

**TOWN OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
FINANCIAL PLANNING AND ALLOCATION COMMISSION
Wednesday, April 24, 2024 – 7:00 PM
Yeoman’s Hall
(This is an in-person only meeting)
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT. 06237**

Members Present: Jeff Viens, Chairman; Judi Jordan, Vice Chairman; Kelley Peck, Richard Szegda, Stephen Cooke, Art Rowbotham, James Chakulski.

Also Present: Mark Walter, Town Administrator; Beverly Ciurylo, Finance Director; Barbara Wilson Superintendent; Scott Leslie, Assistant Superintendent; Steven M. Everett, First Selectman; Lisa Napolitano, Selectman; William O’Brien, Selectman; Judy Ortiz, Selectman; Michael Maziarz, BOE Chairman; Christine Sposito, BOE Vice Chairman; BOE members: Lauren Haberman, Leah Osborn, Rachel Riendeau, Stephania Dawiczuk, & Paul Zator; Kara Levenduski, Principal, and numerous other citizens.

CALL TO ORDER: J. Viens called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 BUDGET:

2.1 Presentations of the proposed budget by representatives of the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen.

B. Wilson, Horace Porter School Superintendent thanked the Board of Education (BOE) and the Columbia Administrative Team for their work on the budget process. B. Wilson presented the BOE budget.

B. Wilson read the message from the Columbia Board of Education and Superintendent:

As stewards of our educational mission, we are committed to providing an exceptional learning experience for every student within our district. To achieve this, we must maintain a keen focus on fiscal responsibility, ensuring the efficient and effective use of our budgetary resources. To this end, key principles that guide our fiscal approach include:

- Transparency and Accountability
- Strategic Planning
- Efficiency and Innovation
- Community Involvement

As we embark on this journey of fiscal responsibility, we are confident that our collective efforts will ensure the sustained success of our educational system. Your support and engagement in this process are vital, and we encourage your participation in discussions to shape the future of our schools.

Thank you for your continued trust in our commitment to providing the best possible education for our students.

The Town Appropriation for proposed FY 24-25 is \$14,009,766. The FY-23-24 budgeted town appropriation was \$13,614,762. The increase is \$395,004 or 2.90%. She said to offset the fixed rate costs, some reductions were made. \$44,000 in additional money in grants helped to offset the budget.

Grants Received:

Description	24-25 Proposed	23-24 Budgeted	\$ Change	% Change
Title grants	\$ 58,734	\$ 40,502	\$ 18,232	45.0
IDEA grants	141,500	123,100	18,400	14.95
REAP	42,000	36,998	5,002	13.52
ARPA grants	62,000	59,394	2,606	4.4
Other	2,153	2,303	250	-6.5
Totals	\$306,387	\$262,297	\$ 44,090	16.8

2024-25 Board of Education Proposed Budget Summary:

Series	Description	24-25 Proposed	23-24 Budgeted	\$ Change	% Change
1000	Salaries	\$6,566,164	\$6,677,491	– \$111,327	–1.67%
2000	Benefits	1,856,580	1,799,321	57,259	3.18%
3000	Prof. Services	649,317	557,320	91,997	16.51%
4000	Prop. Services	128,309	129,762	–1,453	–1.11%
5000	Purch. Services	4,121,541	3,716,462	405,079	10.90%
6000	Supplies	550,692	581,104	–30,412	– 5.23%
7000	Property/Equip.	121,448	137,302	– 15,854	–11.55%
8000	Other	15,715	16,000	–285	–1.78%

B. Wilson said that there was a decrease in the Salaries line of \$111,327, or 1.67% change. She reviewed the summary of changes in the salaries. **Certified Staff:** All certified staff salary contracts were negotiated for the next three years. Goals of the contracts were to retain qualified staff and be comparable to other area and DRG C districts.

Non -Certified Staff: The non-certified contract is currently being negotiated for the next three years. This contract covers paraeducators, BTs, RBTs, administrative assistants, and facilities technicians. Retaining qualified, highly-skilled staff is a goal.

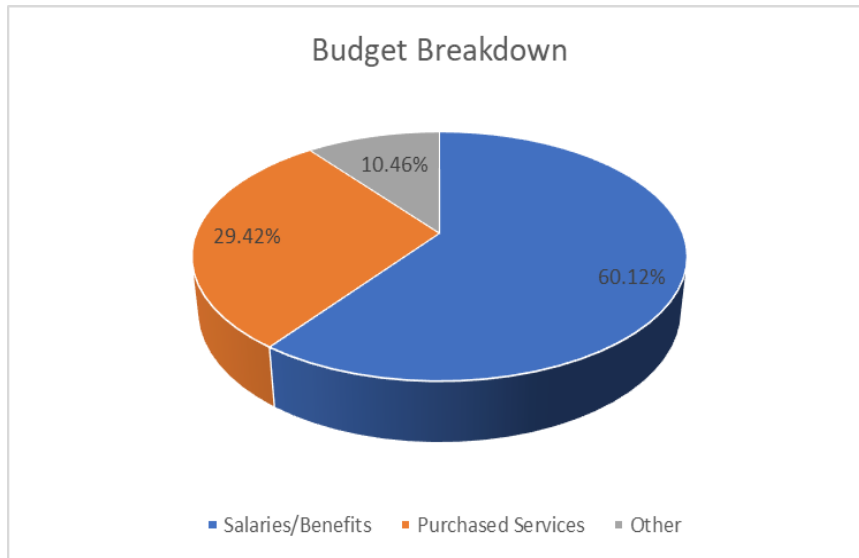
Summary of Changes for benefits showed an increase of almost \$57,259. This included normal increases in medical insurance and district contribution to unemployment rose.

She reviewed the summary of changes for Professional Services. There was an increase of \$91,997. Increase in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and BCBA contracts.

There was a decrease of \$1,453 in property services due to slight changes in contracts for garbage removal, snow plowing, repairs/maintenance.

Purchased Services has an increase of \$405,079. These are fixed costs. There were increases in tuition lines and student transportation lines.

B. Wilson provided a graphic to show the budget breakdown.



She said that originally the budget came in at a much higher percentage increase. The BOE and Administration worked tirelessly to reduce this to the current 5.1% increase. The following areas were reduced or eliminated to achieve the current budget:

- Events (field trips, assemblies)
- Software
- Website Maintenance
- Equipment
- Furniture
- Curriculum Hours
- Conferences
- Miscellaneous (including Supplies)

She said working with FiPAC, the BOE made an additional \$299,929 reduction from their budget at their April 1, 2024, BOE meeting. Reductions were made in the following areas:

Staffing - approximately three positions will be eliminated with the focus on maintaining small classroom sizes.

Building substitute position - the district currently employs three building substitute teachers to fill in for teacher absences. The district will eliminate one of these positions and will look to maintain two building substitute positions.

Morning care - the District will look to partner with Columbia Parks & Recreation or an outside agency to offer morning care for families for a fee.

Stipend positions - many stipend positions will not be filled.

2024-25 Board of Education Capital Budget

New Capital Project	Amount Budgeted
Kitchen Appliances	\$17,500
Drainage Projects	10,000
Fencing	9,000
Capital Projects Removed	-11,990
Total	\$24,510

Enrollment - Grades PreK - 12

* Change from September 2020 to current April 2024 enrollment

** Outplacements, magnets

Level	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	% Change*
HWP	401	439	460	473	+18%
High School	BHS - 47 EOS - 153 Total - 200	BHS - 31 EOS - 153 Total - 184	BHS - 22 EOS - 141 Total - 163	BHS - 18 EOS - 133 Total - 151	-25%
Other**	51	56	52	56	+10%

Proposed Sections Based on Current Enrollment

Grade	Enrollment	Sections	Avg. Class Size	Grade	Enrollment	Sections	Avg. Class Size
PreK	42	3 (2 teachers)	14	4th	39	3	13
K	36*	3	12	5th	55	3	18-19
1st	35	3	11-12	6th	51	3	17
2nd	55	4	13-14	7th	57	3	19
3rd	40	3	13-14	8th	54	3	18

HWP Current and Proposed Staffing: Certified Staff for 2023-24 Budget is 51.7, the 2024-25 Budget 48.7-49.2. for Non-Certified Staff for 2023-24 Budget 28, the 2024-25 Budget 28.

M. Walter, Town Administrator thanked the Board of Selectmen, FiPAC, Beverly Ciurylo, Finance Director, and Jennifer LaVoie, Executive Administrative Assistant for all the hard work they have put into the budget. M. Walter presented the Board of Selectmen (BOS) proposed FY 24-25.

FY 24-25 Proposed Revenues: Municipal and Intergovernmental				
Description	2023-2024 Budget	2024-2025 Proposed Budget	\$ Variance b/t FY 24/25 proposed & FY 23/24 budgeted	% Variance b/t FY 24/25 proposed & FY 23/24 budgeted
Taxes - Other Than Current Year Property Taxes	\$ 132,500	\$ 147,500	\$ 15,000	11.32%
Licenses and Permits	\$ 159,200	\$ 175,200	\$ 16,000	10.05%
Intergovernmental	\$ 2,577,759	\$ 2,674,877	\$ 97,118	3.77%
Charges for Services	\$ 24,350	\$ 22,600	\$ (1,750)	-7.19%
Interest on Investments	\$ 35,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 40,000	114.29%
Town Fees	\$ 188,000	\$ 225,250	\$ 37,250	19.81%
Miscellaneous	\$ 13,500	\$ 13,500	\$ -	0.00%
Transfer In from Recreation	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -	0.00%
Total	\$ 3,140,309	\$ 3,343,927	\$ 203,618	6.48%
Notable changes in Intergovernmental Revenues:				
Education Equalization (ECS) Grant	\$ 2,240,359	\$ 2,316,189	\$ 75,830	3.38%
Special Education Grant (Excess Cost)	\$ 112,000	\$ 75,000	\$ (37,000)	-33.04%
LoCIP Reimbursement	\$ 155,509	\$ 213,269	\$ 57,760	37.14%
Total	\$ 2,507,868	\$ 2,604,458	\$ 96,590	3.85%

Notes on the FY 24/25 Intergovernmental Revenue Changes:

1. LoCIP is an annual entitlement grant. For FY 24-25, the Town is opting to hold off submitting in 2023-2024 and will add to the current entitlement. The 24/25 budget includes the new anticipated LoCIP entitlement plus the balance carried forward.

Key Operating Budget Variables Pending:

BOS/BOE Health Insurance Benefits: The Town and the BOE are completing their second year in the State of Connecticut Partnership Plan for Health Insurance. The projected increase for premium rates was budgeted at 2.0% in the proposed budget.

Town Staff Changes: An additional DPW Highway Maintainer is included in the proposed budget. This cost is partially offset by the removing of the two DPW seasonal positions.

Fuel Costs: The Town and BOE based its proposed budget on the current locked in pricing for oil, diesel and gasoline which expires October 31, 2024. This past

week, the Town locked in a new contract as of November 1, 2024 at slightly better pricing.

FY 24/25 BOS Notable Increases & Decreases in Operating Budget. TOTAL

FY 24/25 BOS Notable Increases & Decreases in Operating Budget 03/20/24			
Description	Increases	Decreases	Notes
Salaries	\$ 216,832		Town employees received a cost-of-living increase plus a few staff salaries were given salary adjustments as well as changes due to turnover and an increase on one staff member. Also, early voting staffing.
Other Town employee benefits	\$ 27,850		Payroll taxes, 457 plan match and the 401a pension contributions were increased based on increased salaries.
Group Insurance		\$ 23,048	Changes in enrollment due to changes in staffing.
Sr Center Transportation Contracted Services		\$ 7,179	Paid off lease on Med Car.
Fire Fighting and Emergency Services	\$ 3,850		CVFD increase of town grant funds for 24/25.
Public Works Contracted Services and Repairs & Maintenance	\$ 21,000		Additional funds to cover DPW contracted services for DPW projects as well as maintenance of vehicles & equipment.
Waste Management	\$ 42,575		Increase in Casella Waste contracted fees.
Facilities Maintenance	\$ 11,250		Increase in Facilities Professional/Tech line and Contracted Services.
Library Services		\$ 2,499	Decrease in Library's town grant request for 24/25.
Total Notables	\$ 323,357	\$ 32,726	

TOTAL BOS BUDGET OVERALL INCREASE: \$324,316 or 6.45%
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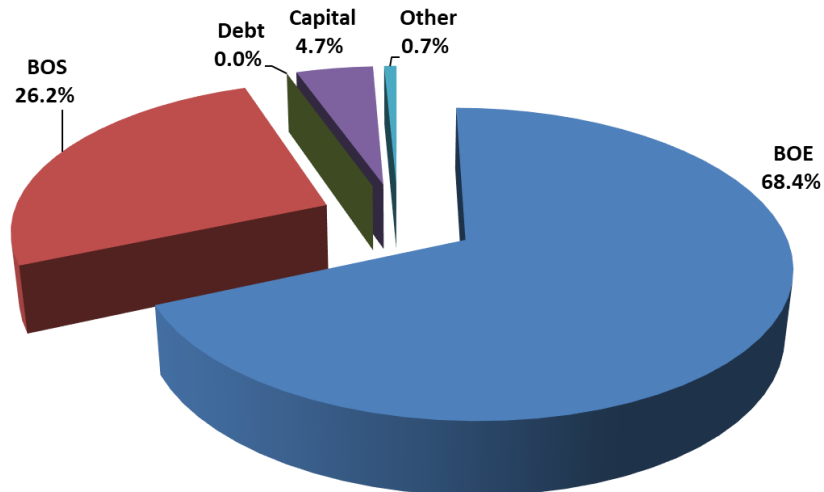
FY 24/25 BOS Notable New and Proposed Capital.

FY 24/25 BOS Notable New and Proposed Capital Appropriations				04/24/24
Capital Project	Adopted 23/24 Budget Appropriation	Proposed 24/25 Budget	Net Change in Budget for 24/25	Notes
Road Resurfacing	\$ 434,500	\$ 249,750	\$ (184,750)	Road paving and maintenance. Partially funded with Town Aid Road: \$203,820. Also, increase due to new chip seal being used.
Hennequin Road Drainage	\$ -	\$ (47,857)	\$ (47,857)	Closed out project.
Box Culvert Replacement Repair	\$ 200,000	\$ 100,000	\$ (100,000)	Continue to funding engineering fees for culvert repairs/replacement.
Revaluation	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -	Continue appropriating funds for next Revaluation.
DPW Capital Equipment	\$ 169,000	\$ 274,000	\$ 105,000	Replacement of 550 Dump Truck.
DPW Capital Improvement Buildings	\$ 20,000	\$ 9,000	\$ (11,000)	Continue to fund HVAC fund.
Latham Hill Bridge	\$ -	\$ (15,000)	\$ (15,000)	Closed project pending future evaluation.
Dam Mitigation and Repair	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ -	Continuing funding for Dam Gate Repair.
Senior Center Equipment	\$ 11,000	\$ 2,000	\$ (9,000)	Funding for touchless soap dispensers.
Hazardous Tree Removal	\$ 100,000	\$ 62,857	\$ (37,143)	On-going budget for hazardous tree removal.
Marine Patrol Boat Replacement		\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	Start to fund Marine Patrol Boat Replacement.
CVFD	\$ 321,070	\$ 271,070	\$ (50,000)	CVFD set up a long-range plan for vehicle and equipment replacement.
Total	\$ 1,270,570	\$ 930,820	\$ (339,750)	
BOS CAPITAL APPROPRIATION FOR 2023-2024: \$1,050,496 Plus Additional 23/24 \$250,000 Gen. Fund Appropriation				
BOS BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR 2024-2025: \$930,820				
NET OVERALL REDUCTION BETWEEN APPROPRIATIONS OF \$89,557 (8.57% DECREASE)				

FY 24-25 Proposed Appropriations

	Appropriations '23-24	Appropriations '24-25	Variance	% Change
BOARD OF SELECTMEN	\$ 5,028,821	\$ 5,353,137	\$ 324,316	6.45%
BOARD OF EDUCATION	\$ 13,614,762	\$ 14,009,766	\$ 395,004	2.90%
DEBT	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	0.00%
CAPITAL (BOS & BOE) APPROPRIATION	\$ 1,044,887	\$ 955,330	\$ (89,557)	-8.57%
OTHER:				
CONTINGENCY	\$ 78,000	\$ 78,000	\$ -	0.00%
DOG FUND	\$ 28,612	\$ 32,104	\$ 3,492	12.20%
INTERNAL SERVICE	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	\$ -	0.00%
SZEGDA FARM	\$ 6,750	\$ 6,750	\$ -	0.00%
RECREATION	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	\$ -	0.00%
TOTAL OTHER	\$ 148,362	\$ 151,854	\$ 3,492	2.35%
TOTAL	\$ 9,836,832	\$ 20,470,087	\$ 633,255	3.19%

FY 24-25 Proposed Appropriations Distribution: TOTAL BUDGET \$20,470,087.



Amount to be Raised by Property Taxes

Current Mill Rate	25.91
Proposed Mill Rate	28.77
Mill Rate Increase	2.86 mills or 11.03%

In the 23/24 Fiscal Year, the 2023 Grand List decreased .20% The Town is requesting that this be taken in consideration when reviewing and setting the Mill Rate for FY 2024-2025.

Analysis of Mill Rate impact on Property Tax Assessment. NOTE: This is for demonstration only and is not anticipated to accurately reflect each resident’s property tax assessment.

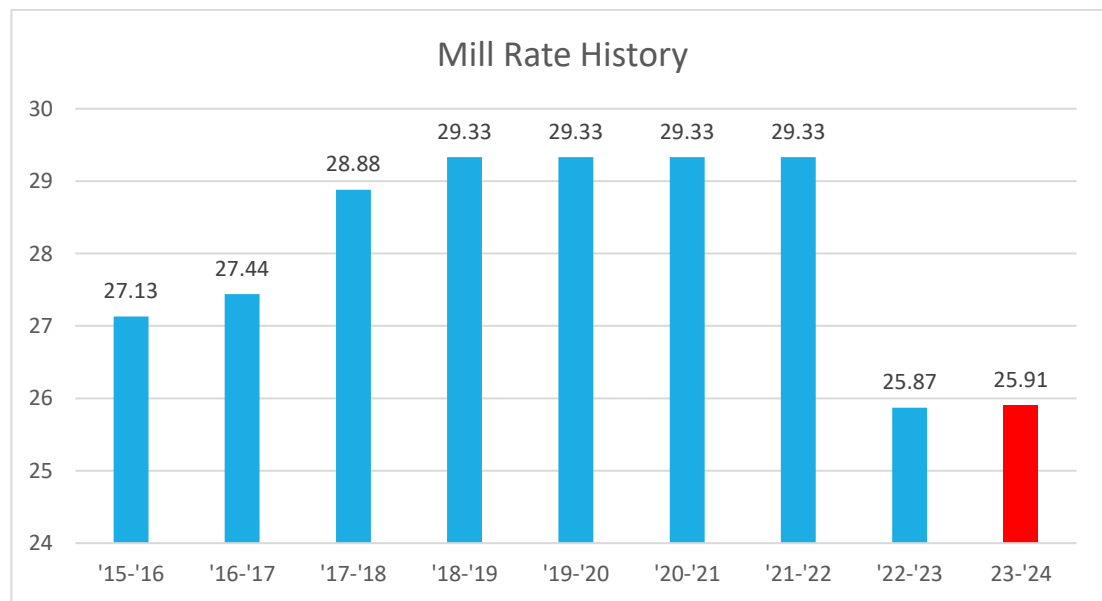
In 2023-2024, a Home with market value of \$350,000 and assessed value of \$245,000.

- Property Tax would be \$6,347.50 in FY ‘23-’24 with mill rate of 25.91.

In 2024-2025, the same Home with a market value of \$350,000 and assessed value of \$245,000 (no change in assessed value resulted in Revaluation)

- Property Tax would be \$7,048.65 in FY ‘24-’25 with mill rate of 28.77.

Recent Mill Rates



NOTE: Year 2021 – Full Revaluation Year; impacted 2022 Grand List and the 2022-2023 Property Tax Mill Rate Year 2026 – Statistical Revaluation Year

J. Viens thanked both the BOE, BOS and FiPAC. He said that FiPAC and BOS look at the large overview of the budget and what is best for the town overall. He said that there has been a lot of misinformation, especially on social media. He opened up the meeting for public comment.

Opportunity for any elector or qualified voter to be heard regarding the recommended appropriations.

Carmen Vance, 1 Beach Road asked what became of the COVID funds. S. Everett, First Selectman responded that the funds were used at Rec Park, Department of Public Works office and maintenance garage, HVAC systems throughout the town, Columbia Volunteer Fire Department upgrades to the exhaust system and upgrade on audio and video. S. Everett said the COVID funds were used on Capital infrastructure upgrades and were one-time expenditures.

Christina Terkildsen, 130 Route 66 asked about the HVAC grant for the Horace Porter School. S. Everett said the HVAC project is a six-million-dollar project and the grant will pay for 48% (about three million). If we do not get the grant then it will be brought up to vote on the full project cost of six million dollars.

Tyler Digiovanni, 11 Scalise Dr. said he has two kids in the school and one going to be in the school. He said three positions are not being renewed. He said that the class sizes will be going up and this is harmful to the kids. He asked why are we taking away field trips, not renewing equipment or supplies. He said the surrounding towns mill rates are a lot higher than Columbia.

B. Wilson said cuts are to staff, not classroom teachers, and this cuts will not impact the class size.

Denis Egan, 16 lake Rd. said she is concerned about the quality of education and is disheartened at how low our test scores are based on our per capita income. She said that our students that went on to E.O. Smith were not prepared in math and were behind despite hiring an extra math teacher.

B. Wilson said the school is focusing on math scores and that is an area that the school is addressing. She said the internal scores show an increase.

Kimberly Newstead, 5 Mallard Point said we live in the richest country, and we need to pay more in taxes for quality education.

Stephania Dawiczuk, BOE member spoke as a citizen of town that Covid took a toll on the students. The cuts would affect support staff for the students that need the extra help and felt that we need to come to a better compromise.

Dana Silver, 11 Sunrise Drive thanked the BOE for the work on the budget and said taking away extra curriculum will have worse results for our children. He said if the school fails he will move out. He asked if someone could explain the full revaluation. M. Walter said the State requires a revaluation every 10 years. The Assessor worked with a professional company hired to evaluate every house and across the board everyone's revaluation went way up. The Mill Rate has to drop, or taxes will double and lowering the Mill Rate generates the right amount of taxes. He said 1 Mill increase generates \$580,000.

Tyler Smith, 41 Lake Rd. said that cutting the interventionist will shift the costs to Special Education.

Lauren Haberman, BOE Member, 25 Hunt Rd. said she will not back down on letting the community know what is going on. She said the school is the heart of this town. She said she recognizes that we have tough decisions to make and that increased costs should not be a burden on the BOE and that the two budgets (BOE and BOS) are disproportionate.

