

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
SELECTMEN  
Tuesday, February 6, 2024  
Immediately Following the Town Meeting at 6:45 PM  
Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room & Virtual  
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT**

**Members Present:** Judy Ortiz, Deputy First Selectman; William O'Brien, Selectman; Christopher Lent, Selectman; Lisa Napolitano, Selectman.

**Members Present Remotely:** Steven M. Everett, First Selectman.

**Also Present:** Mark B. Walter, Town Administrator; Beverly Ciurylo, Finance Director; Marc Morgan, Strategic Account Manager- Municipal Services for Casella Waste Systems, Scott Haddad, Columbia Fire Chief, Guy Wagner & David Geissert, Members of Horace Porter School HVAC Building Committee; Ann Dunnack.

**Also Present Remotely:** Beth Lunt, DPW Director; Brad Evanson, TextMyGov Representative; Jerry James, Emergency Management Director; Barbara Wilson, Horace Porter School Superintendent.

**CALL TO ORDER:** J. Ortiz called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

1. **RULES OF CONDUCT FOR HYBRID VIRTUAL MEETING:** J. Ortiz read the rules of conduct for a hybrid virtual meeting.
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited previously in the Town Meeting..
3. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the AGENDA as Presented. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.
4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
  - 4.1 **BOS Regular Meeting Minutes for January 16, 2024.** J. Ortiz MOVED TO APPROVE the Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes for January 16, 2024. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.
5. **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:** None.
6. **OLD BUSINESS:** None.
7. **NEW BUSINESS:**
  - 7.1 **TextMyGov Presentation and Approval to use ARPA Funds.** M. Walter explained that TextMyGov is smart texting technology that allows citizens to ask questions and get immediate responses, find links to information on the town's website, address problems, report any issues and upload photos. The technology allows the town to push notifications to citizens that are signed up regarding events, road closures, transfer station hours, etc.

Ann Dunnack asked if a resident texted a question would it go out to the entire group that signed up for TextMyGov. M. Walter said no that would not happen.

J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the purchase of TextMyGov, Smart Text Technology using ARPA money for \$6,750. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

**7.2 Approval to use ARPA Funds for HVAC in Yeomans Hall and Land Use Department.** M. Walter said that there will be three units installed. Two units would be for Yeomans Hall and the other unit would be replacing the old unit in the Building Department. J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the use of ARPA funding for the installation of HVAC systems in Yeomans Hall and Land Use Department for \$16,500. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

**7.3 Approval to create fund for the Columbia Art Council.** M. Walter said last year the Board of Selectmen authorized the creation of an Art Council. A special fund will be set up specifically for the Art Council. A resident donated \$500.00 to kick off the account. J. Ortiz MOVED to Create a Fund for the Columbia Art Council. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

**7.4 Approval of the price quote for Transfer Station services.** Marc Morgan, Strategic Account Manager- Municipal Services for Casella Waste Systems explained the proposed contract pricing. He said the cost of recycling is attached to a market index (pulp and paper index). There is value per ton of recycling material and Casella deducts the value of that ton from the process. That value is updated monthly, and that number adjusts constantly. M. Morgan said the proposed contract with Columbia would be a fixed rate of 3% for three years.

J. Ortiz asked if the Town of Columbia is doing a good job with recycling. M. Morgan said that Casella will be working with the community on improving the information on recycling. M. Morgan said he has worked with 82 communities, and Columbia does a great job and is managing it very well. C. Lent asked about the reduction in recycling with aluminum cans due to doubling of the cost? M. Morgan said Casella does not support bottle bill legislation. The closest redemption center is in Woodstock.

M. Walter explained the proposal terms: Pricing provided is for year 1 beginning July 1, 2024. All subsequent years of the contract will be subject to annual increases as outlined below:

All tipping fees will be increased on July 1 of each year of the Term by a percentage equal to the greater of (a) 5.0% or (b) Consumer Price Index for garbage and trash collection.

J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the multi-year proposal for the Transfer Station Services. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

## **8. COLUMBIA LAKE / DAM / BEACH:**

**8.1 Application to conduct repairs on stone seawall for Mrs. Frances Lynch, 46 Erdoni Road, Columbia, CT.** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the Application to conduct repairs on the stone seawall for Frances Lynch at 46 Erdoni Rd upon the

recommendation set forth by LMAC. MOTION CARRIED 4.0.1 with S. Everett Abstaining.

8.2 **Application to place a veneer and cap on their existing concrete lake wall for Mrs. and Mr. Eric and Tracy Sodergren, 166 Route 87, Columbia, CT.** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the Application to place a veneer and cap on the existing concrete lake wall for Eric & Tracy Sodergren at 166 Route 87 upon the recommendation set forth by LMAC. MOTION CARRIED 4.0.1 with S. Everett Abstaining.

8.3 **Application to repair dock and rock removal for Chris Ramm Lower Woodland Terrace, Columbia, CT.** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the Application to repair a dock and rock removal for Chris Ramm, Lower Woodland Terrace upon the recommendation set forth by LMAC. MOTION CARRIED 4.0.1 with S. Everett Abstaining.

## 9. APPOINTMENTS / RESIGNATIONS:

9.1 **Brian Smith, promotion to full-time Highway Maintainer.** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE Promoting Brian Smith to a full-time Highway Maintainer. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

9.2 **Appointment of Andrew Walter as Assistant Animal Control Officer.** J. Ortiz MOVED to Appoint Andrew Walter as Assistant Animal Control Officer. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

## 10. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

10.1 **2024/2025 Budget Highlights.** M. Walter said the Board of Selectmen operating costs increase \$97,283 or 1.93%. This does not take into consideration any salary modifications. We have not received any information from the state on revenue.

