

CHAPLIN BOARD OF FINANCE

Chaplin Town Hall

Chaplin, Connecticut

Special Meeting Minutes

August 5, 2024

Chair Dick Weingart called the meeting to order at 6:08 PM. Present were Board members Link Diwan, Linda Caron, Jeremiah Rufini, Victor Boomer, Bill Jenkins; Alternate Peter Haines. Others present were First Selectman Juan Roman, Finance Manager Val Garrison and numerous members of the audience. Absent were Board members Alternate Matt Foster and Alternate Izzy Alvarez.

3. SEATING OF ALTERNATES: None

4. FIRST AUDIENCE FOR CITIZENS:

- Chris Blair (was on many Boards, on and off with Rec, longtime resident and teacher in Chaplin, now a senior citizen) expressed concerns with cutting special programs (would be a detriment to the community) and supports presenting the same budget that is not overly represented by the votes.
- Irene Schein is for education - would like to see something done about high cost of \$27,000 per student.
- Dorothy Chesters (also speaking on behalf of veteran husband) is not in favor of presenting the same budget (can't afford it – needs more cuts) and asked why million-dollar reserve can't go to the budget.
- Leslie Ricklin (Library Board Chair) presented statistics for the library for 2023/24: small part-time library that is very active, appeals to all age groups, 6,290 people visited, 2,229 people attended events after hours, 5,183 books checked out (July alone had 250 people attending events and 582 materials checked out). The Board was asked to look at the library budget with kindness.
- Don Neborsky asked if there is any section that drives up the cost (portion for the town less than previous year, portion for CES up by 2.5%, portion for Parish Hill up by about \$250,000 – finalized with region vote) and asked about lost revenue from Algonquin (depreciation - loss in revenue about \$200,000 per year).
- Ryan Perry expressed concerns about the budget being in crisis – need to cut as much as possible and come up with a budget that will pass (education is biggest area) and suggested staying away from the Senior Center with seniors struggling to pay bills.
- Laura Chesters asked how the mill rate is determined (will cover later on the agenda – mill rate not set until budget passed).
- Jaclyn Chancey (Chaplin BOE Chair) and Mr. Skarzinsky (new Superintendent for RD11 and Chaplin) expressed concerns about further cuts: hate this level of discussion that pits town agencies against each other, RD11 budget is fixed (Chaplin's share went up) - any further cuts would come from CES, already cut what needed to maintain services (less than contractual increase for staff, way below insurance cost), made additional cuts for 2nd referendum (town didn't), may not meet special ed services, may not be able to meet contractual obligations for staff (labor issue), students may want to leave the region if services they need can't be provided.
- Juan Sanchez asked about state budget if less put into town budget for education (doesn't favor small towns) and commented on taxes not going up past 3 years, Education budget and Library budget less than inflation and more cuts would impact quality of life and education.
- Clint Slowik asked about cost to send students to Magnet School (tuition- \$10,000 plus transportation and special ed costs, special ed outplaced tuition - \$100,000) and asked how Board compares what being done now versus alternatives (Board's role in setting education budget strictly determines level of funding – can't make budget lower than previous year).
- Sandy Horning (Library Director) pointed out the library serves a lot of seniors in the community and people living bare to the bone (no internet, computers or technology skills) helping them with essential needs. People also come in for technology help and to print things.

5. **GUESTS:** None

6. **ADDITIONS OR CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:** None

7. **REPORTS**

a. **Board Member Reports:** None

b. **Staff Reports:** None

8. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES - Special meeting(s): July 29, 2024**

Motion to approve the July 29, 2024 special meeting minutes, made by Victor Boomer with the following correction:

Item #10a under scenarios should read – consider tax increase scenario with least impact to services.

Motion seconded by Linda Caron and carried unanimously.

9. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None

10. **OLD BUSINESS/NEW BUSINESS:**

a. **Identify potential further budget reductions from the revised July budget:**

- Reviewed how mill rate determined and using the Fund Balance towards the budget (already used \$400,000 to keep mill rate down - \$312,000 went into CIP Fund, using ½ million dollars from Fund Balance would start off the following year with ½ million dollars less).

Discussed suggestions for areas to cut: send budget back with \$70,000 proposed cuts presented last week (don't cut the school, Rec, Library, Senior Center), cut \$7,000 from library for books (\$10,000 in Special Revenue – donation for books), consider bonding, consider cuts to education, look at Fund Balance to lower the mill rate, consider \$70,000 bridge funds (restricted to capital projects), use scenario calculator to see impact to median homeowner tax bill (drastic cuts to town services only takes \$100 off median homeowner tax bill), consider 0% increase for CES budget (could use Contingency for salaries not contracted yet), Special Revenue used for items not budgeted – no cost savings, concerns about contractual requirements and MBR with cuts to BOE.

Reviewed budgets line by line for potential reductions:

Chaplin BOE (0% increase); Building, Grounds Maintenance (look at shared services with the school for mowing and plowing), Library (Books - \$7,000 reduction; Office & Material Processing - \$300 reduction based on actuals); Public Works (look at Snow Removal Overtime); Recreation (Special Activities – \$2,000 reduction based on actuals); Registrars (state provides about \$10,500 to start the early voting program – tracking to determine actual cost); Sanitation (Juan noted audit requested for recycling and encourages everyone to read notice on town website carefully (clean – cost goes down, dirty – cost stays up), trash in the recycle bin contaminates surrounding recyclables and thrown in the trash); Town Memberships (consider cutting CCM or COST that are similar - CCM very helpful including grants); Volunteer Fire Department (New Equipment – possibly move to CIP (restricted to \$5,000 or more – look at purchases for the last 3 years), Insurance (items in the building) - Juan suggested using caution with cuts to Public Safety.

- Bill Jenkins left the meeting.

Will send proposed reductions (including \$70,000 from last week) back to Boards and Agencies with explanatory letter. The Board requests a written response by next week and will hold another special meeting on August 19th at 6pm to review (Juan suggested meeting at the Senior Center).

b. Develop notice to all affected town agencies requesting their response to further potential budget reductions:

Reviewed letter that will be sent to Boards and Agencies affected by proposed budget reductions.

Tabled the remainder of the agenda.

c. Develop reduced budget scenario and calculate the impact on median tax bill

d. Develop simplified explanation of budget reductions already taken and the potential impact on town services of further budget reductions

e. Consider and act on Board of Education/CES budget

f. Consider and act on Town Government budget

g. Consider and act on combined Town Government, Board of Education, RSD11 budget for FY 2024-25

h. Develop notice to all town agencies to minimize spending until budget is approved. FY 2023-24 budget is continued until FY 2024-25 budget is approved

i. Review of BOF budget calendar & schedule

j. Other budget issues for consideration:

Link Diwan presented scenarios (some drastic) with impact to the median homeowner.

- Scenario #12 (\$46,000 in reductions) with 29.77 mill rate (\$32 decrease in taxes).
- Flat CES budget with 29.40 mill rate (\$100 decrease in taxes).
- Proposed deductions identified tonight (Library, Public Works, Rec, Town Memberships, Fire Department) with 29.25 mill rate (\$127 decrease in taxes).
- Putting \$50,000 into Town Contingency to cover some of the shortfalls (\$90 decrease in taxes)

k. Consider and act on funds transfers and budget line-term additions/adjustments as requested

11. SECOND AUDIENCE FOR CITIZENS:

Questions and comments from the audience include: scenario with \$127 decrease in taxes could be a grocery bill that feeds your children; concerns about meetings not posted on the electronic sign; can notices be made bilingual (charged by the word).

- Chris Blair thanked the Board for all their efforts with the budget (difficult situation).
- Ryan Perry appreciates the Board going through each budget line by line with not a lot to cut but need to make cuts to show the voters you tried. \$100 in tax savings is not worth losing amount of services.

12. AGENDA SUGGESTIONS FOR NEXT REGULAR/SPECIAL MEETING:

- a. Regular meeting(s): Standard meeting agenda and pertinent tasks from Annual Activity/Project Calendar

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

- a. Monday, August 12, 2024: Regular Meeting @7pm (Town Hall)
- b. Monday, Sept. 9, 2024: Regular Meeting @7pm (Town Hall)
- c. September 2024 (TBD): Town Meeting and Budget Referendum

14. ADJOURN:

Motion to adjourn (9:35 PM) made by Jeremiah Rufini, seconded by Victor Boomer and carried unanimously.

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