

**TOWN OF COLUMBIA  
FINANCIAL PLANNING AND ALLOCATION COMMISSION (FiPAC)  
SPECIAL MEETING with BUDGET WORKSHOP  
MINUTES**

**Wednesday, March 27, 2024  
Town Hall Conference Room and Zoom Virtual Meeting  
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT. 06237**

**Members Present:** Jeff Viens, Chairman; Judi Jordan, Vice Chairman; Stephen Cooke, Art Rowbotham, James Chakulski (arrived at 7:28 pm), Richard Szegda, Kelly Peck (arrived at 7:09 pm.)

**Also Present:** Mark Walter, Town Administrator; Beverly Ciurylo, Finance Director; Barbara Wilson, Superintendent; Scott Leslie, Interim Superintendent; Christine Sposito, BOE Vice Chairman; Paul Zator, BOE; Sue Desrosiers, President Saxton B. Little Library Board; Julie Styles, Library Director; Stephania Dawiczuk, BOE; Leah Osborn, BOE.

1. **RULES OF CONDUCT FOR HYBRID VIRTUAL MEETING:** M. Walter read the rules of conduct for a hybrid virtual meeting.
2. **CALL TO ORDER:** J. Viens called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
4. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
  - 4.1 **FiPAC Regular Meeting Minutes for March 20, 2024.** A. Rowbotham MOVED to APPROVE the FiPAC Regular Meeting Minutes for March 20, 2024 with the correction to the title of Jeff Viens to Chairman, and Judi Jordan as Vice Chairman. J. Jordan SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 5.0.
5. **BUDGET WORKSHOP WITH FiPAC DISCUSSION:** J. Viens opened up the budget workshop and asked the board to start the discussion with any ideas or questions. R. Szegda asked what is the estimated undesignated fund balance. B. Ciurylo said the current estimated fund balance if it was closed today, and everything was spent out of the fund balance including the \$250,000 Capital project for engineering services for the culvert project, is estimated at 3 million She said based on the current budget requirements and we don't make any changes to the budget it is going to be at 14.85%.

R. Szegda said in 2007 we used the fund balance to pay for the work on the school roof and the fund balance went down to 7%. He said that when the time comes the board could consider letting the fund balance get down to 7%, but it's too early to make that decision right now.

J. Viens asked when we will know about the grant for the Horace Porter School HVAC project. M. Walter said we will not know about the grant until April. J. Viens asked R. Szegda if he is suggesting that we leave the fund balance the way it is and not use any of it for the HVAC project at the school. R. Szegda said that he

---

is not suggesting that, but that the board be prepared to use much of the fund balance either to cover the HVAC expenses or cover the increase in the budget. He said that we have a history of getting as low as 7% and right now we are at 18%.

S. Cooke agreed that without the needed information on the HVAC grant until the end of April than there is virtually nothing we can do to budget for that. He said that we will have to budget for the bonding fees. He said that he did not think the board should drastically reduce the fund balance but reducing it by a little would be fine.

Discussion involved on how far we can push the date for the public hearing. B. Ciurylo said that the Town Meeting has to be held between the second Tuesday in May and the first Tuesday in June.

A. Rowbotham asked about the bonding process, and do we have to wait to start the bonding process until we find out about the HVAC project. M. Walter said we put out an RFQ for a Municipal Advisor that will handle the bonding process. B. Ciurylo said when you submit for a bond you have to have set projects and the requested amounts. M. Walter said the HVAC project has been authorized, but we haven't defined the culvert projects yet and we are in the process of creating a subcommittee that will help prioritize the projects and work with the towns engineering consultant. M. Walter said the bonding process takes almost a year.

R. Szegda asked if we need to use town money and then get reimbursed. M. Walter said we would use short-term financing until we get the bond set. R. Szegda asked if we have to allocate town money. M. Walter said no. B. Ciurylo said there would be fees for the Bond Counsel, advertising fees and applications fees. She said it going out to bond could cost anywhere from \$75,000 to \$100,000. She said that fee was quoted over a year ago.

A. Rowbotham said his opinion is he did not think the board would be able to render a decision today because we don't know if we are going to ask the school and the town to cut their budgets and how deep they need to cut their budgets until we know what about the bonding. J. Viens said we could ask for preliminary cuts. Discussion ensued about cuts and does the board ask for a specific dollar amount cuts from the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Board of Education (BOE) and how that would affect the Mill rate.

K. Peck said a cut of 1 Mill from the designated fund and 1 Mill split between BOS and BOE. She said that would be approximately \$380,000 from BOE and \$145,000 from BOS and that would bring the Mill rate down to 1.5%.

J. Viens asked do we feel comfortable asking the 1.5% this year and another 1.5% mill increase next year.

S. Cooke asked about the distribution of the cuts from the BOS and BOE. He said the \$145,000 is the entire increase for the BOS and the \$380,000 is half of the BOE's increase. He asked if it made sense to change those numbers and he would increase the cuts on the BOE and decrease the cuts on the BOS. Discussion ensued.

---

S. Cooke asked what the tuition rate is for both schools. B. Wilson said she would get that number.

K. Peck MOVED to reduce the Board of Selectmen's proposed 24/25 budget by \$75,000, to reduce the Board of Education's proposed 24/25 budget by \$450,000 and to take the equivalent of one Mill rate which is \$582,000 rounded from the undesignated fund balance to reduce the impact of the proposed Mill rate increase to 1.5%. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 6.0 with J. Chakulski Abstaining.

J. Viens MOVED to Set the Next Budget Workshop Meeting on April 3, 2024 at 7:00 pm. K. Peck SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

**6. DISCUSSION ON 24/25 BUDGET PROCESS SCHEDULE**

**7. NEXT MEETING:** All meetings are in the Town Hall Conference Room & Virtual at 7:00 pm, unless noted below otherwise:

- 7.1 April 3 – FiPAC Special Meeting with Budget Workshop (tentative).
- 7.2 April 24 – Public Hearing on the Proposed FY 2024-2025 with Public Input and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.
- 7.3 May 14 – Annual Town Meeting with Budget Vote and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.

**8. ADJOURNMENT:** A. Rowbotham MOVED to ADJOURN at 7:41 PM. J. Chakulski SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted Jennifer C. LaVoie

---