

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

**Wednesday, April 17, 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, Richard Szegda.

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

Also Present Remotely: Kara Levenduski, Horace Porter School Principal.

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.

J. Viens MOVED to Adjust the Agenda to Move Audience of Citizens to after the Approval of the Minutes. K. Peck SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

4. **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:** C. Sposito asked if there was an opportunity for the BOE members to speak later in the meeting.

K. Peck MOVED to MOVE the Audience of Citizens to after the discussion of the budget. J. Chakulski SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

5.1 **FiPAC Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes for April 3, 2024.**

J. Jordan MOVED to APPROVE the FiPAC Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes for April 3, 2024. K. Peck SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

6. **NEW BUSINESS:**

6.1 **Appoint King, King & Associates as the Town Auditors for the 2023-2024 Town Audit.** K. Peck MOVED to Appoint King, King & Associates as the Town Auditors for the 2023-2024 Town Audit. J. Jordan SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

7. DISCUSSION ON FY 24/25 BUDGET WORKSHOP and Possible Motions.

B. Wilson said at the Special Board of Education meeting on April 16th the BOE voted to reduce their budget by \$299,929. The Town Appropriation budget increase from last year (originally \$694,000 or a 5.1% increase) is now an increase of \$395,004 or 2.90% increase.

R. Szegda asked what the specific cuts were from the BOE budget. B. Wilson said that without getting into too much detail, the majority of the cuts come from salary and benefits. R. Szegda asked what positions were cut. B. Wilson said she is not comfortable with specifying the position because it involves people, and she needs to inform the staff first. She said that about 3.5 positions are involved. Discussion ensued regarding staffing and class sizes.

Stephania Dawiczuk, 25 Samuel Hill Rd. said as a parent and a citizen she feels that any cuts would affect all student age groups. She said COVID impacted the students and effected Math and English skills. She said she obtained mill rates from surrounding towns from 2021-2024. She said a lot of towns are higher and some are lower.

Discussion ensued about mill rates and how mill rates are determined.

B. Wilson said the BOE wants to work with FiPAC and hopes that next year, the BOE is involved much earlier in the process.

Leah Osborne, 48 Johnson Rd. is concerned that going forward there will be more kids coming into the school system and we are cutting back. She asks that we look ahead in planning and investing in the school every year.

K. Peck said she also would like to look forward. She said what she struggles with is the opaqueness in how the BOE reach budget conclusions. She said it might be worth investing a small amount in an expert who can come in and look at the budget to assess if somewhere there might be excess spending that the BOE could readjust or even economize more.

C. Sposito asked is it feasible throughout the year to collaborate meetings between the BOE and FiPAC.

J. Viens said that some FiPAC members met with Barbara recently and the intention is to grow that with different members of FiPAC meeting with B. Wilson. M. Walter said Fiscal Policy meets each month and this is an opportunity to discuss and collaborate with the BOE, BOS & FiPAC.

S. Everett said that he has to take into consideration everyone when making decisions on the budget including the elderly, of which many are on a fixed income, and they can't afford a large tax increase. S. Everett discussed that making cuts is painful and he thanked the BOE for the work that they do. He discussed looking forward to several large projects including the purification and HVAC system at the Horace Porter School, infrastructure projects to roads, culverts and bridges, and the possibility of a paid fire department.

Ashley Park, 307 Route 87 said class size is only one aspect having an impact on our children's education. Class sizes are growing and the needs of the students along with the COVID gap impact the education of our children. This is not going to change overnight.

K. Peck MOVED to Accept the Board of Education budget cut and Accept the proposed budget as presented to be moved to the Public Hearing. R. Szegda SECONDED the Budget. MOTION CARRIED 6.0.1 with J. Chakulski OPPOSED.

8. UPCOMING MEETINGS:

- 8.1 April 24, 2025 – Public Hearing on the Proposed FY 2024-2025 with Public Input and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.
- 8.2 May 14, 2024 – Annual Town Meeting with Budget Vote and FiPAC Special Meeting to follow, Yeomans Hall at 7:00 pm.

9. ADJOURNMENT: R. Szegda MOVED to ADJOURN at 7.44 PM. S. Cooke SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully Submitted by Jennifer C. LaVoie
