

Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
January 29, 2024
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:

Ephraim Dobbins
Kathy Guilmette
Charlotte Lister
Beth Swanson
Rob Varsalone
Ron McKinnon
Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio

Budget Committee members absent:

Jack Cannon
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
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.

Chair Dobbins received an email from a taxpayer/Chester School parent. The writer asked that the Budget Committee not support the additional SAU Administration and Psychologist positions. They suggested that in the future, incremental hires be done by warrant and that the School return to a shared SAU. Mr. Richardson offered to provide feedback to the letter writer.

Chair Dobbins said the Committee members have expressed reservations about the incremental positions. He noted the Committee puts forward a bottom line budget.

IV. School Board Operating Budget and Warrant Articles

Chair Dobbins clarified that the Committee constructs and submits the budget. This is the Committee's Warrant Article and they will vote on it. The Committee will discuss the other Warrant Articles but not vote on them, as that would imply they are voting to move them forward, which they do not have the authority to do. This was confirmed by the School's counsel. This is different than how it has been done in the past.

Operating Budget

Mr. Richardson presented the updated budget. He stated the current bottom line general fund subtotal is an increase of \$1,099,345.83, a 7.59% increase. This increase is 100% accounted for by non-discretionary expenses. He explained the adjustments made since the last meeting, including Pinkerton students leaving the school and reducing a paraprofessional position, equaling \$57,328.

Ms. Guilmette moved to move forward the School operating budget in the amount of \$16,088,116.68 to public hearing next week. Mr. Varsalone seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Warrant Articles

Mr. Richardson shared the order of the Warrant Articles as decided by the School Board:

- Article 3: Operating Budget
- Article 4: Flat Roof Replacement
- Article 5: Playground Preparation Project
- Article 6: Boiler Capital Reserve Fund
- Article 7: Special Education Fund

Article 4: Raise and appropriate the sum of \$259,000, split between \$234,286 from the Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund and the remainder from impact fees. There will be no tax impact.

Ms. Lister asked if this would be enough money. Mr. Richardson said they are reasonably sure it will be.

Article 5: Raise and appropriate the sum of \$149,300. Chair Dobbins noted the Committee does not support this Article. Ms. Lister suggested creating a Warrant Article solely to demolish and rebuild the maintenance garage. Ms. Harris explained the immediate value of obtaining sight-lines and better leveraging the space from a student safety perspective would be lost. Mr. Richardson said they do not want to cobble together a variety of Articles to complete the process.

Article 6: Mr. Richardson said if the Budget Committee is supportive of placing \$60,000 into the Boiler Capital Reserve Fund, the School Board will support this as well. Chair Dobbins verified that if the boiler needed to be replaced immediately, funds could be taken from the unassigned fund balance. The Budget Committee is supportive of this.

Mr. Richardson noted this fund was set at 2.5% when the RSA was first passed. Last year, at the District meeting, they asked to increase this to the upper level of 5% and they funded it at approximately 3.5%. They will be taking out \$100,000 to reduce taxes in the coming year.

Article 7: Mr. Richardson noted the Special Education Capital Reserve Fund has approximately \$140,000 and the retained fund of \$380,000 is available in case of emergency (\$280,000 after the \$100,000 is taken out to reduce taxes).

Chair Dobbins will write a summary for the Annual Report and share it with the Committee for review before sending it to Mr. Kilar. He thanked the School Board for their work on the budget.

V. Other Committee Updates

VI. Approval of Minutes

a. January 22, 2024

Ms. Guilmette moved to approve the minutes from January 22, 2024, as written. Ms. Swanson seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed 5-0-2, with Mr. McKinnon and Ms. Harris abstaining.

VII. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on February 5, 2024.

VIII. Adjourn

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

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary