

Town of Columbia
Budget Hearing
Financial Planning and Allocation Commission
April 21, 2010 - 7:30 pm.
H.W. Porter Cafetorium
3 Schoolhouse Road, Columbia, CT. 06237

Present: Chairman Earnest Sharpe, Joanne Gyure, Cindy Harrison,
Judy Szegda-Ortiz, Mike Robertson, Allen Smith.

Also Present: Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz, Superintendent of
Schools Francine Coss and numerous citizens.

Call to order: E. Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7:33 pm. The
Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

1. New Business

- 1.1 Presentation of the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 budget by representatives of the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen:** J. Luiz presented the FY '10-'11 budget summary consisting of the BOE, BOS, Debt Services, Capital Expenditures and remaining others such as the Dog Fund. He explained that the BOS is proposing a 1.77% increase, and the BOE is proposing a 2.62% increase, which is reduced to 2.53% when comparing expenditures to the original FY 10-11 budget figures. He discussed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and its impact on the Town's FY 09-10 and FY 10-11 budgets. J. Luiz provided a percentage breakdown making up the total budget of \$15,956,524. He explained that of this \$15,956,524, 70.5% is education, 19.9% is Selectmen, 5.5% is debt, 3.3% is Capital and .8% is other. J. Luiz discussed the BOS approach to the FY '10-'11 Operating Budget explaining that the BOS requested that Department Heads and Boards/Commission submit budgets with a 0% increase. He also mentioned that the trend is for non-property tax revenues to diminish. J. Luiz talked in detail about the notable expenditure increases and decreases in the BOS operating budget. Luiz talked about salaries and wages, explaining that nearly all town employees did not receive a raise in FY '09-'10. He explained that two collective bargaining units recently formed and that negotiations for both units are underway. He stated that if the negotiations result in the Town giving a raise to union employees, then the Town will provide a similar raise to all non-union employees. This plan has resulted in a significant increase in Contingency. J. Luiz spoke of the Capital Budget, explaining each purchase that was funded by FiPAC and other projects that were requested, but not funded. Lastly, J. Luiz discussed revenues and stated that the proposed mill rate increase is .56 mills or 2.43%.

F. Coss discussed the BOE approach to developing the FY '10-'11 budget. She explained that some of the approaches the BOE have taken include utilizing local cooperative to reduce pricing for supplies and materials, renegotiating contracts with any vendor or group that is willing to do so, requesting instructional material/supply costs from Content Area Coordinators and Team Leaders and structuring staff to reflect current student population. F. Coss reviewed notable expenditure increases and decreases in the BOE FY '10-'11 budget. F. Coss discussed the 70.5% of the budget that is BOE. She explained that \$319,384 increase is for Special Education, but pointed out the salary reduction of \$251,683. F. Coss explained the elimination of several staff and the reorganization of staff assignments in order to fill vacancies and needs.

1.2 Public Hearing- Opportunity for any elector and/or taxpayer to be heard regarding the recommended appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 town budget.

- David Chase of 144 Route 87 asked why parents who have special need children cannot cover the cost of occupational therapy, etc. under their insurance. F. Coss explained that is the BOE is obligated to pay for such expenditures due to federal and state mandates.

- Marcia Morrison of 14 Doubleday Road thanked the Town Administrator, the Superintendent and the boards and commissions for the hard work they put forth on the budget. She stated that she was shocked by motions made at previous FiPAC meetings by new Commission members pertaining to the funding for the purchase of the new fire truck, and cutting the Deputy Fire Marsha position as well as motions made regarding making cuts to the Library. She stated she feels there should be no more cuts made to the BOE budget and feels as though the roof and doors need replacing. M. Morrison asked the Commission to reconsider the cut for Open Space.

E. Sharpe explained that though he may not have been comfortable with particular motions or statements made by Commission members, each member does have the right to speak and make motions.

- Joan Hill of 23 Cards Mill Road spoke about the Open Space cut. She explained that she feels it would be beneficial to the town to have more Open Space. She stated that she feels \$20,000 for Open Space was a reasonable request made by the BOS and feels the town needs to plan ahead and save for Open Space.

- Chris Tolsdorf of 104 Hunt Road stated that when the Town purchased the Szegda Farm property, it was able to pay for it with cash and not have to bond due to the existing Open Space funding. He would like to see

funding for Open Space gradually saved so that future purchases do not have to be bonded.

- Su Epstein, Director of the Saxton B. Little Free Library explained that the statistics that A. Smith provided at a prior FiPAC meeting were not completely accurate. She clarified to the Commission that there are no books in storage, and clarified the Library's hours of operation. S. Epstein stated that some of the state library statistics are very inaccurate. She explained that the insurance benefits are approximately 1/3 of the library's budget, and pointed out that library employees currently receive a 60/40 split, which is an improvement from what once was a 50/50 split. She explained that eventually she would like to see a 75/25 split. She stated that the money that was set aside to provide insurance to library employees will be given back to the town's general fund if these employees choose to not take insurance.

- Henry Schwartz of 6 Mallard Point spoke about Open Space and stated that he feels if the town does not purchase the land that is available, it will be developed and this will eventually ruin the character of the town. He also expressed that he feels that the town gets a lot out of the library and that Library employees are deserving of benefits.

- Bob Ashton of 19 Brendi Trail responded to a comment that was made earlier in the hearing by stating he has a son with special needs and that his son receives the special benefits from the school because his son *needs* them.

- Paul Kubala of 37 Lake Road asked if it the Fire Department gets paid for responding to medical/emergency calls. Jan Thibodeau, President of the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department, explained that there is an ambulance billing service that bills the insurance of individuals who use the ambulance service. She stated that if an individual does not have insurance then he/she receives no charge at all. Once the money is received from the billing, the money goes into two funds, an ambulance billing fund and a general fund. She explained that this money pays for the Fire Department's heat, fuel and insurance on the ambulance as well as the garage space used to house the two ambulances. She explained that this money is also put towards ambulance repair, the purchase of new ambulances when needed, EMS training, etc. She explained that without ambulance billing that the town would be paying for all of these costs. P. Cabala stated that he would like to see this in writing.

- Pete Starkel of 40 Oakwood Lane stated that the last time the town purchased an ambulance was in 1997. He explained that the fire truck that is scheduled to be replaced has been in existence from 1987 and lacks

safety features. He asked for support from the town's people and commission in the purchase of the new fire truck.

- Carol Kubala of 37 Lake Road stated that she is extremely comfortable with the proposed budget, but did express concern with the idea of combining the library with the school's library due to safety concerns.

- John Leahy of 32 Wildwood Drive expressed that he feels that the proposed budget increase is too much and needs to be cut.

- Vera Englert of 230 Route 87 stated that she feels there are a lot of buildings in town that are underused and are being maintained such as the Murphy House, the Old Firehouse, etc. She would like to see better utilization of these buildings. V. Englert expressed that she feels the mill rate increase is an increase at a very tough time and feels it could hinder businesses interested in coming to town. She stated that she feels there are overstaffed departments within the town hall. V. Englert suggested increasing the town's lot size for open space purposes. She feels there is a lot of waste in town, and stated that the temperature in town buildings is often too cold or too warm and feels that these temperatures need to be regulated. V. Englert spoke of delinquent tax payers and said that it is not fair for someone to not pay their taxes. C. Vance explained that the BOS has looked into the delinquent taxpayers and that the town will begin taking legal action against some of them as needed. She also pointed out that penalties incur annually for those who are delinquent.

- Al Smith of 52 Oakwood Lane stated that he is a former efficiency consultant and feels as though the library is completely overstaffed and underused. He spoke of the Chapel and feels it is not necessary to heat and cool it simply for the storage of books.

- Lori Rogers of 14 Hennequin Road explained that the Chapel is used as a book sales room and not a book storage room. She thanked the BOE for doing such a wonderful job with their budget and asked the Commission to please not make any more cuts.

- Ann Dunnack of 103 Lake Road requested that the \$20,000 be put back into the Open Space fund. She expressed that she feels it is extremely important to start planning for the purchase of more open space.

- Dick Marshall of 2 Webster Lane stated that although he is in favor of Open Space, a new fire truck, etc. he feels that an increase in the budget is not affordable for the townspeople at this time.

- E. Sharpe explained that if the \$20,000 is designated for Open Space, then it may only be used to purchase Open Space in the future, but if it remains in the General Fund it will be available if an emergency .

- Bob Baldwin of 50 Route 87 inquired about the status of the undesignated fund. J. Luiz reviewed undesignated fund figures in the proposed FY 10-11 Budget. B. Baldwin asked what percentage the undesignated balance should be of the Total Town budget in order for the Town to be considered fiscally healthy. J. Luiz stated that most rating agencies feel that approximately 10% is considered healthy, and that the town is currently at approximately 7-8%. J. Luiz said 16% is very strong.

- Pam Bissell of Bears Den Way asked about teacher negotiations. F. Coss explained that contract negotiations will take place before year end and that a pre-discussion will occur with FiPAC before any decisions are made.

E. Sharpe confirmed that there were no members of the audience that wished to speak about the budget, and then closed the budget hearing at 9:34 pm.

2. Recess: E. Sharpe called for a brief recess at 9: 34 pm. E. Sharp ended the recess at 9: 34 pm.

3. Approval of Minutes

3.1 FIPAC March 31, 2010 Special Meeting Minutes: M. Robertson MOVED to approve the FiPAC Special Meeting Minutes of March 31, 2010. E. Sharpe SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 6:0.0.

E. Sharpe MOVED to immediately address agenda item 4.3, entitled “Modification of the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 town budget as FiPAC deems advisable” and agenda item 4.4, entitled “Adoption of the proposed Fiscal Year 2010-2011 town budget for purpose of presenting the budget at the Annual Budget Meeting.” MOTION CARRIED 6:0.

4. New Business (continued)

4.1 Transfers: E. Sharpe MOVED to approve the following FY 09-10 transfer: \$15,000 from 10-4800-900, Contingency to 10-4120-500, Prof/Tech. MOTION CARRIED 6:0. J. Ortiz MOVED to approve the following FY 09-10 transfer: \$2,500 from 10-4800-900, Contingency to 10-4260-010, Salaries. MOTION CARRIED 5:0:1 with A. Smith abstaining.

4.2 Approval of Auditing Contract: E. Sharpe MOVED to accept the auditing contract with Robert E. King and Company for an audit of Fiscal

Year 09-10 finances. A. Smith SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 6:0.

- 4.3 Modification of the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 town budget as FiPAC deems advisable.** Discussion ensued regarding the position of the Deputy Fire Marshal. J. Luiz explained that he met with the Fire Marshal who stated he will likely be retiring sometime in the future and feels that it would be for the best interest of the town to keep the Deputy Fire Marshal as is. Discussion ended on the subject of the Deputy Fire Marshal.

J. Ortiz MOVED to put \$20,000 back into the Open Space fund. J. Gyure SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION FAILED 3:3:0 with E. Sharpe, C. Harrison and M. Robertson opposing. C. Vance asked the Commission what it would take to bring the budget to a 0% tax increase. Discussion followed.

J. Ortiz MOVED to put \$10,000 into the internal service fund. M. Robertson SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 6:0.

A. Smith MOVED to add \$25,000 to the FY 10-11 Revenue Budget to reflect anticipated fees from the trial Pay-As-You-Throw trash program. MOTION CARRIED 6:0.

- 4.4 Adoption of the proposed Fiscal Year 2010-2011 town budget for purpose of presenting the budget at the Annual Budget Meeting.** E. Sharpe MOVED to adopt the proposed Fiscal Year 2010-2011 Town Budget as modified by the amendments that have been passed by FiPAC this evening and to send the adopted budget to the Annual Budget Meeting scheduled for May 11, 2010 at 7:30 pm in the Horace W. Porter School Cafetorium. MOTION CARRIED 6:0.

- 5. Adjournment:** MOTION to adjourn CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. The meeting adjourned at 10:31 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly A. Bona