

**Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing**  
**January 22, 2024**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**7:00 PM**

**Budget Committee members present:**

Ephraim Dobbins  
Kathy Guilmette  
Charlotte Lister  
Beth Swanson  
Rob Varsalone  
Ron McKinnon

**Budget Committee members absent:**

Jack Cannon  
Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio  
Steve Couture, Selectboard Liaison

**Guests and members of the public present:**

Royal Richardson, Chester School Board Chairman  
Sharon Locke, SAU Superintendent  
Benjamin Kilar, SAU Finance Manager  
Rhonda Lamphere, School District Treasurer  
Chester PACT

**I. Meeting to Order**

Chair Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. Attendance**

**III. Public Comment**

There were no members of the public wishing to comment.

**IV. Review of Updated School Budget**

Dr. Sharon Locke reviewed the updated School budget and the reductions they were able to identify. Reductions were noted in areas that include salaries, the number of students involved in the Pinkerton Resource program, equipment replacement, elimination of the project manager for the construction projects, and reduction of the number of classroom split HVAC units. She noted the current budget is \$15,664,666, which is an increase of approximately 8.13%.

Dr. Locke reviewed discretionary and non-discretionary spending. She noted the biggest drivers beyond their control in increasing the budget are Pinkerton tuition, out-of-district placements for students with IEPs and special education students, and contractual salaries.

Dr. Locke reviewed other non-discretionary increases that impact the budget, including transportation, technology, snow removal, and other contractual obligations. Mr. Richardson explained these contracts are agreements negotiated over time to obtain the best price for these services. Dr. Locke described the discretionary expenses the School Board chose to keep in the

budget, including administrative and staff positions, textbooks, and window security ballistic film.

Mr. McKinnon suggested purchasing Chromebooks for students instead of leasing them. Mr. Kilar explained a specific Chromebook is necessary for educational settings and will share this information with Mr. McKinnon. Mr. Richardson noted the District did purchase equipment in the past; however, that resulted in an inventory of equipment that could not be turned over every three years. He said the Budget Committee asked them to avoid spikes in the cost of technology purchases, so recommended leasing instead of purchasing equipment. The School Board agreed to investigate this.

Mr. Varsalone asked if the insurance plans taken by employees vary over time. Mr. Richardson explained that the demographic of the workforce has changed and they have younger employees, so are seeing changes they have not seen in the past. He noted the District is continuing to research other insurance providers.

Mr. Kilar reviewed the changes made to the Warrant Articles:

- **Flat roof replacement:** They plan to expend the full amount of the Capital Reserve Fund. The balance will be covered by impact fees, so there should be no tax impact.
- **Playground preparation:** The Budget Committee had recommended moving this Article down the list. The School Board will discuss this at their next meeting. The group discussed why the existing building cannot be salvaged and reused, or remain in the same location. Dr. Locke noted a new maintenance building is needed in a different location. Mr. Richardson explained the School Board committed to presenting this Article this year, so the playground equipment the Playground Committee is currently fundraising for can be installed after July 1, 2025. The group discussed whether this project could be split across two Articles or across different years.

Mr. Richardson answered questions the Budget Committee posed at the last meeting. Dr. Locke reviewed the reclassification of the business administrator position. She also explained how psychological and mental health services are being funded and the importance of these services.

Chair Dobbins asked about the increase in the software budget. Mr. Kilar explained a human resources software program was purchased that includes the ability to manage the hiring process online.

Chair Dobbins thanked the School Board for their work on the budget and answering the Budget Committee's questions. He noted this budget is a large increase over last year, but is driven primarily by non-discretionary items.

Rhonda Lamphere asked clarifying questions about staff positions, the ballistic window film, and the breakdown of the cost of the construction of the garage and the preparation for the playground.

## V. Approval of Minutes

### a. January 8, 2024

*Ms. Guilmette moved to approve the minutes from January 8, 2024, as written. Ms. Swanson seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed 5-0-1, with Mr. McKinnon abstaining.*

**b. January 15, 2024**

*Ms. Guilmette moved to approve the minutes from January 15, 2024, as written. Mr. McKinnon seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.*

**VI. Budget Committee Member Comments**

The Committee discussed their concerns about the School budget. They agreed to request that the School Board reduce the proposed budget by approximately \$45,000-47,000 so that the increase equals 100% non-discretionary expenses. Chair Dobbins will calculate the exact figure and notify the School Board.

The Committee agreed the School Board needs to increase the amount requested to fund boiler replacement.

The Committee agreed they do not support the playground preparation Warrant Article.

**VII. Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will be held on January 29, 2024.

**VIII. Adjourn**

*Ms. Lister moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Guilmette seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary