

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
(to be approved at next BOS meeting)
COLUMBIA BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Thursday, February 24, 2011- 7:00 pm.
Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT. 06237

Selectmen Present: First Selectman Carmen Vance. Selectmen Richard Szegda, Rebecca Stearns, Robert Hellstrom and William O'Brien.

Also Present: Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz, Columbia Volunteer Fire Department President John Hahn, Deputy Fire Marshal Mike Lester and Fire Chief Peter Starkel.

CALL TO ORDER: C. Vance called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm.

- 1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- 2. OLD BUSINESS**
- 3. NEW BUSINESS**

3.1 BUDGET WORKSHOP: Members of the Columbia Volunteer Fire Department (CVFD) were present to discuss the proposed FY '11-'12 CVFD budget. C. Vance stated that the Operating Budget for the CVFD has remained virtually the same as last year. P. Starkel spoke about the request for the BOS to include funding in its Capital Budget for the purchase and installation of a dry hydrant at Island Woods.

C. Vance asked about the status of the dry hydrant at Mono Pond. P. Starkel stated that the state recently approved the dry hydrant for Mallard Point and hopes that it will be installed around early spring. He stated that the issue with dry hydrants is that their water supply is subject to weather conditions. Discussion followed. C. Vance asked if an attempt was made in the past to seek approval for a grant for the cistern. P. Starkel stated no. He explained that the CVFD could apply for a grant for the cistern but the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) matching grant program is normally for dry hydrants. C. Vance asked whose property the cistern would be placed on if purchased. P. Starkel said that the cistern would be placed on Town property. R. Szegda feels it is very important to look into safety issues for the community, and asked how important, in the grand scheme of things, it is to have a cistern versus a dry hydrant. P. Starkel explained that one would not take the place of the other, and that the cistern is a priority and the CVFD has been requesting a cistern for approximately 5 years now. P. Starkel stated that the only protection currently at the Island Woods area is "on wheels" and that they rely on additional tankers for water supply. R. Szegda feels that he would like to see how things work out once the dry hydrant is installed and operable and that if the dry hydrant proves to not be sufficient, he would likely support the cistern request next year. R. Szegda asked if the CVFD would be comfortable waiting until next year to purchase the cistern due to the constraint on the budget this year. M. Lester

expressed concern regarding portions of Mono Pond drying up, and stated that he is not sure if water from the Pond would always be available in the instance of a fire. Discussion followed. W. O'Brien asked for clarification regarding the cost of the cistern. J. Luiz explained that the cost for the cistern as presented by the CVFD is based on materials costs from a few years ago, and based on the Public Works Department supplying the labor. P. Starkel said an up-to-date cost estimate would be in the \$ 25,000 to \$ 35,000 range. P. Starkel also spoke about funding for the regional fire school being cut in half by the Governor's proposed budget and stated this could have a financial impact of the town in the future. R. Szegda suggested that the CVFD contact the Windham Region Council of Governments (WinCOG) or the Northeast Council of Governments (NeCOG) to discuss sharing services and costs. Discussion followed.

The BOS discussed the cistern request made by the CVFD. R. Szegda feels that the cistern should wait another year, as the BOS would want to see how the soon-to-be-installed dry hydrant works out. W. O'Brien expressed concern due to the fact that the CVFD has been requesting this for a few years now. W. O'Brien said that that if the BOS does not grant the full request for a cistern this budget year, then it should provide some level of funding this year to be allocated towards a cistern project to be completed in the future. Discussion followed. C. Vance feels that the overall capital budget needs to be reviewed before making any final decisions on the cistern. The BOS will re-visit the possible capital purchase of a cistern at Island Woods.

J. Luiz reviewed the Board of Selectmen's FY '11-'12 Operating Budget. He stated that it currently consists of a 2.13% increase, or an increase of \$67,678. He explained that when subtracting the \$33,112 decrease in Contingency, the actual total BOS budget increase becomes \$34,566. Discussion followed. J. Luiz stated that the Board of Education is proposing a 3.24% increase in budgeted spending, or an increase of \$363,801. He explained that this year, the state will provide \$363,801 of additional funding to the Town in consideration of the fact that the Federal Government will not continue providing that amount directly to the school district. Discussion followed.

J. Luiz reviewed the FY '11-'12 Operating Expense and Capital Expenditure Budget Summary with the BOS. He reviewed the FY '11-'12 Capital Projects Reserve Fund Budget. He explained that in order for all proposed capital items to be funded, property taxes in the amount of \$473,223 must flow from the FY 11-12 Operating Budget into the FY 11-12 Capital Fund. C. Vance stated that she feels the number one priority this budget year is to keep property taxes from increasing.

Discussion followed. J. Luiz reviewed FY '11-'12 Projected Revenues with the BOS.

J. Luiz explained that the undesignated fund balance will likely grow a bit due to a projected surplus in the FY 10-11. He explained that the estimated fund balance at 6/30/11 will be \$2,004,503. He explained that the amount projected to be raised this year in property taxes is \$12,694,307 which projects to a mill rate increase of approximately 3.614% at collection rate of 97.5%. (if no adjustments are made to current requests) He stated that the Grand List

increase is approximately 1% according to his discussion with the Assessor. FiPAC will have to examine all requests and propose the appropriate mill rate.

C. Vance feels that the proposed budget represents “business as usual” meaning she does not feel there are any major increases, or any major decreases. She asked the board to give thought to ways to reduce the budget that might involve change services.

J. Luiz presented to the BOS requests for donations from various organizations. The BOS concurred that a donation of \$300 should be made to the Sexual Assault Crisis Center and that a \$2,000 donation be made to the Nature Conservancy. J. Luiz will be looking into the request from the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District for a \$500 donation.

Lastly, J. Luiz discussed requests that were made for increase in staff that had been requested by staff that he had denied in this budget:

- 1) A request by the Columbia Rec Commission that more hours be budgeted for the Recreation Director;
- 2) A request from Recreation that a “Beach Manager” type position be budgeted;
- 2) A request by the Director of Senior Services that hours be budgeted for an assistant; and.
- 3) A request by the Town Clerk that each of the Assistant Town Clerks receive forty-nine additional hours.

J. Luiz discussed the request for more hours for the Rec Director with the BOS. He explained that prior to approving the request he would like to see a plan put forth that relates an increase in hours to an increase in revenues. R. Szegda stated that he would like to see a plan as well that would indicate what revenue an increase in hours for the Director would generate, etc. He would like to see clearer documentation provided, for example, how many more hours and what would they be used for, etc. Discussion followed. J. Luiz also discussed the Beach Manager proposal and said that he feels that the creation of such a paid position is difficult given the financial circumstances the Town is in. J. Luiz said that the Rec Director would do her best to manage the beach along with the help of trainers or organizations that would, if necessary, be contracted for on a per event basis.

J. Luiz spoke with the BOS about the request by the Director of Senior Services for an assistant. He explained that this is the first year that the Director’s hours have been increased to 35 hours and he does not feel that an assistant is necessary. He stated that floaters are available for coverage when needed. Discussion followed.

J. Luiz explained that the Town Clerk is requesting more hours be granted to the two Assistants for when she is out sick or on vacation, etc. He stated that given her long-standing tenure as an employee, she receives the maximum amount of leave and that she feels it is necessary to receive more hours for the assistants to be able to provide greater coverage when the Town Clerk is out on leave. C. Vance feels as though the Town Clerk may be able to arrange the assistant’s schedules so additional hours are not needed. She does not feel this is the appropriate time to increase hours given the financial limitations on the town. J. Luiz explained that the requested increase in hours would consist of an increase of \$1,530 in the budget. R. Szegda asked J. Luiz what his thoughts were on the requested increase in hours. J. Luiz explained that he did not feel that the request was unreasonable. J. Luiz said that he

thinks increases in staff hours should be considered once the budget's mill rate is figured out. R. Szegda suggested possibly granting only part of the request. For example, instead of increasing the hours for the assistants by a total of 49 hours each, grant only 25 hours each. Discussion followed, with no consensus reached.

ADJOURNMENT: C. Vance MOVED to adjourn. The MOTION to ADJOURN CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. The meeting adjourned at 9:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Kimberly A. Bona