

Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
March 18, 2024
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:

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

Budget Committee members absent:

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

Guests and members of the public present:

Chuck Myette, Selectman
Stephen O. Landau, Selectman
Dick Trask, Selectman
Chester PACT

I. Meeting to Order

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

II. Attendance

III. Public Comment

David Lavita, 235 Raymond Road, said he has 35 years of budgeting experience. He said the Town is in need of cash to do everything that needs to be done. He said the Budget Committee is responsible for doing this, and they have his full respect.

Mr. Lavita said most of the people at the School District Meeting were not happy about hiring a full-time superintendent. He noted the cost of the superintendent, principal, and assistant principal is over \$500,000, and that the package they have is ridiculous. He believed the budget was amended to not hire a full-time superintendent and they did it anyway, which is dishonest. He said a lot of people are unhappy and this should be dealt with.

IV. Selectboard Update

There was no Selectboard update.

V. School Board Update

Ms. Harris was not present to provide an update.

VI. New Business

a. Chester School District Meeting Recap

Chair Dobbins noted the budget was amended on the floor, the amendment passed, and the amended operating budget passed. He noted that Chris Hadik said the original budget would result in a 11.5% tax rate increase. Mr. Dobbins confirmed this to be accurate.

b. Town Budget Review

Chair Dobbins noted the numbers discussed at this meeting are not specific goals. The School was tasked with limiting their budget increase to 5%. He said the consensus number for expected wage increases in 2024 is 4% and Social Security is 3.2%.

Ms. Swanson asked how the Selectboard can choose to determine a wage matrix with a 2% raise and a 2% longevity bonus without knowing what the budget is going to be. Chair Dobbins explained the wage matrix was constructed to provide visibility and certainty. Mr. Trask added it helps with hiring. The Board discussed the wage matrix and the proposed COLA and step increases.

Mr. McKinnon suggested drawing down Capital Reserve Funds to offset the budget. Mr. Trask explained the Budget Committee originally recommended establishing these funds and eliminating them would increase the budget. Chair Dobbins pointed out they are established for specific purposes and the Selectboard are the agents to expend these funds.

Chair Dobbins said he intends to keep track of the total approved through warrant articles to be able to compare from year to year. Mr. Trask suggested he speak with the Town Finance Director to obtain that information.

The Board noted the estimated tax impact of the operating budget is \$8.31. Chair Dobbins asked how much new inventory was added to the tax base, which Mr. Trask will provide. This amount is not anticipated in the tax rate calculation.

Selectman Myette said most of the information the Board is asking for exists on spreadsheets, not necessarily in the budget book. He noted the budget does not look at offsetting revenues. He said Town Administrator Doda can provide the answers to any questions the Board poses about the budget. He also clarified the use of Capital Reserve Funds and the CIP.

Selectman Landau said when a development is approved, the land is taken out of current use and charged as house lots, which is considerably more. Selectman Myette added this will be incremental, depending on how many houses are sold per year.

c. Other Items

The Board complimented the Selectboard on their endurance during the budget season and the work they are doing.

Chair Dobbins reviewed the Board positions that are up for reelection and reminded Board members to file between March 27 and April 5, 2024.

VII. Next Meeting Date

The next meetings will be held on March 25 and April 1, 2024.

VIII. Adjourn

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*Ms. Guilmette moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:11 p.m. Mr. Varsalone seconded the motion.
A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.*

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Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hangel, Recording Secretary