

Town of Columbia
Public Budget Hearing
Special Meeting Minutes
Financial Planning and Allocation Commission
Wednesday, April 19, 2017 at 7:00 pm.
Yeomans Hall
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT 06237

Members Present: Chairman Earnest Sharpe; Vice Chairman Jeff Viens; Kelley Peck; Todd Shepard; Judy Ortiz; Dean Toepfer; Richard Szegda.

Also Present: First Selectman Carmen Vance; Deputy Selectman Steven Everett; Selectman Robert Hellstrom; Selectman Robert Bogue; Superintendent Lol Fearon; Principal Alyssa Gwinnell; Vice Principal Michael Kenyon; Director of Student Services Barbara Wilson; Library Director Su Epstein; Town Historian Ingrid Wood; Attorney Henry Beck; Fire Chief Peter Starkel; Fire Marshal Mike Lester; Carole Williamson; Andrea Drabicki; Carol Wiggins; Brenda Morey; Gail McGrath; Bryan Tarbell; Shirley King; Karen Butzgy; Alyson Cranick; Nelisa Reagan; Ann Dunnack; Cindy Postemsky; Amy Raffa; Carol and Paul Kubala; Paul and Nancy Schwartz; Gary Littlefield; Reporter from *the Chronicle* Ekaterine Tchelidze.

1. **Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance:** E. Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. **Public Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal Year 2017-2018 Budget**
 - 2.1 **Presentations of the proposed budget by representatives of the Board of Education and the Board of Selectmen:** L. Fearon presented the proposed FY 2017-2018 BOE budget (attached). He explained that the focus of the BOE is long range planning, maintaining and improving current programs and improving student success. Student tuition costs were discussed as well as increases and decreases in the proposed budget.

M. Walter presented the proposed FY 2017-2018 town budget (attached). He discussed revenues, and notable increases and decreases in the proposed budget. M. Walter explained that the proposed mill rate is 28.88, which is equivalent to an increase of 1.44 mills or 5.26% from the current mill rate of 27.44.
 - 2.2 **Opportunity for any elector or qualified voter to be heard regarding the recommended appropriations:**

E. Sharpe opened the floor to the public for comments and questions.

Paul Kubala of Lake Road asked why the pension costs are showing up in the town budget and not in the school budget. M. Walter stated that by including the pension costs in the town budget keeps it from going towards the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR).

Andrea Drabicki, Route 87 asked about what BOS and FiPAC has done to increase tax base in commercial areas. E. Sharpe stated FiPAC has no involvement in this. A. Drabicki asked why there isn't a town newsletter anymore. C. Vance stated that when *Crossroads* existed and was run by town's people and volunteers. C. Vance stated that an electronic newsletter was in circulation for a short time with a previous Town Administrator but that has dissolved. Currently, the town is working with a publishing company with hopes to start another newsletter, but Columbia may be too small of a town. She explained that in the meantime, we are trying to do email blasts, website advertising, etc. when possible. M. Walter stated that PZC just met and approved new regulations pertaining to commercial zones. He explained that he is hopeful that once the economy turns around, tax base will improve.

Steven Everett of Route 87 asked if the Economic Development Commission is accepting new members. M. Walter said yes. S. Everett encouraged those interested to please step up and join.

Jennifer Tigeleiro of Hunt Road expressed that she feels there is a need for three teachers of the 3rd grade classes next year. She explained that the reshuffling of staff decreased the number of teachers from 3 to 2 and feels the students need the 3rd teach. She would like to advocate for this to be changed. E. Sharpe stated he appreciates her comments, but feels that at this point in the budget season this change is unlikely.

Bill Preuss of Route 87 thanked FiPAC and the Town for proposed budget. He expressed serious concern with the current situation with the state budget proposal. He asked what will happen if the town is going to be required to fund more than what we have budgeted. E. Sharpe stated most likely a town meeting will be held to fund any excess needed costs from the general fund. E. Sharpe stated that the town has a healthy fund balance. He explained that worst case scenario would require a special session and auxiliary tax, which we do not want to do.

Christine Sposito of Doubleday Road stated that she feels that moving forward, FiPAC must realize that "students are not numbers and their needs must to be met." As an educator she sees the other side as well, but feels that the town must be proactive based on needs of the students, not the numbers. E. Sharpe explained that the BOE, BOS, and FiPAC are all involved in the budget making process and each board/commission has different responsibilities. He stated that FiPAC generally relies on the BOS and BOE to make recommendations on the budget. He feels that these comments should have been expressed at BOE meetings and then the BOE could have brought the concerns to FiPAC.

J. Tigeleiro stated that she attended the February 24th BOE meeting, but the "grid has changed since then." E. Sharpe stated again, this should have been brought up earlier in the budget process.

Jeff Morrison of Macht Road expressed concern about the new gate monitor system at the lake. C. Vance stated that the town relies on the Lake Management Advisory Committee (LMAC) to advise the BOS on how to care for the lake. She explained that implementing this monitor system has been being discussed for many years. C. Vance stated that the Public Hearing was advertised and then held for public input prior to the BOS voting and approving the amended ordinance. J. Morrison stated he was not in town when the Public Hearing was held. A. Drabicki asked how those that live on lake will be monitored. E. Sharpe cut off discussion on this topic. He encouraged everyone to read the Charter and if they feel like challenging an item they are not happy about, the Charter will explain how to do so.

Carol Kubala of Lake Road asked how the \$50,000 allocated for teacher's pension was figured. E. Sharpe explained that M. Walter and L. Fearon have been very diligent about keeping on top of state legislature. He stated that they are doing the best they can at this time, because there really is no way to tell what is going to happen in terms of the state budget.

P. Kubala of Lake Road stated he notices a lot of expenditures under capital projects. M. Walter stated that engineers and architects are being hired to design projects and that some of these are early expenditures to cover cost estimates to get an actual plan. P. Kubala feels these should come to the town first to get the peoples input. E. Sharpe assured him that nothing has been approved at this time in regards to bonding, etc. and that this is not an appropriate discussion for this evening's meeting.

Carol Wiggins of Route 6 asked if a motion can be made to increase the budget the night of the Town Budget Meeting. E. Sharpe said no but a motion may be made to reduce the budget.

Jeff Lasky of Sunrise Drive inquired about several capital projects including the beach project and the bleacher/stairwell project at the school. C. Vance explained that the beach project came about after the concrete dock was replaced due to a remaining issue with erosion. Also, the beach area is not ADA compliant and this will also be corrected.

L. Fearon explained that the bleacher project began last summer and stated that the balcony was not accessible unless you stood on the bleachers, which is very unsafe. He stated that now stairs are in place but in order to bring it up to code, more maintenance needs to be done. There will now be a safe way to access the balcony in order to run the sound system and lights when there is a play, concert, etc.

Hank Schwartz of Mallard Point asked if the town's general fund is adequate and what would happen if we were faced with being required to fund the entire teacher's pension. E. Sharpe stated that Columbia's general fund is in good shape. If we were to take a hit, we would still be at an acceptable level in terms of fund balance, but not as strong as we would like to be.

Karin Vertefeuille of Fox Run is concerned with the proposed 1.44 mill rate increase considering we may receive unanticipated tuition costs teachers pension, etc. She would like to see the Capital budget re-looked at to possibly put off some projects this year. E. Sharpe encouraged her to look at the capital project exhibit and stated that next year's number is already pretty high. He stated that whatever is deferred this year will have to be factored in down the road.

Christine Sposito of Doubleday Road asked for clarification on what the renovation of Old Fire House is for. C. Vance stated that over many years, the town has been debating what to do with this building. She explained that over this past winter, there was discussion of putting a small addition on the school to serve as a workshop area. After touring the Old Firehouse building, which is currently filled with equipment, trucks, etc. it has been decided that it would be beneficial to clean it out so it may serve as a workshop for both the town and the school. Financial records will remain stored in the upstairs portion of the building.

P. Kubala asked about Fire Department budget request for fire trucks, marine boat, rescue trucks, etc. S. Everett explained that the fire department is the "lifeblood of the safety" in this town and that we must stay on top of this and the needs of the CVFD in order to keep our citizens safe.

The Public Hearing adjourned at 8:50 pm.

3. Recess

The meeting resumed at 8:57 pm.

4. Old Business

4.1 Modification of the proposed FY '17-'18 budget, as FiPAC deems advisable : R. Szegda MOVED to send the proposed FY 2017-2018 budget unchanged for consideration at annual budget meeting on May 16, 2017 at 7 pm in Yeomans Hall. K. Peck SECONDED the MOTION and it CARRIED 7:0.

5. Approval of Minutes

5.1 FiPAC Special Meeting Minutes of:

March 15, 2017, Minutes of March 22, 2017, Minutes of March 29, 2017 and Minutes of April 5, 2017: T. Shepard MOVED to approve the FiPAC minutes of March 22, March 29 and April 5, 2017 as presented. J. Ortiz SECONDED and the MOTION CARRIED 6:0:1 with J. Viens abstaining.

6. New Business:

6.1 Appointment of FY 2017-18 Town Auditor: J. Ortiz MOVED to re-appoint King, King and Associates as town auditors for FY 2016-2017. J. Viens SECONDED and the MOTION CARRIED 7:0.

7. Transfers: R. Szegda MOVED to approve the transfers as presented. J. Viens SECONDED.

8. Next Meeting: The next meeting will follow Town Budget Meeting on May 16, 2017.

Adjournment: T. Shepard MOVED to ADJOURN at 9:10 pm and the MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Kimberly A. Bona