

**Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
January 31, 2022
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM**

Budget Committee members present:

Chairman Mike Weider
Vice-Chairman Ephraim Dobbins
Jack Cannon
Kathy Guilmette
Dana Theokas, Chester School Board Liaison (joined at 7:21)
Selectmen Liaison Steve Couture

Budget Committee members absent:

Guests present:

Michael D'Angelo
Police Chief Aaron Berube
Chester PACT

I. Meeting to Order

Chairman Weider called the meeting to order at 7:12 PM.

II. Attendance

III. Announcements by the Chair – Welcome

IV. Public Comment

V. BOS Update - Steve Couture

Selectman Couture said the Budget Committee is invited to the Board of Selectmen meeting on February 3, 2022 to hear the presentation by the Public Works Working Group (PWWG) regarding the transition of the Road Agent position from an elected to an appointed position.

VI. School Board Update – Dana Theokas

Ms. Theokas had no update from the School Board.

VII. Other Committee Updates

VIII. Minutes

a. January 24, 2022

Mr. Dobbins moved to accept the minutes of January 24, 2022 as written. Mr. Guilmette seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor except for Selectman Couture, who abstained. The vote passed 5-0-1.

IX. Old Business

Chairman Weider reported the PWWG will appear before the Committee on Monday, February 7. Members of the Committee will attend the Board of Selectmen meeting on Thursday.

Chairman Weider sent the Committee members an analysis from Mr. Cannon regarding Recreation programs and fee schedules associated with them.

X. New Business

a. Town Budget Review

i. Questions related to Town Budget

The Committee discussed why new lines have been added for holiday coverage and on-call supervision in the Police Department budget since the salary matrix should cover those expenses.

They discussed the rationale for having a salary pool of \$20,000. Selectman Couture explained that the salary pool is not a new item. It is used when a new employee is hired whose salary is more than was budgeted for the year for that position, as well as for merit increases. The Committee questioned whether the salary pool is being used in this manner and Selectman Couture will provide documentation as to how it is being used. He requested the Budget Committee notify the Board of Selectmen if the Committee wants the Selectmen to handle the salary pool in a different manner. The Committee believes having a salary pool on top of the salary matrix inflates the budget.

Police Chief Berube answered questions from the Committee members about the Police Department budget. He explained that the current employment situation in the country is affecting the Chester Police Department. It is difficult to attract and retain experienced police officers.

The new lines affords the department the ability to provide succession planning so that officers can field calls the chief would normally cover. These lines will provide a stipend to pay these officers so they can gain experience and exposure. Chief Berube is in his 21st year of duty with the Chester Police Department. Succession planning is important as he nears retirement.

The chief is the only salaried employee in the Police Department. Officers are not salaried as it is difficult to hire experienced officers without the potential of making overtime pay. It is the chief's job to retain his current staff. Without an attractive environment and salary, they will leave. It takes three years on the job to train an officer. He explained the coverage and services the Department provides. By retaining his professional staff, liability is limited.

The holiday pay line covers the cost of police officers working on holidays. The Police Department is the only department that has employees working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Selectman Couture said the Board of Selectmen has discussed the Police Department budget with the chief since July and the chief has done all they have asked of him.

The chief discussed regional partners willing to support the Chester Police Department. The Sheriff's Department is an option, but will require payment and will not provide the same level of service as local officers provide. One community stated that Chester would be creating their own emergency by not having adequate staffing, so they would not be willing to assist. There is a direct correlation between crime and the availability of officers.

Mr. Dobbins thanked Chief Berube for attending the meeting. The Committee understands the need to attract good employees and hopes these new lines will help solve that problem.

Mr. Cannon suggested that each Committee member bring a number to the next meeting based on their individual review of the budget to present to the Board of Selectmen. The warrant articles have not been finalized.

Mr. Dobbins questioned the Town's IT budget increase and if other options had been presented. Selectman Couture said the services have not gone out for bid. Chief Berube said Finance Director Joanne Smith is willing to answer any questions about this. Mr. Dobbins will reach out to her.

- ii. **Non-Public - RSA 91-A:3, II(c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this board, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to include any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant.**

Mr. Canon moved to go into non-public session per RSA91-A:3, II(c) Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this board, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to include any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant. Ms. Guilmette seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The vote passed 5-0-0.

The camera was turned off at 8:43 PM.
The camera was turned on at 8:45 PM.

A motion was made and seconded to come out of non-public session and to seal the minutes indefinitely. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The vote passed 5-0-0.

XI. Next Meeting Date – February 7, 2022

XII. Adjourn

Ms. Guilmette moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 PM. Mr. Dobbins seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary