

Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
April 15, 2024
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:

Kathy Guilmette, Vice Chair
Jack Cannon
Charlotte Lister
Ron McKinnon
Rob Varsalone
Beth Swanson

Budget Committee members absent:

Ephraim Dobbins, Chair
Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio
Steve Couture, Selectboard Liaison

Guests and members of the public present:

Debra Doda, Town Administrator
Chuck Myette, Selectman
Stephen O. Landau, Selectman
Dick Trask, Selectman
Chester PACT

I. Meeting to Order

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

II. Attendance

III. Selectboard Update

There was no Selectboard update.

IV. School Board Update

Ms. Harris was not present to provide an update.

V. New Business

a. Town Budget and Warrant Article Review

Operating Budget

The Committee discussed the current version of the Town operating budget, which reflects the changes suggested at the last meeting. They recommended further changes, including:

- Reduce Government, Maintenance Part-Time (4194) by \$10,000.
- Reduce Town Clerk/Tax Collector line (4140) by \$10,000.
- Reduce Executive Miscellaneous (4130) by \$2,500.

Selectman Landau referenced a Warrant Article tied to the Legal Expense line (4153) that will reduce the operating budget by \$10,000, if passed.

Ms. Guilmette asked if the Selectboard will support this version of the budget. Selectman Landau pointed out this meeting was not noticed, so they cannot conduct a vote.

The Selectboard will meet on April 17th to discuss the final operating budget. The Committee agreed to meet at 5:45 p.m. on the 18th before the Public Hearing.

The Committee discussed changing the Building Inspector to a part-time position.

Warrant Articles

Article 9: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 10: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 14: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 15: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 5-2-0.

Article 16: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 17: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 18: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 19: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 20: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 21: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 22: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 23: The Committee discussed whether the number of projects is excessive, given the new nature of the Department. Selectman Myette pointed out most of the roads are small and the projects can be completed quickly. Ms. Swanson stressed the importance of public safety. A question was raised regarding Dump Road and the Committee agreed to enter into a non-public session to continue this discussion.

VI. Non-Public Session

A non-public hearing was scheduled under 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. Varsalone made a motion to go into a non-public session under 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. Ms. Lister seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

The Budget Committee went into non-public session at 8:00 p.m.

The Budget Committee came out of non-public session at 8:12 p.m.

VII. New Business (continued)

a. Town Budget and Warrant Article Review

Warrant Articles (cont.)

Article 23: Via straw vote, the Committee did not recommend it 2-4-0.

Article 25: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 26: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 27: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 28: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 29: This article may be removed by the Selectboard.

Article 32: The Committee had questions after the Solar Group presentation at the last meeting, but have not received answers. Therefore, they did not hold a vote.

Article 33: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 34: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 6-0-0.

Article 37: Via straw vote, the Committee recommended it 5-0-1.

Article 38: Selectman Trask said a Warrant Article will be inserted after this one, if it passes, regarding how to fund hand-counting ballots. The Committee discussed how to educate the voters on the cost of hand-counting ballots, which is significant. Via straw vote, the Committee did not recommend it 0-6-0.

Article 39: Via straw vote, the Committee did not recommend it 0-6-0.

Article 40: Via straw vote, the Committee did not recommend it 0-6-0.

Article 41: Via straw vote, the Committee did not recommend it 0-6-0.

Mr. Varsalone moved to move forward the Operating Budget as amended at this meeting.

Mr. McKinnon seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

VIII. Next Meeting Date - April 18, 2024

IX. Adjourn

Mr. McKinnon moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m. Mr. Varsalone seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary