

**Town of Columbia**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**Financial Planning and Allocation Commission**  
Wednesday, March 16, 2011 - 7:30 pm  
Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room  
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT. 06237

**Members Present:** Chairman Earnest Sharpe, Vice-Chairman Cindy Harrison, Scott Petrequin, Judy Szegda-Ortiz, Michael Robertson, Al Smith and Pamela Missal.

**Also Present:** First Selectman Carmen Vance. Selectmen Richard Szegda and William O'Brien. Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz, Superintendent Francine Coss and others.

1. **Call to Order:** E. Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm.
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

*C. Harrison MOVED to address New Business items 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 immediately. E. Sharpe SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.*

Lauren Perrotti-Verboven, Board of Education (BOE) Chairman stated that she and the BOE is in support of the proposed BOE budget. She explained that the BOE is mindful of the town's economic situation but that the BOE wants its facilities to be maintained and children to be nourished, which does require money. She asked for FiPAC to support the BOE budget as presented.

C. Vance stated that the BOS submitted a budget requesting a 2.1% expenditure increase and hopes that FiPAC hopes to bring the total budget down to avoid a tax increase.

F. Coss presented the Fiscal Year (FY) '11-'12 BOE budget to FiPAC. She said that the BOE is asking the town for a 0% increase. She explained that there is an increase in transportation costs due to the need to transport students to E.O. Smith High School. F. Coss discussed the surplus of \$144,319.07 in special education tuition that is projected for FY '11-'12. She explained that last year, the BOE over budgeted for Special Ed and explained that many of the students either exited Special Ed classes, or the services per pupil were reduced, resulting in the large surplus. F. Coss discussed the BOE Capital projects with FiPAC. Discussion took place between FiPAC and F. Coss regarding the FY '11-'12 proposed BOE budget.

J. Luiz presented the BOS FY '11-'12 budget to FiPAC. J. Luiz explained that technically, the BOE is proposing a 3.2% increase because the town will fund the BOE \$ 363,801 more than it funded in FY '10-'11. The increase in funding is due to the fact that the BOE will not be receiving a \$363,801 grant from the federal government. J. Luiz stated that the BOS is proposing an

overall expenditure increase of 2.8%. He discussed notable expenditure increases as well as denied requests with FiPAC. J. Luiz discussed salaries and wages and explained that the 2% general wage increase (GWI) came from Contingency for FY '10-'11. He explained that Contingency is technically a part of the BOS budget. He explained that next year's GWI will be taken from the BOS Operating Budget. He stated that the grand list growth for FY '11-'12 is 1.24%, and that the projected actual property tax collection rate for FY '10-'11 is 98.4%. J. Luiz explained that the Tax Collector has made it known to the BOS that this is a unique time where people have voiced their opinions stating they are having a very hard time paying property taxes.

E. Sharpe opened the floor to the audience.

Diane Schatz of 2 Homestead Lane asked what the mill rate would be with a collection rate of 98%. J. Luiz explained that the mill rate would be 29.496 at a collection rate of 98%.

L. Perrotti-Verboven clarified some of the terminology stated in the BOE budget presentation such as PPT's (Planning Placement Teams) and IEP's (Individual Education Plans). She explained that these are mandated by law for students that require extra attention. She also stated that she feels the grand list growth is good news and reminded everyone that the school does indeed draw a lot of people to town.

Gary Littlefield of 123 Pine Street questioned the difference in the BOS and BOE budget as far as the projected expenditures. E. Sharpe explained that the BOE's projected expenditures pertain to what it would cost the Town to run the school and that the BOS' projected expenditures are based on what it would cost the BOE to run the school.

Amy Raffa of 48 Oakwood Lane expressed that she supports the BOE budget and would like to see it remain as proposed.

RJ Weston of 495 Rte 87 stated that 16 years ago he moved to town and paid approx \$1,900 in property taxes and now he pays about \$3,600.

Pat Baginski of 12A Russmar Trail said that she is very impressed with how the school runs and has improved education. She said the school increases property values.

Leslie Poulos of 5 Sleepy Hollow Road stated she is in support of the BOE budget and also feels that property values are reflected greatly by the school value. She expressed concern regarding the level of spending and feels that if anything else is taken away it would be detrimental to school programs, etc. She complimented F. Coss and the BOE on the FY '11-'12 BOE budget.

Steve Piro of 70 Lake Road stated that he feels that it would be hard to find a more fiscally responsible BOE than what the town currently has. He said that although the town needs to be responsible financially, it is also important that it does not lose sight of the children.

Maria Gratton of 208 Pine Street stated that she is in support of the BOE budget and requested that no more cuts be made.

D. Schatz expressed support for the BOE budget. She stated that she feels F. Coss knows what she is doing and is doing a great job.

At this time FiPAC provided their responses to the budget presentations.

A. Smith expressed disappointment in the proposed budgets because there is not a 0% increase. He said taxes will skyrocket if the trend continues.

E. Sharpe and FiPAC discussed the BOE budget with F. Coss.

Jim Thorn, member of the BOE, asked what it would take to spend a portion of the Town's Undesignated Fund Balance (UFB). J. Luiz stated that such an expenditure would take place via FiPAC making it a part of the budget process. R. Szegda asked J. Luiz to explain the Moody's fund rating. J. Luiz said Moody's has general guidelines of whether or not a municipality has set aside a healthy amount in UFB. J. Luiz said Columbia currently has an UFB of around 12% of total expenditures. J. Thorn asked if it is possible for the Town to spend monies from the UFB. J. Luiz answered yes.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

**3.1 FiPAC Meeting Minutes of 2/16/11:** S. Petrequin MOVED to approve the minutes of 2/16/11. A. Smith SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.

**4. Correspondence**

**4.1 BOS Regular Meeting Minutes of 2/15/11**

**4.2 BOS Special Meeting Minutes of 2/24/11**

**4.3 BOS Regular Meeting Minutes of 3/1/11**

**4.4 BOS Special Meeting Minutes of 3/9/11**

**4.5 BOE Meeting Minutes of 2/7/11**

**4.6 BOE Policy Subcommittee Meeting Minutes of 2/14/11**

**4.7 BOE Special Meeting and Public Hearing Minutes of 2/28/11**

**4.8 Fiscal Policy Meeting Minutes of 2/9/11**

**4.9 Article – “The Costs of Confinement: Why Good Juvenile Justice Policies Make Good Fiscal Sense”**

**5. Old Business**

**5.1 Information Request – ten year history of expenditures & mill rates**

**5.2 Refinancing of existing Town debt:** J. Luiz explained that the BOS discussed the fact that the town would incur “pre-payment penalties” by refinancing prior to June 15, 2013. J. Luiz also discussed the chance that the Town would be taking with respect to waiting to refinance after June 15, 2013. The more interest rates rise, the less of a benefit it would be to refinance on/around June 15, 2013. He stated that after discussing the issue last night, the BOS agreed not to refinance the existing town debt at this time, but to revisit the issue in the future.

**6. New Business**

**6.1 Fiscal Year 2011-2012 budget presentations by the BOE & BOS**

**6.2 Audience response to the budget presentations**

**6.3 FiPAC response to the budget presentations**

**6.4 Transfers:** J. Luiz reviewed the FY 11-12 transfers. C. Harrison MOVED to approve the following transfers:

AMOUNT	FROM A/C #	DESCRIPTION	TO A/C #	DESCRIPTION
\$ 1,009	10-4800-900	Contingency	10-4410-120	Telephone/Comm.
\$ 1,410	10-4800-900	Contingency	10-4115-240	Fuel
\$ 1,320	10-4800-900	Contingency	10-4410-230	Electricity

E. Sharpe SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 6:1:0 with A. Smith opposing.

**6.5 Audit – Engagement letters from King, King and Associates, CPAs:** E.

Sharpe MOVED to appoint King, King and Associates for the town and Saxton B. Little Free Library audit services for the upcoming year. S. Petrequin SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.

**7. Audience of Citizens on non budget:** None.

**8. Next Meeting:** The next meeting is scheduled for 3/23/22 at 7:30 pm.

**9. Adjournment:** E. Sharpe MOVED to ADJOURN. S. Petrequin SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0. The meeting adjourned at 9:52 PM.