

CHAPLIN BOARD OF FINANCE
Chaplin Senior Center
Chaplin, Connecticut
Special Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2024

Chair Dick Weingart called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM. Present were Board members Linda Caron, Jeremiah Rufini, Bill Jenkins, Victor Boomer; Alternate Peter Haines. Others present were First Selectman Juan Roman, Selectman Joe Pinto. Absent were Board members Link Diwan; Alternate Matt Foster and Alternate Izzy Alvarez.

3. SEATING OF ALTERNATES: Alternate Peter Haines seated for Board member Link Dewan.

4. Review Meeting Protocols for Audience: Chair Dick Weingart requested that, during the audience of citizens, each citizen wishing to speak should stand and give their name and address for the record. He also pointed out that there will be a three-minute time limit for each speaker and will be subject to Chair discretion. Letters and emails received from citizens pertaining to the budget discussion will be read out by the Chair.

5. First Audience of Citizens:

- Johanne Philbrick of Chaplin Street asked the audience if her assistant Mary Oliver could read out the comments she wished to make. Her statement called on the BOF to consider the Library cuts from the perspective of both need and morality. Cutting needed programs for people like herself with disabilities such as the Merlin Reader would be harsh. Also, she feels that appropriating a donation to be used in the budget is immoral and possibly illegal. She asked the Board to look to the future when no one will be donating or bequeathing anything to the Library, Senior Center or Fire Department knowing that a generous contribution will be taken away to be placed in the budget.
- Sandra Horning, Library Director, stated that Facebook posts were erroneous. A letter from Library Board Chairperson Leslie Ricklin was read out and included the reciting of Library Board Policy Section 10, Special Revenue. The Library feels that the reductions proposed by the BOF are acceptable, however they are asking for the book budget restored.
- Jeanette Haines gave historical context stating that in 2013 a donation of \$15,000 was received by the Library and that books purchased with this money have been carefully selected and presented to the Library Board by the Librarians. Some funds still exist within this donation.
- Ann Lewis, Singleton Road stated she is opposed to cutting the library budget. She asks for no cuts to the book budget as it shows a lack of appreciation to the donor.
- Adele Swart, Tower Hill Road, stated that the library is a vital, active and welcoming place and that cuts will tragically affect the children's programs at the library.
- Will Hooper, Bedlam Road spoke on behalf of the school stating that further cuts would not be supported.
- Kity Lashay, Tower Hill Road, stated that she will not vote for the budget if the book money is not restored.
- Adelaide Northrop, Chaplin Poet Laureate, can't imagine a town without a library.
- Henry Swart, Tower Hill Road, stated that the gift to the library was never intended to be used for the Town budget. Th gift was clearly intended to enhance the library, not to pick up the slack for the Town budget.
- Jaclyn Chancey, Bedlam Road, Board of Education Chair, gave her thanks to all who have worked on the budget and stated that there is no more room for further cuts at the school. She stated that other Town

entities are not being asked to lay off employees or ration materials and that all should share the pain of the budget cuts.

- Irene Schein, Miller Road, stated that spending \$27,000 per student sounds exorbitant and that a small town like Chaplin cannot go on like this. Perhaps the students will need to go somewhere else.
- Johanne Philbrick, Chaplin Street, stated that people did not vote against the budget because of the library or school. They voted against it due to the property revaluation and the taxes that resulted. She stated that the Board of Finance and Town Officials are not attacking the real problem.
- Nicole Mott, Phoenixville Road, stated that there has never been a 6:1 ratio of students to teachers and that we shouldn't have to send our kids to school out of town.
- Ellen Dylan, S. Bear Hill Road stated that the discussion keeps going around and around and a budget must be passed. The school population is declining, and she supports our school, however, the town will have to face reality in the future.
- Allyssa Browning Grey stated that she does not see the school population declining and that there are laws dictating ratios of students especially in early childhood. She stated that there is currently a waiting list for Pre-K program.
- Juan Roman, Singleton Road, Chaplin First Selectman stated that the Board of Finance put together a good budget from the beginning. It failed as did the second proposed budget therefore more cuts were made. The Board of Finance is not looking to cut the school's budget or the library budget. They are trying to listen to the people of the Town who are saying they don't want to pay this kind of money. The budget will continue to be cut if it keeps being voted down.
- Will Hooper asked if he would be able to respond to another person's stated concern. The request was denied by Chair Weingart to avoid the session becoming like social media.
- Dick Weingart stated that the Board of Finance has a better sense of the school's needs and activity since the implementation of new policies for the Board of Finance and the Board of Education to follow. Communication and information have been enhanced and the BOF has a much better sense of how the Board of Education functions.

6. Guests: None

7. Additions or changes to the agenda: None permitted.

8. Reports:

a. Board Member Reports: Dick Weingart stated that the BOF would like to get information about the budget process out to more people. He will be creating a document with frequently asked questions and their answers. Questions can always be addressed to the Board of Finance email Bofinance@chaplinct.org.

b. Staff Reports: None

9. Correspondence:

The Board of Finance received the following emails:

- Email from Keely Macalister asked the BOF to reconsider cuts to the Elementary School, the Library and the Fire Department for the health, education and safety of all.
- Letter from Amelia Nelson outlining her position as a paraprofessional and asked the BOF to consider the impact on the livelihood of two employees that these cuts could affect.
- Email from Amie Kraemer stated that she is one of two paraprofessionals facing termination due to the proposed budget cuts and expressed concern for the children at the school that her position supports and urged that the proposed revised budget of the July 17th referendum be voted on once again.

- Email from Penny Boomer, a 26-year paraprofessional with the Chaplin School system, stated that she has never seen the school subjected to this level of financial squeeze. She cannot support a budget that demands this level of cuts to education.
- Email from Laura Anderson stating that the latest proposed cuts to the school budget will have deleterious effects on the ability to provide a fair education and that she will not vote to support a budget with these cuts.

10. FY 2024-25 Budget Workshop:

- Finalize budget reductions from the revised July budget:** Chair Dick Weingart stated that the budget proposal to be presented is a starting point for the Board of Finance’s consideration. Taking the resident’s displeasure with taxes into account, the Board of Finance chose not to resubmit the previously revised budget proposal from the July 17th referendum. Radical reductions were the result, and the Board of Finance has given substantial consideration to all of the resulting responses.
- Calculate the impact of finalized budget reductions on median tax bill:** D Weingart presented a spread sheet from the expense summary page outlining the further reductions. J Ruffini asked for clarification about the numbers to be presented and if they were the budget numbers with cuts which were proposed to agencies or if it is the revised budget previously voted on. D. Weingart responded that it is neither. The budget about to be presented restores many of the reductions and will show a reduction in the mill rate and budget. The reductions/changes being proposed at this meeting include General Government (\$ 4,000 reduction), employee benefits (changed to add), Public Works (\$27,000 reduction which includes the elimination of \$22, 000 in diesel fuel costs), Recreation (\$2,000 reduction), sanitation (\$ 3,000 reduction), tax collector (\$5,000 reduction), Town Clerk (\$1,000 reduction) and transfer station (\$5,000 total in reductions).

These numbers reflect a decrease of \$ 67,000 from last year’s budget (FY 2023-2024). The total Town Government Budget presented tonight is \$ 2,180,158 and is \$187,000 less than FY 2023-2024. The loss of the Resident State Trooper presented a reduction of \$170,000, however, there have been changed circumstances since the initial May budget proposal and that money was used to address these changes. The numbers presented this evening reflects the current situations and what is known today. D Weingart addressed the question of how a Town functions without an approved budget and explained that, by State statute, the last fiscal year’s budget rolls over into the current year, therefore the Town is currently operating on a budget which is \$187,000 more than what is currently proposed. The education budget proposed this evening has been reduced by another \$12,500 which was done in a good faith effort for the citizens who needed to see further cuts.

Taking the already passed Parish Hill Budget into account, the resulting total combined budget proposed is \$9, 841, 817 which is \$192, 059 less than FY 2023-2024.

- Consider and act on Board of Education/CES budget.**
- Consider and act on Town Government budget**
- Consider and act on combined Town Government, Board of Education and RSD11 budget for FY 2024-25. Peter Haines made a MOTION to accept the combined FY 2024-2025 Town Government and Board of Education budget in the amount of \$9,841,817. Victor Boomer seconded the MOTION. Discussion:** Bill Jenkins asked what the difference is from this proposed number to that of the failed proposal. D Weingart responded: \$61, 269. J Rufini asked if the Motor Vehicle Mill Rate would remain at 29.95. Answer: No. The mill rate goes across the board. J Rufini stated that there is little the Board can do and there is not a lot to cut. He does not agree with the restoration of funds to the library, but they did make a good showing. Taxpayers were looking for cuts and the BOF was in a tough position. He feels that sustainability for this is questionable. He said a good effort was made and that he will support it, but the Town must begin to look at revenue differently. P Haines commented that last year’s Mill Rate was 35.5 and we are now contemplating a 29.7 mill rate. He said we have tried to

maintain what we have without losing everything. Linda Carron commented that she will support this but would rather see the whole education budget put back in. She stated that they made their initial \$70,000 cuts and would like to see it put back in, but she will support this in the spirit of compromise. Victor Boomer stated that he would like the Town to investigate further grant funding. ***The MOTION carried with the following vote: YES: Victor Boomer, Linda Carron, Peter Haines, Jeremiah Rufini, Dick Weingart. NO: Bill Jenkins. ABSTENTIONS: None.***

f. Consider and act on budget letter to be published with the revised budget: D Weingart asked the Board for recommendations to be included in the Budget Letter in addition to publicizing the budget reductions. P Haines suggested the possible new mill rate of 29.7 be publicized. D Weingart explained that, had the budget passed during the first referendum, the BOF would be responsible for setting the mill rate. Given the budget failure, in accordance with State statutes, the BOS with the recommendation of the BOF set the Mill Rate at 29.95 to ensure funding for operations. The Connecticut Office of Policy Management (OPM) has a policy which states that the Mill Rate set by the Board of Selectman is the Mill Rate for the year. The Board of Finance does not get to set a new Mill Rate. An ongoing conversation is currently occurring between the BOF, the BOS, the Town attorney and the Tax Collector regarding how to adjust for the .25 difference in the Mill Rates. The prevalent opinion is to calculate the difference in revenue between the two mill rates (if approved) and put the funds in a special account to be used to defray next year's taxes. D Weingart stated that, in the interest of full disclosure, this is different than what was said in earlier meetings and different in what was posted on the website. J Rufini asked if the reduction in the Mill Rate would still be going back. D Weingart responded the attorney's' opinions are iron clad that the funds be carried forward and put in a special fund. B Jenkins asked if the money can be returned directly to the taxpayer. D Weingart stated that one of the complications in doing that is that 62% of homeowners have their taxes scrolled and banks are not always good about making changes. He said it may ultimately be a Board of Selectman decision. B Jenkins stated that he feels strongly that taxpayers who have overpaid should receive a refund. J Roman stated that this can be explored with the Tax Collector, Lisa Madden. J Rufini asked if a meeting to set the Mill Rate by the Board of Finance will still take place on the day after the referendum. D Weingart stated that these issues should be sorted out first.

g. None

h. Review of BOF calendar & schedule:

a. Monday, September 9, 2024: Regular Meeting @ 7:00 PM (Town Hall)

b. Tuesday, September 17 2024 Town Budget referendum @ Firehouse- Noon to 8:00 PM

c. Monday, October 7 2024 Regular Meeting @ 7:00 PM (Town Hall)

11. Second Audience for Citizens. (Note: 10 minutes total time. Limited to agenda items & subject to Chair's discretion:

- Will Hooper- anyone with questions regarding the Board of Education budget can see him after the meeting.
- Adelaide Northrop – thanked all who worked so hard on this budget.
- Nicole Mott – the date of the referendum needs to be publicized better
- Jaclyn Chancy – suggested the reminder that the Algonquin source of revenue has diminished through the years be included in the Budget Letter. She also stated that she wished to correct the misinformation presented that the school population is diminishing. She stated the school population has held steady at around 150 students for years now.
- Alyssa Browning Grey – perhaps highlight the reduction in MV taxes in the Budget Letter.
- Ryan Perry, Singleton Road – objects to the taxpayers not receiving a refund. The option of a taxpayer requesting a refund in writing was mentioned at the joint BOF/BOS meeting. He asked what the incentive would be for the taxpayer to vote on this budget if refunds are not provided.

Motion to adjourn (8:11 PM) made by Jeremiah Rufini, seconded by Linda Caron and carried unanimously.

***Respectfully submitted by Susan Welshman
Administrative Assistant to the First Selectman***