

TOWN OF CHAPLIN
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

May 13, 2024

Approximately 40 electors and those authorized to vote at Town Meeting assembled at the Annual Town Budget Meeting on May 13, 2024, at 7:00 P.M. at the Chaplin Senior Center, 132 Chaplin Street, Chaplin, Connecticut. Also present were Selectman Juan Roman, III, Selectman Joe Pinto, Board of Finance members, Chairman Richard Weingart, Linda Caron, Linkesh Diwan, Peter Haines, Matthew Foster, Jerimiah Rufini, Town Attorney Dennis O'Brien, Regional District 11 Superintendent Andrew Skarzynski, Chairwoman Stacy Foster, member Eugene V. Boomer, Jr. and business manager Jobina Miller, Chaplin Elementary School Principal Kevin Sanchez and Chairwoman Jaclyn Chancey. The following business was transacted:

1) The Town Clerk called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M., read the call and opened the floor for nominations to elect a Moderator. Selectman Roman/Warren Church moved/seconded to nominate Irene Schein. Hearing no further nomination, Irene Schein was declared Moderator and read each item on the call as it arose.

2) To nominate and elect to the Regional Board of Education of Regional District 11 one member for a full term of three years to commence July 1, 2024; Eugene V. Boomer, Jr./Jaclyn Chancey moved/seconded to nominate Stacy Foster. Hearing no other nominations, Stacy Foster was elected to the Regional District 11 Board of Education for the term commencing July 1, 2024.

RD 11 Chairwoman Stacy Foster introduced herself and has been serving on the RD 11 Board of Education for the past eight years as Vice Chair and for the past year as Chair and Chair of the Central Office Committee. The Central Office Committee has recently shepherded the school through the loss and passing of Superintendent Henrici and the hiring of Superintendent Skarzinski. Part of the reason Stacy wanted to continue serving on the Board was so that she could help the school to have stable leadership through this transition and to help the new Superintendent to move forward.

3) Whereas the Town is applying for Local Capital Improvement Grant Funds: therefore, to resolve to approve the CIP plan for FY 2025-2029 (on file with the Town Clerk). The Moderator called for a motion to approve the CIP plan. Linkesh Diwan/Jeremiah Rufini moved/seconded. BOF Chairman Weingart gave an overview of the CIP plan noting that there has been an increase in the Grand List for real estate and decrease for personal property. There has been a 15% increase in taxes independent of any increase in the budget. There is \$6,668 under the "new & ongoing" section to start putting money away over the next five years for the 2028 revaluation. Under general government there is \$11,000 for a new server in the town hall which, ultimately, may not be needed. Under public safety there is \$8,000 for protective equipment for the fire department. \$380,000 under the Public Works department. Under Chaplin Board of Education there is \$25,000 for electrical room upgrades. There is \$112,674 in Capital Nonrecurring - CIP to be funded from the current year's income property taxes and other revenue that the town has.

The Moderator called for a vote to approve the 2025-2029 CIP plan with a result of 38 in favor of the plan, zero opposed and zero abstentions. The 2025-2029 CIP plan passed.

4) *To receive and approve the Annual Town Budget for the Fiscal Year July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025 in the amount of \$ 10,255,229 as submitted by the Board of Finance and to appropriate funds required; (contingent on asterisk *).

*At their meeting held on April 30, 2024, the Board of Selectmen voted, pursuant to CGS § 7-7, that item #4 of the Call of the Annual Town Meeting be submitted to a referendum vote at an Adjourned Town Meeting to be held May 21, 2024, at the Chaplin Firehouse, 106 Phoenixville Road (Rte. 198) in said Chaplin from 12:00 Noon to 8:00 P.M.

The Moderator read #4 of the call and Chairman Weingart discussed the highlights of the proposed budget noting a substantial 15% tax increase independent of any increase to the town's budget and a failed Regional District 11 budget referendum. Linkesh Diwan gave an explanation of the revenues and expenditures sides of the budget noting how they and the grand list have progressed over the years and how expenditures affect taxes. The majority of town revenues are from property taxes and the majority of expenditures are from education costs.

Resident Ann Chuk asked if the property value of the new business in town, the Dollar General and the new gas stations will be included in this valuation? Assessor Rose answered that both properties are on the Grand List but with an unfinished construction percentage.

Chairman Weingart explained that the Regional School District 11's budget failed at their first referendum in May. The assessment for the RD 11 budget has already been appropriated in the town budget that is currently being presented. If the current budget passes, it will already have the money for RD 11 appropriated. When the RD 11 budget finally passes, we will have a new assessment for the RD 11 budget, and we will have money left over.

Chaplin Elementary School Board of Education Chairwoman Chancey gave an overview of the school's budget. She noted that the budget the BOE is presenting is higher than the allotment from the BOF and she knows that the figure will need to be reduced after the RD 11 budget passes. She also pointed out that there is money in the non-lapsing educational account to cover unanticipated special education costs.

Library Board of Directors member Leslie Ricklin spoke in strong support of the library and encouraged electors to support the library as well.

Selectman Roman stated that the RD 11 budget did not pass at the recent referendum. He asks if the budget passes at the second referendum with a decreased amount, will our town budget decrease by the same amount or will the money be put into savings and the budget amount will stay the same. BOF Chairman Weingart and member Linkesh Diwan explained that our town budget is set and if the RD 11 budget is reduced at the next referendum, that decreased amount will not be taken out of the budget this year but will be put into a savings account. The savings will not help the taxpayers by decreasing the mil rate for this year but will hopefully decrease it for next year.

Ann Chuk asked what the percentage of increase will be to our taxes. Chairman Weingart responded that with a mil rate 31.45 mils, the percentage of increase for average taxpayer would be roughly 25%. He asked Assessor Rose if this increase is an unusual result compared to other town's revaluations. Assessor Rose stated that he is unaware of what other towns tax increases are. The valuation increase for Chaplin properties is approximately 40% compared to Windham which had an increase of 61%. Chaplin's overall grand list growth is 22% and comparable to the nearby town of Hampton which is 22.5%. The valuation of the Algonquin property has gone down in recent years which decreases the grand list.

5) To appropriate and transfer for fiscal year 2023-2024 an amount not to exceed **\$200,000** from the General Fund Unassigned Fund Balance to the CIP Fund for the following project(s):

1. Project #3305.4 – Road Maintenance (125,000)
2. Other projects per CIP Plan (\$75,000).

The Moderator called for a motion to approve the above transfers. Ann Chuk/Linkesh Diwan moved/seconded. The Moderator called for a vote. 31 yes, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. The vote to approve the transfers passed.

6) To appropriate and transfer for fiscal year 2023-2024 an amount not to exceed **\$25,000** from the General Fund Reserved Account #10701.10 BOE Non-Lapsing Unexpended Education Funds Account to the CIP Fund for the following project(s):

1. New Project – CES Secondary Electrical Room Upgrades

The Moderator called for a motion to approve the above transfers. Jaclyn Chancey/Selectman Roman moved/seconded. The Moderator called for a vote. 31 yes, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. The vote to approve the transfers passed.

7) To appropriate an amount not to exceed **\$70,000** from the General Fund Reserved Account #10701.10 BOE Non-Lapsing Unexpended Education Funds Account for the following:

1. To offset unanticipated/unbudgeted Special Education costs in FY 2023-2024

The Moderator called for a motion to approve the above transfers. Ann Chuk/Linkesh Diwan moved/seconded. The Moderator called for a vote. 31 yes, 0 opposed, 0 abstentions. The vote to approve the transfers passed.

8) Discussion and possible action on the Resident State Trooper Program.

Moderator Schein made a motion to end the Trooper program in the town of Chaplin and Ann Chuk seconded.

Selectman Roman spoke saying the program is costing the town about \$170,000 per year. He feels that it is a great program, however most of the residents calls are answered by Troop D and not the resident trooper. The Board of Selectmen thought it prudent to put the question to discontinue the program to the electors of Chaplin. He also stated that he spoke with the attorney for the State Police, and they have informed us that we are able to terminate the contract.

Former Selectman Eugene V. Boomer, Jr spoke in strong support of keeping the program and feels it is a mistake to end it. As a former Selectman, he feels there is a huge difference in having a trooper in town and feels the town will pay the consequences if we end the program. He feels there will not be radar on secondary roads without the program. He also stated that the issue of ending the program should be decided at a referendum and not at a town meeting. He said he asked the BOS previously if it would be put to referendum and they indicated that it would.

Jeremiah Rufinfi spoke in favor of ending the program saying that in the last year only 6 out of 69 calls were answered by the resident trooper. Troop D responded to 63 calls.

Ryan Perry spoke in favor of ending the program saying that he has called the resident state trooper 3 times since 2020. The trooper responded to one of the calls, Selectman Roman dealt with one call and Troop D took over an hour to respond to the third call.

Linkesh Diwan asked if a trooper would continue to have a presence in the elementary school. Linda Caron indicated that the current trooper was in the school often and knew all the kids. She felt that she could get another person to do the DARE program.

Former Selectman Rose commented that during his terms there were three resident troopers and that selectmen had no control over the hours the troopers worked and felt they have no control over the program even though they spoke with the lieutenant at Troop D several times. He stated that during his term, there was a murder on Mt. Laurel Lane. He was in his office at the time of the murder and had been notified by a resident who lived across the street from where it was happening. Our trooper, who was on duty at the time was not notified by Troop D. Troop D did dispatch trooper out of Danielson but they did not notify our trooper who was on duty and in Chaplin at the time.

Several residents, including Selectman Roman spoke in favor of a referendum to vote on the Trooper Program question because it is a town wide public safety issue and should be voted on by everyone, not just the residents present at this meeting.

Linkesh Diwan asked if the motion on the table could be changed from ending the trooper program today to sending the question to referendum. Moderator Schein rescinded her motion and made a motion to send the trooper question to referendum and Linkesh Diwan seconded. Linkesh Diwan asked Town Attorney O'Brien for clarification on point of order. If the Selectmen can adjourn something to referendum, why can't this body (town meeting) adjourn to referendum. Attorney O'Brien said the legislative body could because the question is on the agenda for "possible action". If it were not on the agenda, it would not be possible.

Moderator made a motion to rescind her last motion. William Jordan/Sally Ireland made a motion to send the question to the BOS and have them adjourn to referendum. After discussion, Bill Jordan made a motion, seconded by Matthew Foster to amend the motion to have this town meeting instead of the BOS make a motion to adjourn the question to referendum of which the BOS would set the date. William Jordan withdrew his motion. Linkesh Diwan made a motion, seconded by William Jordan to adjourn the question to referendum and to direct the BOS to set the text of the referendum question and the date of the referendum to be set by the BOS. William Ireland disagreed with sending the question to referendum at this meeting and said the question should be sent to the BOS and have them send the question to referendum. He feels it may be illegal to do this. Attorney O'Brien said it is not illegal.

The Moderator called for a vote to approve the motion for the Town Meeting to adjourn the question to referendum and to direct the BOS to set the text of the referendum question and the

date of the referendum to be set by the BOS. 69 yes, 6 opposed, 0 abstentions. The motion passed.

9)The Moderator called for a motion to adjourn. Jaclyn Chancey/Selectman Roman moved/seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 P.M.

Respectfully submitted, Shari Smith, Chaplin Town Clerk