessary to complete tasks. It was reported that 30% of tasks are “emergencies” and 70% are “required inspections”. It is difficult to budget for “emergency” and unanticipated expenses. It was suggested that perhaps contingency funds should be budgeted for Fire Marshal expenses. Detailed information provided by the Fire Marshal was included in the BOF packet. Jon Joslow questioned the requirements of the duties of the Fire Marshal vs. the number of instances requiring the Fire Marshal's attention.
- Hydrants – still waiting for appropriate figures. Jamie is following up with the Water Co.
- Animal Control – figures changed due to new hire. Outside Contractor decreased by \$1,500 due to discussions with Essex and Deep River.
- Medical Insurance – quote received less than anticipated (15% vs. 8%).
- Region 4 – as of their last meeting, down \$130,000 from initial request.
 - Tuition for “out of Town” students was discussed.

- A letter sent from Virginia to Region 4 BOE regarding enrollments was discussed relative to the projections provided being less than actual enrollments.
- The following will be forwarded to the BOE for further discussion at the 4/8/19 meeting:
 - What is the dollar amount and percent increase in the FY20 budget as compared with the approved FY19 Budget, not including debt service?
 - What is the dollar amount and percent increase in the FY20 budget as compared with the FY19 Projection, not including debt service?
 - What is the dollar amount and percent increase in the FY20 budget as compared with the approved FY19 Budget, including debt service?
- The proposed 2019/20 budget request of \$13,659,821 is up \$657,718 (most due to schools) and equates to a 4.79% increase. The General Fund budget is up 3.76% and Capital is down substantially.
 - Note that in several prior year's Chester has experienced a decline in enrollments thus lower ADM increases.
- The proposed mill rate increase is 1.68 higher than last year (6.2%).
- Masonicare appealed the Assessor's decision to deny their tax exemption. The Board of Assessment appeals forwarded to the Court.
- The need for increased overview of the BOE budget via a BOF for the BOE was discussed.
 - This is allowable under Statute and has been discussed with neighboring towns.
 - This will be discussed further by the BOF.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF CAPITAL BUDGET

Capital Budget documents were included in the BOF packet and discussed. The discussion on Capital included:

- Items have been adjusted in the Capital Plan to allow the Capital to be unchanged from the current year to the next fiscal year
 - Additions – parking lot at Firehouse, repairs to Project Adventure (including \$10,000 for tree work related to solar project at CES).
 - Oil tank CES
 - Budgeted in two fiscal years
 - Per DEEP, must be removed in 2020
 - Computer Replacement Line – Windows 7 will no longer be supported and costs associated with the upgrades are reflected in the upcoming Capital.
 - The Infrastructure Line includes bridge repairs; not just paving and sidewalks
 - Reimbursement for the Liberty Street Bridge repairs will be put into same.
 - Building Rehabilitation and Enhancement – CES – on-going safety and security items – funds originally budgeted were forwarded to the oil tank replacement project.
 - Fire Dept. Parking Lot – included in the Master Plan
 - Plan includes converting grass areas to paved and additional lighting.
 - Could alleviate parking concerns downtown and surrounding areas
 - Included in out going Capital, not the current year
 - Town Owned Buildings/Properties
 - Town Hall – will need boilers and air conditioners – also, issues with the roof have been uncovered.

- Meetinghouse – flooring project will be more complicated than originally anticipated – moved to future year due accommodate the Firehouse floor project.
- Request for interior painting at the Library
- Town Hall interior painting has been on-going and not funded by Capital
- Meetinghouse painting – will be expensive due to the detail of the project
- Firehouse request for access controls and cameras – included in future years
- Fire Dept. Fleet Replacement
 - After this year, \$70,000 to \$100,000 is budgeted for replacements (20% of capital).
 - Funding options, including bonding for fleet replacement was discussed.

Lauren reported that the BOS has discussed and recommends the following change to the Capital budget as follows:

- OPM has required a report (mandated) regarding the status of the Town’s budget. If the Town’s budget has increased more than 2.5%, the town will lose its ability to obtain discretionary state funding. Capital and Special Education may be deducted. This year, it is anticipated the Chester’s spending budget will be increased and Capital will decrease significantly. Note that the Town does not have control over the school’s budget.
 - Jon Joslow suggested that this matter be referred to the Auditor of recommendation
- Lauren recommended that the large increases (\$40,000 for a total of \$80,000) to the tree budget be moved to Capital. The tree budget has increased substantially due to the tree crisis throughout the State.
 - The use of LOCIP funding (possibly to the detriment of using the funding for roads) to address the tree crisis was discussed.

Board member availability for the 4/18/19 Budget Workshop was discussed.

Lauren reported that information on the upcoming budget, especially the impact of the substantial increases to the Region 4 budget, will be included in the next issue of Chester Events. The possibility of scheduling a Public Informational Meeting on the budget was discussed.

Lauren reported on a change to the Operating Budget relative to the Tree Warden as follows:

A letter of resignation has been received from a part-time Public Works employee/Tree Warden (Scott Mills). He has been offered a position elsewhere that includes benefits but would prefer to remain in Chester. His hours in Chester have increased over the years due to various unanticipated events (snow storms, September flood, etc.). The status of the trees in Chester has been an on-going topic of discussion vis a vis gypsy moths, ash borer beetle. The tree budget has increased substantially as a result of same.

As reported previously, the quality and quantity of the work performed by the cleaning contractor has not been satisfactory. Also, the Town has been utilizing Mr. Mills to perform tree work (smaller trees). Additionally, contractors have been used for various tasks because of the lack of staff.

Lauren is recommending additional hours for Mr. Mills (under Public Works). He would remain the Tree Warden and be assigned cleaning duties, plowing sidewalks, and other duties as appropriate thus saving "Outside Contractor" costs and remaining budget neutral. The BOF agreed that Mr. Mills be offered additional hours (to 29 hours per week) as discussed above.

Lauren reported that she, Jeff Jacobson, John Divis, Bruce Sypher and Jamie Grzybowski completed a walk-thru of the Maple Street Parking Lot and the Jacobson Walkway. The short-term needs to make the area more accessible, including lighting, were reviewed and cost estimates are being developed. While the Main Street Project does include work in this area, short term needs of the town, including parking, need to be addressed as soon as possible. Some aspects of any project may be accommodated in-house. At this time, no funds have been placed in the project for any project. It is anticipated that a project could begin in the Fall. The importance of maintaining the vibrancy of the Merchants during the Main Street Project was stressed.

Jon Joslow, at the request of Virginia Carmany, requested an update on the following:

- Stone wall repair – Lauren is pursuing same with Public Works
- Status of Police vehicle – vehicle currently located at Public Works – the intent is to sell the vehicle.
- Solar Panels – E-Team considering the re-use of the panels either at the Firehouse or Town Hall. There is also the option of re-sale.
- North Quarter Park – Park & Rec continues to address the park and new equipment has been installed.

Jamie reported that the Town Operating budget is relatively flat and has increased due to the tree crisis, salaries and health insurance (all out of the control of the BOS and BOF). He asked Board members what their expectations are relative to the proposed 1.68 mill increase and the BOE's contribution to same.

Lauren reported that there may be slight increases to the Grant List due to proposed projects.

Richard Strauss reported that the Town's are due to receive funds from the BOE regarding surplus dollars. Lauren responded that the Chester's share of this year's surplus is approximately \$15,000 to \$20,000 and it is anticipated that due to the September flood, various line items will be overspent. We will be reimbursed 70 to 80% in flood related damages. Updated projections regarding the anticipated surplus from the school were requested.

FUTURE BOF AGENDA ITEMS

The BOF requested that the following items be discussed further at a BOF meeting:

- Investments – the Treasurer will be invited to discuss same.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion made and duly seconded, the meeting was unanimously adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Suzanne Helchowski
Clerk