

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

**Wednesday, April 3, 2024 at 7:00 pm
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, Kelley Peck.

Members Absent: Richard Szegda.

Also Present: Mark Walter, Town Administrator; Beverly Ciurylo, Finance Director; Barbara Wilson, Superintendent; Christine Sposito, BOE Vice Chairman; Paul Zator, BOE; Leah Osborn, BOE; Lauren Haberman, BOE; Judy Ortiz, BOS Deputy First Selectman, Steven Everett, First Selectman; Scott Leslie, Interim Superintendent.

1. **RULES OF CONDUCT FOR HYBRID VIRTUAL MEETING:** J. Viens 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 Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes for March 27, 2024.** K. Peck MOVED to APPROVE the FiPAC Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes for March 27, 2024 as presented. J. Jordan SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 6.0.
5. **BUDGET WORKSHOP WITH FiPAC DISCUSSION**

M. Walter said the Board of Selectmen looked at the Operating budget for the requested reduction from FiPAC of \$75,000 but felt that it would be too detrimental to the town and focused on the Capital side of the budget instead. The cuts to the Capital budget included the following:

 - \$47,857 – Close out Hennequin Drainage Project original work needed is complete (cross drains replaced). Future work will be evaluated.
 - \$15,000 – Latham Hill Bridge evaluation to be scheduled in future with Lebanon. It was reserved for an analysis on the bridge. The quality of the bridge is fair and will be coordinated with the Town of Lebanon.
 - \$12,143 – Balance from Tree Removal Budget by reducing next year’s request of \$75,000.

A. Rowbotham MOVED to Accept the \$75,000 Board of Selectmen reduction to the 24/25 proposed budget as presented. J. Jordan SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 6.0.

J. Viens asked B. Wilson to discuss the requested budget cut of \$450,000 in the Board of Education (BOE) budget. B. Wilson said BOE discussed at length and went through every line item in the budget to get the \$450,000 in reductions that would involve at least five position. She said the presented BOE budget had included taking out extra field trips, increases in furniture and musical instruments. She said that there were no other line items that the BOE could reduce and the BOE would like to stand and propose again that FiPAC accept the BOE's proposed budget presented.

J. Jordan asked about the number of personnel associated with the special education budget. B. Wilson said there are five special education teachers that oversee ages 3 through 22, 1 ½ speech pathologist, an occupational therapist three days a week, a physical therapist, 2 days per week, BCBA three days a week, and all the paraprofessionals are under special education. J. Jordan asked how many students are included in special education. B. Wilson said including high school there are 110, of which 80 are in the pre-k through grade 8. B. Wilson said, some of those numbers include services to the high school.

J. Jordan asked what are the financial benefits to the town for services in-house compared to outplacement and about State reimbursement. B. Wilson said that we only get a fraction of reimbursement from the State for outplacement. Including transportation, it costs about \$125,000. There is a minimum threshold that has to be reached of \$82,000 before reimbursement from the state. K. Peck asked do we get reimbursed for the special education that is done in-house. B. Wilson said it depends on if the threshold is met and then a portion of the remaining amount is reimbursed.

Discussion ensued about the cost of eliminating positions and the actual dollar to dollar savings.

S. Cooke asked about the high school population. B. Wilson said there was a decrease in students but an increase in tuition. S. Cooke said there was an 11% increase from last year to this year. Discussion ensued regarding what high schools students attend.

S. Cooke said on average we spend 7.5 % per student costs more than the State. He said per year the State spends \$25,135 and our costs are about \$26,700 per student per year. B. Wilson said she will get back to FiPAC on this.

S. Cooke asked about students ratings in reading, math and science. B. Wilson said the BOE is working to improve the test scores and part of the curriculum adopted addresses not only reading and writing but dives deeply into science.

J. Viens said he was surprised that the BOE did not come back with any cuts and would like to hold BOE on what FiPAC originally asked them to cut. He felt a 2 Mill increase is going to be excessive.

J. Vien MOVED to return the 24/25 proposed budget to the Board of Education for further review to reduce the proposed budget by the \$450,000 cut that FiPAC requested. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 5.1.0 with J. Chakulski OPPOSED.

J. Jordan asked B. Ciurylo about the funding allocated to cover tuition costs and the “gentlemen’s” agreement regarding the tuition line with the BOE that if there are any funds left that the BOE gives those funds back to the town. B. Ciurylo explained that through the school year, the tuition costs change due to new students, students moving, changes in services and so on. She said that both the Town Attorney and the BOE Attorney were consulted regarding this agreement. Both attorneys were in agreement that this agreement could not be enforced. She did note that with the year end BOE transfers, any surplus funds are normally reflected in this line.

Discussion ensued about the collection rate and possibly changing it to 98.5%.

K. Peck MOVED to Send the 24/25 proposed Board of Selectmen and Board of Education Budgets to the Public Hearing on April 24, 2024 as presented inclusive of the FiPAC requested reduction of \$450,000 from the Board of Education budget. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 5.1.0 with J. Chakulski OPPOSED.

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 24 – Public Hearing on the Proposed FY 2024-2025 with Public Input and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.

7.2 May 14 – Annual Town Meeting with Budget Vote and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.

8. ADJOURNMENT : J. Jordan MOVED to ADJOURN at 7:39 pm. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer C. LaVoie