M. Walter reviewed some highlights in operating costs, grants & subsidies:

- **Information Technology:** There are some projects that will be completed this year, so this will bring the budget down a little bit. There will be an IT representative that will be available at the town once a week. Previously it was every other week.
- **Registrar of Voters:** Increase of \$4,400 because of costs associated with the presidential election and early voting.
- **Assessor's Office:** Increase of \$7,700. GIS was done for many years by CRCOG at no costs. We now have to pay for GIS. Additional new set of manuals have to be purchased.
- **Beckish Senior Center:** Decrease of \$5,400. The Senior Center car lease was paid off. Fuel and electrical usage is down.
- **Fire Department:** Increase of \$4,850 or 1.58%.
- **Fire Marshal:** Increase of \$5,400 consisting of \$5,000 due to equipment.
- **Department of Public Works:** Total increase of \$23,000. An increase of \$12,000 for repairs and maintenance and an increase of \$8,600 for Contracted Services.
- **Waste Disposal Services:** Increase of \$48,000 mainly due to the increase in Contracted Services.
- **Library Services:** Increase of \$11,000. That will be coming down a little bit once the health care cost is decreased from 8% to 5%.
- **Lake Management Advisory Commission:** Increase of \$12,600 due to an increase in testing.

- **Grants and Subsidies:** Most grants remained the same. Salmon River was up by \$100.00 for more watershed testing. WRTD held with no increase. TVCAA had a small increase of \$43, AHM is up by \$2,182 or 4.19%. Increase of \$3,850 or 1.47% due to an increase in physicals. S. Everett asked for a cost analysis, usage stats, and how many clients WRTD is serving in Columbia.

M. Walter reviewed Capital.

- **Culvert Replacement/Repair:** Future projects for culverts and road repair will need to be prioritized because of the recent damage due to flooding. Doubleday Rd. is one example of road damage that will need to be prioritized because the old drainage pipes have rusted out and the road has started to collapse. The FY 23/24 Capital increase budget appropriation was \$1,050,000. For FY 24/25 the proposed budget appropriation is \$1,157,000. M. Walter explained that the real issue the town is looking at is when you start looking it all these culverts we have to repair those numbers add up to a staggering amount. M. Walter said that we are working off a list of six culverts, of which two have just been authorized for engineering design. The Department of Public Works has replaced the culvert on Erdoni Rd.

B. Lunt explained that metal piping has a lifespan of 50 years, and the corrugated piping is rusting. Due to development on Pine St. and Thompson Hill Rd. the water table has changed the watersheds, and the capacity of those pipes are no longer sufficient, so the road has overtopped multiple times. Both those culverts have been rebuilt twice and they've taken out a good quarter of the road and embankment.

C. Lent asked assuming we get the grant for the HVAC project at the school, is there the potential to package the road/culvert projects with the HVAC project for bonding. M. Walter said yes, by getting the worst roads/culverts engineered we can get bids on the repairs and get authorization for bonding.

B. Lunt said that Doubleday Road is a priority and in this budget we already have \$100,000 for engineering.

Scott Haddad, Columbia Volunteer Fire Chief said the Fire Department has a 1% increase in Operating costs. The Capital will be going down because of the grant for the forestry truck and reduction of equipment..

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) would like to have the Department of Public Works and the Beckish Senior Center to present their budgets at the next BOS meeting on February 20, 2024.

- 10.2 **2023 Grand List Overview.** Motor vehicle lost 6% value mostly due to values went down after the pandemic. Grand List is down .2%. Personal property value went up xxx.
- 10.3 **Revised Hunt Road Bridge Schedule.** The construction schedule for the Hunt Road Bridge project has been pushed out until 4/17/24 due to weather.
- 10.4 **Sustainability CT Kick Off Meeting February 29th at 6:00 PM.** The kick-off meeting for Sustainable CT will be on February 29th at 6:00 PM in the conference room at Town Hall. We are looking to restart our Sustainable CT Initiative and are looking for volunteers. Ace Riker, Sustainable CT Equity Coach will be available

to speak to us regarding the Optimize for Equity portion of the Sustainable CT initiative.

**11. CORRESPONDENCE:**

**11.1 The Willimantic Chronicle**

- **Quality of life key for Columbia.**

**11.2 CT State Trooper Monthly Report for January 2024.**

**11.3 Letter from Board of Education Official Announcement of Barbara Wilson as the Superintendent of the Columbia Public Schools.**

**12. BUDGET:**

**12.1 Transfers:** None.

**12.2 Refunds:** None.

**13. APPROVE PAYMENT OF BILLS:** J. Ortiz MOVED to APPROVE the PAYMENT of BILLS Totaling \$101,743.64, consisting of 2023/2024 Emergency, 2023-2024 Regular, Credit Card & Paychex. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.

**14. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:** None.

**15. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:** J. Ortiz asked about the boathouse. M. Walter we are still waiting for final approval from the insurance company. We have a builder ready to go.

**16. EXECUTIVE SESSION: Real estate per State Statutes Section 1-200(6)(D); Pending Litigation per State Statutes Section 1-200(6)(B); Personnel per State Statutes Section 1-200(6)(A).** None.

**17. ADJOURNMENT:** J. Ortiz MOVED to ADJOURN at 8:25 pm. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer C. LaVoie