Jess Price, 57 West St. said she choose this area because of the school district. An Interventionist helped her daughter every day. She said the cuts are taking away crucial members and will add a burden to the teacher. She will leave if the school fails.

Rachel Riendeau, BOE member, 310 Route 66 asked for clarification for the audience on what positions were being cut. B. Wilson said that they are not cutting anything required for special education students. She said one position will be cut which will be the STEM interventionist for Science. She said that they will reevaluate for math and reading intervention coaching position. She said they will try to have a minimum effect on the students as they can.

Rhonda Kincaid, 8 Basket Shop Rd. asked how much additional money needed to go back into the education budget to meet the original request. B. Wilson said the BOE made the last cut on April 1st of \$300,000. That equals 3/5ths of a Mill.

M. Walter said the Grand List went down 1 Mill. He said a big part of the Mill Rate is automobile tax went down 7% which was a 1-million-dollar loss big part of large mill rate.

Thomas Capstick said he was the one who quoted 11 teachers positions were being eliminated on social media. His question is the loss of a paraprofessional

and a teacher will those positions be back filled. B. Wilson said that any staff that resign or retire that individual would shift into that position and would not need to be let go.

Allie Roberts, 3 Dilaj Dr. asked if all the necessary drainage projects need to be worked on simultaneously. S. Everett said none of the drainage problems are in this budget except for engineering design. He said Capital road maintenance and paving are in this budget, as well as the sealant application to less travelled roads. She also asked if the funds for the lake patrol were necessary. J. Viens said the cost for the marine patrol boat is a safety need.

C. Vance, 1 Beach Road said if you look through the years at scores at Horace Porter School and school districts with less money per students their scores are higher. Scores are not always proportional to the class size, or how much money you can give the school. She said there were 800 kids in Horace Porter School many years ago with only one Superintendent and there was some debate on a part-time Superintendent. The BOE decided not to go the way of a part time Superintendent. She said we now have a Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Principal, and Assistant Principal.

S. Everett said two weeks ago the school working with FiPAC was able to make some cuts. He said that he fights for everybody. Half of the population is over 55 to 60 and they have paid a lot of taxes over the years, and we have to look out for them. He said he got an email from an elderly resident – the resident said he watched the FiPAC meeting, and he is retired on a fixed income, and has owned his home for years. The resident said his health, auto and home insurance will be increasing by \$100 dollar a month, not to mention the increase in food and utilities. He asked that we keep the property tax to a reasonable amount so he could stay in his home. S. Everett said every person who sits on the boards makes decisions for the future of the town and takes into account all the citizens. He said that we need more people to step up and become members on the various boards.

Christine Sposito, Vice Chairman of BOE, 62 Doubleday Rd. said that test scores are only one indicator on how students perform and that there are different assessment on students. She said the use of interventionist is to help students in need. She said the administrative positions have never changed, just the titles changed. She said the BOE due diligence was to fill those positions with high qualified individuals. She said she is on a fixed income as well and her income has only gone up by \$10.00 a month.

Douglas Brochu, 32 Route 87 said his granddaughter goes to school and the staff are fantastic. He said cut to the school is the last place to make cuts. They are our future.

Jessica Price, 57 West St. asked what the costs are to cut field trips and assemblies.

B. Wilson said some are paid by BOE and will be looking for more parent contribution.

Lauren Haberman, BOE Member, 25 Hunt Rd. said she wanted to reiterate that Steven Everett called out the parents and that the parents should take the brunt of hit for the elderly. She said our kids are the future of the town. She said we can't keep pretending this is the run of the mill negotiation. She said why would people move to town with that comment. She asked how many roads/culverts did the town know about and why wasn't the maintenance done in the past on the roads. She said there are 600 lines in the budget document, and she knows for a fact that people on the board do not read the budget.

Heather Connor, 82 Cards Mill Road said COVID hit the kids hard and students are reading below level. She said it breaks her heart that the reading interventionist, or any interventionist is being cut. She said the interventionists are important for our kids. She said other types of learning is important, such as music and art. She said she is not insensitive to residents needs and higher taxes.

B. Wilson we are not eliminating all interventionists.

Olivia Evans, 173 Route 87 asked if we are cutting \$111,000 in teachers' salaries how will we stay competitive. She asked why would experienced teachers want to work in Columbia if we are not offering a competitive salary. B. Wilson said that teachers' salaries are contracted. The cuts are due to staff reduction, not salaries.

Victoria Christensen, 21 Chesboro Bridge Rd., said she is a parent, and a staff member of the school is upset about the budget cuts. She said she is on a fixed income and has a young family. She asked if Administration will be taking cuts in salaries. B. Wilson said that there are no salary cuts. All three contracts were negotiated, and all staff are getting an increase.

Rachel Riendeau, BOE Member, 310 Route 66 said she participated in the contract negotiations. She said the contract was negotiated across the board and everybody got a pay increase. She said the salaries are competitive compared to other schools. She said no teachers that are staying in that building are getting a pay cut. Veteran teachers are paid more and less experienced teachers are paid less.

James Chakulski, FiPAC Member, 2 Beaudet Terrace said he was on the BOE for eight years. He said this is a touchy budget and the increases are too steep and the cuts are too steep. He said the BOE put forth a reliable and well thought out

budget. The budget did not have a lot added. He said all the BOE attends the BOE Budget Sub-committee and B. Ciurylo, Finance Director attends as well and is transparent. He said he is new on FiPAC and there is a misconception somehow that the BOE does not put a budget in good faith. He said in the BOE budget presentation enrollment totals for 22/23 were 163 kids for the high school, 5th through 8th total enrollment is 217. He said that trend shows 60 kids or more. He said if all those kids go to Bolton, which is the lowest tuition, which would be \$65,000 at this year's tuition rate. In the next three or four years, there will be further increases. He said this is a forewarning that there will be a 1-million-dollar increase. He said we should know it's coming now. These costs are coming and they are fixed and there is no getting around them.

Noreen Farrington, 3 Nuhfer Dr., thanked the board for their hard work and thanked the parents. She said there were 800 students at Horace Porter School and now it is down to 400, but we haven't changed anything in administration. There are cuts to the programs for the kids, but why haven't we looked at cuts at another level. B. Wilson said that they looked at every position and every aspect of the budget when looking at the cuts.

Leah Osborn, BOE Member, 48 Johnson Rd. said schools all over the country were exploding over those years. She said we don't want to compare ourselves to that and school administrators have different duties now.

Christina Sposito Vice Chairman of BOE, 62 Doubleday Rd said in 2020 there was a negative .6% request in the budget, in 2021 was a negative 1.6%, in 2022 there was a 1.32% increase, in 2023, there was a 0 percent increase, in 2024 there was an increase of 5.67% and in 2025 the request is to maintain at 5.10%. FiPAC asked the BOE to cut \$450,000. The BOE agreed to a 2.9% increase and she believes the BOE worked very hard and diligently to present a barebones budget with cuts that would have the least negative impact on students.

S. Postemsky, 44 Edgerton Rd. said ARPA funding was received by both the BOS and BOE. There was a transportation increase. He asked if we are getting any credit or money back from the transportation company when they can't provide transportation. B. Wilson said that in the contract with M&J we get a credit memo each month if they can't provide transportation.

Allie Robinson, 3 Dilaj Dr asked if Rham absorbed 5th, 6th, and 7th what would that do to the budget. B. Wilson we are exploring options at this time. The town said no to 6th, 7th and 8th. Only talking to Rham High School.

M. Maziarz said if another school absorbs 7th and 8th we would still pay tuition and transportation. It would probably be the same as E.O. Smith.

Steve Piro, 22 Russmar Dr. thanked all the committees. He said cuts to school, are going to affect our students. Our goal is not to be tied to test scores, but to create a well-rounded students. He said it is very shortsighted eliminating programs that will affect the kids. He said the budget is very transparent. He said that cutting the Administration level is not a good level to cut, they are always out and about doing something. He asked where did FiPAC come up with \$300,000 cut come with all the cost increases and increase in population.

Bob Ciurylo, 244 Route 66 said he was on the BOE from 1997 to 2002. He said the test scores were top tiered and is disheartened with the decrease in scores despite other issues kids deal with. He challenges the administration and current BOE to define the goals and key indicators that would define success for the programs. He said additional spending may not help with the scores.

Michael Maziarz, Chairmen of BOE, 8 Fox Run urges everyone to look carefully at modern test scores due to the amount of testing and quality of assessments. Most college and university are not asking for SAT scores. The state mandated assessment for SBAC is not a good assessment and he has opted for his own children to not take the test. He said that the kids success is due to good teachers and the number one goal is for the teachers to feel valued and appreciated. That is how you keep good teachers and recruit new teachers.

Mike Sposito, 62 Double Day Rd. said the \$300,000 cuts are significant. He said he is thinking about his elderly relatives too. He said we need to be fiscally responsible but slashing the budget does not look good.

Ahslee Parks, 307 Route 87 said test scores are not an accurate way to determine success. She has two children in Special Education that have both social and emotional needs. She said things are different now and cutting the budget may not be the answer. She said we need to look forward.

J. Viens said we do look forward. We look at the Mill rate and the cost to the taxpayers. We are looking at the costs for the HVAC and debt services alone is 1 Mill. He said we are looking at a steep increase in the upcoming years and it is difficult to cut.

Christine Sposito, Vice Chairman BOE, 62 Double Day Rd. said the HVAC is for a town municipal building and is a town problem, not a BOE cost.

Heather Connors 82 Cards Mill Road asked if the Public Hearing could be recorded online. She asked that the budget cuts that are being made be the least impactfully, such as cuts to basic classroom supplies. She asked about the elimination of teacher stipends. B. Wilson said the after-school stipend will not be cut. Administration will absorb some stipend responsibilities.

L. Napolitano, BOS Member, 7 Hunt Rd. said the BOE gave money back in the past. There are a lot of unfunded mandates for new curriculum. She said to think about who you are going to vote for in November.

Carmen Vance, 1 Beach Rd. said every year we go through this process. For the past 20 years. FiPAC has cut the BOE and the kids are doing well despite scores and are succeeding. She said every year we have cut some money out of the budget and people carry on.

3. **ADJOURNMENT OF THE PUBLIC HEARING:** J. Viens Adjourned the Public Hearing at 8:55 PM

4. **RECESS.**

5. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

5.1 **Financial Planning and Allocation Commission Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes, Wednesday, April 17, 2024.** K. Peck MOVED to APPROVE the FiPAC Special Meeting with Budget Workshop Minutes for Wednesday, April 17, 2024. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

6. **CORRESPONDENCE:**

6.1 **BOS Regular Meeting 4/16/24.**

6.2 **BOE Draft Special Meeting Minutes for 4/16/24.**

1. **OLD BUSINESS:** None.

2. **NEW BUSINESS:**

2.1 **FiPAC Discussion on Public Hearing.** J. Viens noted that three emails were received and were given to each FiPAC member.

2.2 **Modification of the proposed FY 24-25 budget, as FiPAC deems advisable.** R. Szegda MOVED to Apply \$375,000 from the General Fund to reduce the budget impact on the FY 24-25 Mill Rate. A. Rowbotham SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

K. Peck MOVED to proceed with the budget as proposed without further modifications. R. Szegda SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

J. Chakulski said the budget cuts are harsh. He said he hopes that we get better sense of trust with BOE. There seems to be some mistrust and possible fluff in the BOE budget by FiPAC. He said the BOE work hard to keep the budget bare

bones and are being realistic with no padding. He said that future years we can see a drastic increase.

A. Rowbotham asked J. Chakulski if he had alternative number for the proposed \$299,000 cut. J. Chakulski said I do not.

J. Jordan disagreed with the perception that the cuts are due to mistrust. She said she has the greatest respect for Barbara and how she stepped into the role of Superintendent so quickly. She said she didn't think the BOE came into the budget with padding. She said the cuts to the budget were for the Town overall, and not all about the school.

K. Peck said she appreciated Judi's point and she too is looking forward to the future years. She said we are probably expecting a 2 Mill increase this year and maybe next year, but not a 3.5 Mill increase. She said she appreciated the BOE reducing their budget through economizing, which allows us to reduce the Mill rate. She said it is not about trust or mistrust, but there is always something we can do if we look a little closer. She said personally she would proceed with budget the BOE presented to us.

R. Szegda said he has been involved in town government for 20 years. He said cutting the budget from what was asked for was difficult, and that the coming years are going to be more difficult. He said the budget cuts made this year are good cuts and does not affect the education for the students.

J. Chulkaski said his comments were not in the minutes from that last meeting, but he was able to speak about his points in the Public Hearing portion of the meeting..

R. Szegda said the most important thing that the community can do is to educate its children. He said he grew up in Columbia, and his kids went to school in Columbia. He said he had a discussion with Barbara Wilson on the impact of cutting \$300,000 and she convinced him that there would not be any negative quality to the children's education in away. He said he supports the budget as proposed and the budget will maintain the quality of education in Columbia.

2.3 Motion to move the proposed FY 24-25 budget to the Annual Town Meeting.

K. Peck MOVED to send the Proposed FY 24-25 Budget with the Modification of Use of \$375,000 from the General Fund to the Annual Town Meeting on May 14, 2024. J. Jordan SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED 7.0.

3. NEXT MEETING:

- 3.1** Tuesday, May 14, 2024 – Annual Town Meeting at 7:00 PM in Yeomans Hall, Columbia, CT. This meeting is an in-person meeting with No Zoom accessibility.

FiPAC members should plan on meeting after the Town Meeting to discuss any possible budget revision and setting the mill rate.

4. **ADJOURNMENT:** K. Peck MOVED to ADJOURN at 9:21 pm. J. Chalkuski SECONDED the MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer C. LaVoie