

CHAPLIN BOARD OF FINANCE
Chaplin Senior Center
Chaplin, Connecticut
Special Meeting Minutes
August 19, 2024

Chair Dick Weingart called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM. Present were Board members Linda Caron, Jeremiah Rufini, Victor Boomer; Alternate Peter Haines. Others present were First Selectman Juan Roman, Selectman Joe Pinto. Absent were Board members Link Diwan, Bill Jenkins; Alternate Matt Foster and Alternate Izzy Alvarez.

3. **SEATING OF ALTERNATES:** Alternate Peter Haines seated for Board member Bill Jenkins.

4. **FY 2024-25 BUDGET WORKSHOP:**

a. **Review Town official and agency responses to proposed FY 2024-25 budget reductions and adjustments**

- 1) **Agencies to be reviewed include: Board of Education, Library, Fire Department, Employee Benefits, General Government, Transfer Station, Building & Grounds, Recreation Commission, Public Works, Sanitation (Members of the public may address questions and comments to the BOF Chair, about the specific agency being reviewed at the conclusion of each agency's presentation):**

Board of Education (Board Chair Jaclyn Chancey, Superintendent Andrew Skarzinsky, Principal Kevin Chavez) – \$70,000 in cuts already made from original proposal to keep services the same with cuts to the following: Professional Development, Standardized Testing, Field Trip Transportation, one Custodian position. The Board of Finance asked for a flat budget (\$107,000 reduction) - looked at least impact to the kids with cuts to the following: instructional supplies (teachers posted Amazon Wish Lists asking for donations or using their own funds), elimination of Field Trip Transportation (parents would have to pay directly), loss of 2 Paraeducators that work with upper elementary grades (help with small group learning, provide individual attention, potential for fewer science experiments). Working on enhancing school climate (difficult to maintain with these changes). Financial impact – increased staff turnover and substitutes, arbitration, unemployment benefits. This budget is challenging – any savings with these reductions would result in cost shift to families. Need to provide a school that children want to attend and facing challenge of families sending their kids to the Magnet School (need resources to address these challenges).

- Pat Pogmore asked about student/teacher ratio (depends on the grade, 19 students to 1 teacher for 5th grade, some grades less to meet individual needs of the students).
- Alissa Gray asked about services for sending students out-of-district (grant for Special Ed services has run out - not maintaining these services would result in outplaced students with each costing over \$100,000, difficult to hire specialists – costly to contract out), and read letter sent to the Board of Finance supporting the education budget.
- Rick asked where money would come from for outside services if cuts are made (would have to decide where else to cut from the same budget or go to the town to ask for additional funding).
- Irene Schein supports education but would like to find a solution for the excessive cost per student the town cannot afford (consider regionalization or tuition students out).
- Jeremiah Rufini noted cuts need to be made to pass the budget and asked for any guidance on smaller cuts (already made significant cuts – prefer no additional cuts, possible items to cut in response letter).
- Jeff Courier commented on yearly tax increases and asked about percentage of the CES budget with these cuts (original – 4.5% increase, 3.7% increase with \$28,000 reduction, 2.69% with additional \$42,000 reduction, 0% increase with proposed \$107,000 reduction).

- Audience member commented on the success of her daughters (need to support the teachers who support the kids) and expressed concerns about the cost of turnover when losing one of these good teachers.
- Julisa Mendez expressed concerns about many catalogs being overpriced for supplies and asked if the school shops for the best price (looks at Amazon and collaborates with other organizations for the best price).

Library (Board Chair Leslie Ricklin, Library Director Sandy Horning) – Reducing proposed book budget to \$0 would negate the primary mission and function of the library (not possible to implement). Books are the backbone and reason for the library’s existence (6,290 people visited with 5,183 books checked out for FY 2023-24). Cutting the book budget would only be cost savings of \$5.45 per household for the average Chaplin taxpayer. A library that can’t purchase books cannot serve and grow with the community. The Public Library was established per the October 7, 1901 special meeting minutes of the Town of Chaplin with a budget of \$225 (free to all inhabitants of the town of about 400 people). The Board is urged to reinstate the library’s book budget.

- Library Board Vice-Chair Jeanette Haines commented on the unlimited access to books at the library (can’t drive to Windham once a week for \$5 year to check out a book), noted the library budget cut about 10% and can’t support the book budget cut to \$0.
- Library Board and Friends member Diane Sanchez is a big user of the library and can’t fathom or support cutting \$7,000 for books.
- Library Board and Friends member Adele Swart commented on the quality of life in Chaplin - the library offers things here so you don’t have to go elsewhere, and can’t support without a book budget that supports about 40% of books for children.
- Ann Chuk supports the library (one of Chaplin’s secret treasures) - can’t support if book budget cut.
- Kitty LeShay encourages the community to support the library (people may not use or go to places in town but they are important to others).
- Marcia Donofrio understands a tight budget for a small town but can’t support the cut to books.
- Dan Rogers loves the Chaplin library.
- Email received from Kara Aiken regarding the library being the town’s biggest gem (her kids who are avid readers were lucky to grow up with the availability of current books – a pride in discussions with family and friends from other areas), and expressed the importance of reinstating the book budget.
- Jeremiah Rufini supported cut to the book budget understanding a grant for books in excess of what budgeted this year could be used to offset (\$10,000 in Special Revenue was a gift to the library to be used for special things and not considered part of the budget).
- Cynthia Ensling expressed concerns about getting the funds back when it is cut to \$0 (if you cut this year, extremely difficult to return funds next year).

First Selectman (Juan Roman) – Feeling the pinch with the budget - don’t want to lose services (cautious about the mill rate and tax burden on every taxpayer). Identified another \$4,741 in reductions – Employee Fringe Benefits & Costs (Annuity Match – must stay the same, Health Insurance – couldn’t join the union, remains the same); General Government (Legal Fees - \$1,000 reduction with no upcoming negotiations, Liability/Auto/Property - \$2,281 reduction); Transfer Station (Attendant Salary - \$260 reduction, doesn’t work 7 weeks in the winter); Building, Grounds & Maintenance (Custodian - \$200 reduction); Recreation (Building and Field Maintenance – remains the same, Special Activities - \$1,000 reduction).

Fire Department (Chief Joe Pinto, Deputy Chief Chris Bray) – Budget was cut about 15% (\$12,000) - Stipends (Town Ordinance to retain members), Electricity (reduced), Forestry Grant (reduced to zero), Rental Expenses (cleaning costs including after voting - reduced), OSHA Mandates (doing firefighter

physicals – reduced), Insurance (reduced to zero), Fire Alarm System (maintenance cost – reduced), Training (Fire School, EMT – covers 3 people, updated training for regular members – reduced). Grant received for radios – Fire Department cost is \$6,000 (hope to offset with ARPA funds). Contract with Willimantic Ambulance (couldn't sustain their own). Pushing for 2 sets firefighter gear with firefighter cancer (don't have washer/dryer to clean gear - cost about \$20,000). Cancer and cardiac arrest major causes of firefighter deaths – need to have clean gear and safe environment for them and their families. Training for safety needed to keep up with changes in the world including: solar power, battery banks in houses, electric vehicles, alternative fuels.

b. Review of other FY 2024 agency budgets as deemed appropriate by the Board of Finance (Members of the public may address questions and comments to the BOF Chair, about the specific Agency being considered, at the Conclusion of each review): None

c. Other budget issues for consideration by the Board: None

d. Public questions and comments about the FY 2024-25 budget that have not been addressed previously:

- Dick Weingart noted that most of the reductions are not going to help the tax bills.
- Pat Pogmore asked if the state is giving funds to offset 20% increase in electric bills (no funds from the state) and asked about suggestions to increase revenues - ask the school or some other entity to help.
- Irene Schein understood the increase in tax bills has to do with the reval – not expenditures).
- Sandy Horning clarified that agencies are applying for and getting grants to function.
- Juan Roman reported that the town received ARPA funds that were used for renovations to the Senior Center, HVAC, extra truck for Public Works (able to do a lot of things that would have come out of the town budget without having these funds).
- Dick Weingart presented revenue changes from October 2022 to October 2023 Grand List - Total Revenue – 3.97% increase, Real Estate based on 29.95 mill rate – 19.39% increase (driving the tax bill increase for median homeowner), decrease for Motor Vehicles and Personal Property.

e. Review of REVISED BOF budget calendar & schedule:

Special Budget Workshop - August 26th, Regular BOF meeting - Sept. 9th, Referendum - September 17th.

5. AGENDA SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT REGULAR/SPECIAL MEETING:

a. Special meeting(s): Budget Workshop to finalize the FY 2024-25 Budget

6. TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT REGULAR/SPECIAL MEETINGS:

- a. Monday, August 26, 2024: Special Budget Workshop @6pm (Town Hall or Senior Center)
- b. Monday, Sept. 9, 2024: Regular BOF Meeting @7pm (Town Hall)
- c. Tuesday, September 17, 2024: Town Budget Referendum @ Firehouse – noon to 8pm

7. ADJOURN:

Motion to adjourn (7:44 PM) made by Jeremiah Rufini, seconded by Linda Caron and carried unanimously.

***Respectfully submitted by Kathleen Scott
Recording Clerk***