

**Town of Columbia**  
**Financial Planning and Allocation Commission**  
**Special Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, March 14, 2018 – 7:00**  
**Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room**  
**323 Route 87, Columbia, CT. 06237**

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

**Also Present:** Mark Walter, Town Administrator; Lol Fearon Superintendent; Beverly Ciurylo; Finance Director.

1. **Call to Order:** E. Sharpe called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm
2. **Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
3. **Budget Presentation**
  - 3.1. BOE
  - 3.2. BOS
4. **Audience of Citizens:** Carmen Vance, Gary Littlefield, Linette Dooley, Barbara Wilson, Director of Student Services; Alyssa Gwinell, Principal; Christopher Lent, BOE Chairman
5. **FiPaC Discussion:** L. Fearon presented the BOE Budget to FiPAC which included an overview of the following:
  - Impact of Federal Grants:
    - REAP (Technology)
    - Adult Education: There is a large reduction in the State and this will be an issue going forward.
    - Town Appropriation Net of Grants: \$12.6million represents reduction of \$283,736 resulting in an 2.20% decrease.
  - Program Enhancements: Academics:
    - Grades 5-8 math classes – providing access to higher level math.
    - Initiation of more labs in STEM, Geography/Current Events, Language Arts and Math.
    - Emphasis on the effort/work study habits.
    - Life Skills are now offered to all Middle School students.
    - Middle School instrumental music lesson offered in addition to band. No additional staff needed by rearranging schedules to accommodate students.
    - Art/Technology integrated into the Art program.

- Program Enhancements:
  - Established Principal/Teacher Leadership Group: Established an on-going program to improve professional skills.
  - Middle School Joint professional development with Region 19 & feeder schools.
  - Panther's Lair which allows the students an opportunity to socialize.
  - SRBI program received a 10k grant.
  - Special services funding for NAEYC Accreditation through the pre-school program
  - Partnered with EastConn to develop and implement a Co-teaching model.
- Focus:
  - Long-Range Plan (LRP) Survey asked two fundamental question; regarding High School choice and Middle School structures.
  - Improving Student Success
- Budget Highlights:
  - Commitment to class size at Primary grades. Most grades are two sections and couple have 3 sections.
  - Improving student support services in Literacy and Mathematics; 10k grant funding received.
  - Pursuing NAEYC Accreditation for PK (Porter Pals) program.
  - Pilot World Language (French) Program Gr. 7: There will be no impact on the budget and no increase in staffing. There will be online programming software and a staff member in the room as well. Reassigning current language teacher to teach the class. If successful, this program can be provided in the 8th grade.
- Budget Increases:
  - Health Benefits 15% rate increase
  - Professional Services: (EASTCONN Food Services & Proj.O): \$43,693 of which 22k is associated with the move to EASTCONN food service provider, which allows a great deal of savings going forward.
  - Contracted Services: \$20,676. MBR Implications are a big issue for the school/town. Decreases in state reimbursement for education cost sharing. Only area not affected is the excess cost for special education. This year ECS and special education costs have been fused together into one.
  - Repairs/Maintenance: \$118,290 \$117,000 approximaetly in Capital items from the 5-year plan. Transfer capital items into budget: technology, ongoing painting, tile/floor replacement. Move capital to operating and at the same time giving a \$150,000 cushion on MBR.
- Budget Drivers:
  - Decreases in Unemployment, Tuition (2 out-placements) and software

- Staffing Proposal:
  - Staffing Proposal includes a reduction in 3 FTE certified staff if enrollment goes as planned.
  - Add 1.0 FTE non-certified Staff: there is a reduction in literacy and numeracy teaching staffing from 1.5 to 1.0. The non-certified staff member would give support to the 2-certified teacher in that program.
- Projected Enrollment:
  - Magnet Programs (Tuition K-12 and Non-Tuition) Costs: We are not seeing an increase in students attending Magnet schools but are projecting a possible 5% increase in tuition costs. The \$289k in magnet school tuition represents 2.27% of total budget
- Enrollment 2018-2019:
  - Demographic Study (2016), PK-8: 403
  - Current Projection, PK-8: 423
  - Demographic Study (2016), 9-12: 245
  - Current Projection, 9-12: 244
- MBR Implications: L. Fearon said that the budget is down 2.2%, but at the same time we are confident that we have a budget that meets our needs and the MBR requirements with the caveat that the State funding stays as it is.
  - Reduce by the equivalent of ONE high school tuition based on enrollment reduction: \$12,203
  - Reduce by the anticipated ECS reduction for 2018/19: \$120,714
  - Total: \$132,917

BOS Budget Discussion: M. Walter presented the BOS budget discussion to FiPAC which included an overview of the following:

- Overview of Revenues that included Licenses and Permits fees are down \$3,300 at -2.62%.
- Intergovernmental Revenues: There have been significant reductions in grants, which included the ECS grant is down \$406,339, Special Education down \$150,000, Circuit Breaker is down \$30,000, Municipal Revenue Sharing, reduced by \$160,179 PILOT is slightly down, Pequot-Mohegan Grant is reduced by \$14,356 and LoCIP Reimbursement is down substantially by \$105,347.
- Municipal Revenues: Interest Revenue is up by \$15,000 (100.00%), Telecommunication Property Relief is down \$4,000 (-33.33%), Court Fines are down \$1,000 (-33.33%). Total general fund resource is -4.75%. Total reduction in revenues is \$821,680.
- FY 18-19 Appropriations:
  - BOS: Appropriations for 17-18 is \$3,822,332; Appropriations 18-19 is \$3,914,627 with a Variance of \$92,295 for a Change 2.41%. The BOS 17/18 budget included the Governor's Proposed Teachers Retirement contribution of \$50,000. The State has taken this off the table at this time; therefore, it is not a responsibility of our local budget.

- BOE: Appropriations for 17-18 is 12,894,369; Appropriations for 18-19 is 12, 610,633 with a Variance of \$(283,736) for a Change of -2.20%
- Debt: Debt is down from \$174,000 to \$166,750 with a Variance of \$(7,250) at -4.17%
- Capital: Capital request is down from \$1,056,839 to \$898,505 with a Variance of \$(158,334) at -14.98%.
- Other: Appropriations for 17-18 is \$81,964; Appropriations for 18-19 is \$120,122 with a Variance of \$38,158 for a Change of 46.55%.
- BOS Notable Operating Increases & Decreases
  - Teacher's Pension with a decrease of \$(50,000)
  - Information Technology had an increase of \$6,886, which included the cost of a server replacement.
  - Assessment for Renter's Assistance had an increase of \$7,000
  - Beckish Senior Center had an increase of \$15,130 due to an increase in the Sr. Center Van hours and an increase in salary for Sr. Center Director and Sr. Center Assistant/Dispatcher.
  - Lake Management had an increase of \$10,000 due to the upcoming Invasive Species Abatement project at the lake.
  - Public Works had an increase in fuel costs of \$6,725.
  - Contingency increase of \$33,000. BOS Salaries and Wages 2% gross wage increase.
  - Debt Services had a decrease of \$(7,250).
  - BOS Health Insurance: There was an increase a 12.45% increase in health insurance. We are currently looking into EChip (regional health care insurance) with the assistance by our health care consultant.
- Capital Budget: M. Walter explained the philosophy behind funding the capital projects by setting a certain dollar amount away each year for large projects/purchases such as the set aside of 150k for the Fire Department for the purchase/replacement of a rescue truck and on an engine, the Recreation Area Improvements (Rec Park) for \$195,000. Some other items of note that M. Walter discussed included the budget of \$5,000 for Revaluation; the \$5,000 for a storage building for the Sr. Center, Road Resurfacing of \$237,000 and DPW Capital Improvement Buildings budget of \$166,000, and the DPW Transfer Station Equipment of \$8,000.
- M. Walter provided information on the Current and Proposed Mill Rate based on currently Proposed Governors' Budget. The Current Mill Rate is at 28.88 and the Proposed Mill Rate is at 30.77, with a Mill Rate Increase of 1.89 Mills or 6.55%. for a mill rate increase of 1.89 mills or 6.55%. This is based on the home market value of \$250,000 and assessed value of \$175,000. M. Walter added that in FY 17-18 the mill rate of 28.88 was taxed at \$5,054 and for FY 18-19 the mill rate of 30.77 will be taxed at \$5,385, which is an increase of \$331 in property taxes.

**Audience: E. Sharpe asked if anyone from the Audience or the First Selectman would like to comment.** First Selectman, S. Everett asked L. Fearon a question regarding what kind of penalty could occur with the MBR. L. Fearon responded that we would be

facing forfeiture penalties of 2 times the amount that we are below the MBR threshold. He added that it does not need to be spent, but must be appropriated. S. Everett stated that in the FiPAC packet for tonight's meeting are two letters from the Superintendent and Town Administrator to the legislature regarding the MBR requirements. In addition, S. Everett stated that he gave testimony at the legislature on this subject.

S. Everett stated that the budget presented was a sensible and realistic budget to the Town and added that he and M. Walter met with the Department heads to look over each of their budgets closely and based on projections and history we know there is some room to adjust. S. Everett added that we bring forth a very generous general fund and that he would prefer not to go to the Town with a mill rate increase.

BOE Chairmen, C. Lent spoke and stated that the BOE budget speaks for itself and that the Administrative team worked hard to build a budget that included quality enhancement and nimbleness.

Public: C. Vance asked to explain the increase in the salaries at the Senior Center. S. Everett explained there was a salary adjustment to the Sr. Center Director due to increased responsibility of added employees and operations of the Sr. Center Van and that the position has been changed to an exempt salary position.

T. Sheppard asked if there were volunteer drivers and if the Sr. Van is accepting contributions. S. Everett explained that at this time the contributions are very little. We will be evaluating the cost of running the van in the next 6 months. If it's too much we will investigate paring it down to only medical/life quality rides. He added, that based on the nature of the State grant we cannot ask Seniors to donate. They do not have to pay but are reminded that a donation is accepted and there is a list of suggested donations. S. Everett added that both he and M. Walter are monitoring the van use closely and that currently the van is out 3 days a week, 6 hours a day and we are looking at sharing services with Lebanon and Andover.

C. Carmen asked about the added Sr. Center Assistant/Dispatcher positions. Everett stated that we need a dispatcher when the van goes out and that the Dispatcher is also the assistant to the Sr. Center Director which has increased this positions hours. The Assitant/Dispatcher position's hours were expanded to cover the same hours as the van is operating in case of an emergency.

D. Toepfer had a concern about how FiPAC committee that meets once a month can get a handle on the encumbrances included in the budget as it is very confusing. Asked about the encumbered column in the budget L. Fearon responded that with the bottom line budget there are times that we need to make adjustments for unexpected expenditures. For example, long-term illness and that last year the school ended up 50k out of the 12M budget and gave that back to the town. M. Walter stated that we use a spending report to track where we are based on what has been spent and the percentage remaining compared to the calender.

E. Sharpe added that there may be an option by making a note of exception. i.e. BOE knew that a student aged out of the system and assume that everything else on the budget will come in as expected. When something major happens, we should be able to make a note of exception.

E. Sharpe asked about the Education Commissioner's right to grant a waiver and is the school going to be proactive or wait? L. Fearon stated that almost every municipality could claim the same exceptions and if the Commissioner granted a waiver to Columbia,

this would result in waivers to other municipalities. L. Fearon said he will follow-up and get more clarity before next Wednesday.

E. Sharpe asked about the Rec Park Improvements Master Plan Publicmeeting (April 19, 2018). He would like to know the Town's opinion. S. Everett responded that he does not like to bond, unless it's absolutely necessary. With the public meeting on April 19<sup>th</sup> this will allow us to gauge public sentiment before committing to something this big and that the public will have an opportunity to voice their opinion.

M. Walter stated that we could present a more detailed presentation on the Master Plan to FiPAC if they would like at the next meeting.

**6. Correspondence:**

**6.1.** Letters from Mark Walter and Lol Fearon regarding the Senate Bill No. 364 – An Act Concerning Special Education Funding

**7. Next Meeting:** The next meeting is a budget workshop scheduled for March 20, 2018 at 7 pm.

**8. Adjournment:** J. Ortiz MOVED to ADJOURN at 8:34 pm and the MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer C. LaVoie