

**Town of Columbia  
Special Meeting Minutes  
Financial Planning and Allocation Commission  
Wednesday, April 27, 2016 at 7:00 pm.  
Yeomans Hall  
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT 06237**

1. **Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance:** E. Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
  
2. **Public Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Budget**
  - 2.1 **Presentations of the proposed budget by representatives of the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen:**

**BOE:** L. Fearon presented the proposed FY 2016-2017 BOE budget to the audience. He stated that the BOE is requesting a net increase of \$643,331 or 5.40%. L. Fearon explained that high school tuition has increased by 17% due to tuition costs and unanticipated Special Education costs. L. Fearon stated that the majority of the decrease is in the pre k-8 part of the budget. Non-certified staff has been reduced by (2) two full-time positions and a grade 5 position has been reassigned to primary grades (1-3).

L. Fearon explained that the proposed BOE budget focuses on long range plan, maintaining and improving current programs and most importantly, student success. He stated that this is the first year the BOE is utilizing REAP grant money for technology updates, etc. L. Fearon discussed areas of increase including high school tuition costs, unanticipated Special Ed, certified salaries (1.03% increase), pupil transportation and unemployment compensation for the two full-time positions that were cut. Decreases in employee benefits, professional services, copier rentals, heating oil and diesel and software totaled approximately \$148,429.

L. Fearon lastly discussed enrollment and stated that the decrease in enrollment is going down. L. Fearon thanked the community for all the support it gives the BOE.

**BOS:** C. Vance presented the proposed FY 2016-2017 town budget to the audience. She discussed notable operating increases in the budget including a 226.59% increase in Elderly Services for the purchase of a senior transportation van and a 57.39% increase in Recreation due to the status of the Rec Director going from part-time to full time.

C. Vance explained that an increase has been appropriated in Contingency has increased because Union negotiations have yet to be completed. C. Vance discussed notable decreases. She stated that due to staffing changes the Finance Department budget has decreased by approximately \$43,000. C. Vance also discussed a significant decrease in the LMAC line which is due to the fact that a consultant to test for invasive species is no longer needed at this time. C. Vance discussed appropriations over \$20,000 in the Capital Budget including road resurfacing, a new playscape at Rec Park, a Front Loader for DPW, beach upgrades, drainage on Hennequin Road, CVFD breathing apparatus, Town Hall phone system replacement, senior transportation van and energy efficient improvements.

C. Vance explained that the current mill rate is 27.13 and the proposed mill rate is 27.44 which equates to an overall increase of .31. She discussed amount to be raised by property taxes and other items for FiPAC consideration.

**2.2 Opportunity for any elector or qualified voter to be heard regarding the recommended appropriations:**

Don Schofield of Route 87 requested that FiPAC restore the \$200,000 that was cut from Open Space. He explained that the state has begun to mandate that towns should be preserving a percentage of every town. It is important to residents and it must be shown that there is money reserved for Open Space. He spoke about purchasing property as soon as possible because interest rates are low right now.

Joan Hill of Cards Mill Road spoke in favor of restoring funding for Open Space. She stated not one member of FiPAC spoke about why Open Space was being cut at the prior Budget Workshop meeting when the cut was made. She explained that forests, fields, clean water, etc is ALL supported by Open Space. Open Space benefits entire town and once developed cannot be restored.

Hank Schwartz of Mallard Point supports Open Space also. He spoke about the POCD Survey and said that it states rural character is the second reason in the survey pertaining to attracting individuals to town. Open Space is very important according to the POCD survey. He does not feel it is taken into account as it should be.

Kathy Tolsdorf of Hunt Road spoke in support of Open Space as well. She said that she has seen a lot of hard work put into Open Space over the years and feels that it is very important. Also, drinking water is going to become an issue down the road and that concerns her. She would like to see endangered/special species and plants in Connecticut be conserved.

Paul Kubala of Lake Road asked about high school tuition and whether or not Columbia pays the same amount as the other towns. L. Fearon stated

that Columbia is not part of Region 19 so it may be slightly more or less depending on what the membership provides. P. Kubala asked if new enrollment students are from families or group homes. L. Fearon stated from families. He inquired about the reasoning behind the 10 year contracts. L. Fearon stated that there are several reasons for agreeing to the terms that the BOE agrees to. Why is the town tied into a contract for such a long time? He feels this hinders the town from being able to search for other schools which may help save money. P. Kubala asked how many playscapes are at Rec field. C. Vance explained that there are two playscapes, one of which is in very bad condition. P. Kubala asked how many responses were received in regards to the Open Space survey. Vera Englert of Sleepy Hollow Road answered approximately 300. P. Kubala feels this is a poor amount of received responses. He would like to know how many acres in town currently consist of Open Space. There was no answer for this at this time.

Ann Dunnack of Lake Road explained development rights for two farms, in addition to Szegda Farm has been designated to Open Space. Since 2006 they have been asking but haven't gotten it. She explained that Open Space provided a plan to FiPAC as requested. She stated that they are in the middle of negotiating for two lands and do not have any money because it was cut. She asked FiPAC to reinstate the funding in the Open Space budget.

Carole Williamson of Gaulin Road stated that years ago she served on the Conservation Commission and Open Space was important then and it is important now. She stressed that the drinking water in Columbia is FROM Columbia. The world and climate is changing and if the town is forced to start bringing water into town, it is going to cost.

Chris Tolsdorf of Hunt Road spoke about the funding system and how it has changed. He explained that the state wants to see that the funding is in budget and available prior to even beginning the purchase process.

Carol Kubala of Lake Road asked why FiPAC has decided to cut it out of the budget. E. Sharpe asked individuals to turn to page 24 of proposed budget document. He stated that originally document called for 13% tax increase. If that is what everyone wants then FiPAC can put it all back in the budget. He stated that FiPAC had to be disciplined and decide and prioritize. The playscape was deemed unsafe had to be replaced. He stated that FiPAC feels that this just may not be the year for Open Space and that Open Space is not the only thing that has been cut. For example, the DPW salt shed was as well, because it also is not 100% necessary this year. He stated ability to purchase Open Space was not eliminated. If need be, a Town Meeting can be held to approve funding for a property if it comes available for purchase.

K. Tolsdorf said that she does not feel the land that is set aside by builders qualifies for Open Space preservation.

Catherine Rowe of Lake Road thanked BOS and FiPAC for supporting the 5310 grant application to purchase a senior transportation van. She spoke to the audience regarding the needs for a van and stated that she hopes that it is not a consideration to remove it from the proposed budget. She spoke to the audience about reasoning behind the needs for the van and hopes that it is not a consideration to remove it from the proposed budget.

Millie Ramsey of Hunt Road stated that for the past four years there has been no mill rate increase and if a small increase is proposed this year, we can afford this. She loves the fact that we have been so fortunate with no increase over the past four years but she also wants Columbia to be a viable town. In order to do this, we need to support senior services, open space and education. She doesn't think it is right to see people put forth so much time and effort for what they believe in just to be shot down by FiPAC.

C. Vance stated that currently, there is a balance of \$264,000 in the Open Space/Land Acquisition fund.

V. Englert asked about the funding for the van. C. Vance explained that we must pay \$20,000 towards the initial purchase of the van, plus operating expenses such as fuel, insurance, vehicle maintenance, drivers, etc.

V. Englert asked what the salary for the FT Rec Director is. C. Vance stated that it is approximately \$42,000.

Christine Sposito of Doubleday Road stated she is the parent of a struggling reader and is concerned with class sizes doubling because she feels that her child will not receive attention needed. She would like to see the primary grade classes split into 3 sections.

The Public Hearing adjourned at 8:35 pm.

**Recess:** A brief recess took place.

### **3. Old Business**

#### **3.1 Modification of the proposed FY '16-'17 budget, as FiPAC deems**

**advisable:** R. Szegda stated that he feels those who spoke in support of Open Space made very good points. He agrees that a community with a lot of Open Space improves the property value, etc. R. Szegda MOVED to amend the proposed budget by putting \$100,000 back into the Open Space Land Acquisition fund. J. Ortiz SECONDED the MOTION. J. Ortiz also feels that a lot of people support it and it is important. T. Shepard doesn't feel that it is necessary to amend the budget at this time seeing as in order for the purchase of a prospective property to be purchased it must go to a Town Meeting in order to approve the funding anyhow. K. Peck concurred with T. Shepard and stated that if need be for the state, there is evidence of intent with the balance that is currently in the Open Space line. K. Peck stated that there is a nominal amount to show good faith therefore does not feel increasing the budget and raising taxes is necessary.

We have a nominal amount to show good faith. D. Toepfer would like to see \$100,000 put back into Open Space. R. Szegda stated that it is easier to contract with prospective sellers as well as work with the state if the money is there. It simplifies the process if a certain amount of money is set aside. E. Sharpe stated that no information has been given to FiPAC that shows \$364,000 is currently needed. He explained that the state is talking about possibly making drastic cuts to town funding and feels that it is important to keep the town's fund balance very healthy. Therefore, he does not feel that funding an additional \$100,000 is in the best interest of the community at this time. C. Vance stated that the town is currently negotiating for one piece of property. She does not believe this property is qualified for state funding and it would be purchased outright by the town. C. Vance pointed out that a Town Meeting is taking place soon to vote on the supplemental appropriation request from the BOE for this year in the amount of \$400,000. MOTION FAILED 3:4:0 with R. Szegda, J. Ortiz and D. Toepfer in favor and E. Sharpe, K. Peck, T. Shepard and J. Viens opposed.

J. Viens MOVED to forward the proposed FY 16-17 budget as is to Town Vote. K. Peck SECONDED and the MOTION CARRIED 7:0.

### **4. Approval of Minutes**

**4.1** FiPAC Special Meeting Minutes of March 23, 2016 and March 30, 2016 and April 7, 2016: J. Viens MOVED to approve the FiPAC meeting minutes of March 23, 2016, March 30, 2016 and April 7, 2016. J. Ortiz SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.

### **5. New Business**

**5.1** Appointment of FY 2015-16 Town Auditor: T. Shepard feels it is good to change auditors from time to time, especially with the changes in administration. Discussion followed. FiPAC will discuss and look into hiring a new auditor next year. K. Peck MOVED to re-appoint King and King for FY 2015-2016. E. Sharpe SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.

**6. Transfers:** T. Shepard MOVED to approve the following transfer:

<b>TRANSFER # / AMOUNT</b>	<b>FROM A/C #, DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>TO A/C #, DESCRIPTION</b>
2016-032 / \$700	10-4134-710, Public Records Professional Improvement	10-4134-130, Public Records Legal Notices
2016-032 / \$150	10-4134-600, Public Records Rep/Maint.	10-4134-130, Public Records Legal Notices

K. Peck SECONDED and the MOTION CARRIED 7:0.

**7. Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held on May 24, 2016 immediately following adjournment of the Town Budget Meeting scheduled to begin at 7 pm.

**8. Adjournment:** T. Shepard MOVED to ADJOURN at 9:07 pm and the MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Kimberly A. Bona