

TOWN OF COLCHESTER

BUDGET WORKSHOPS - WEEK 2 IN REVIEW

Many citizens were in attendance for the Board of Finance (BOF) Public Budget Forum on Monday night.

Those present spoke in favor of restoring the 242K of reductions made by Board of Education (BOE) at their 2/17 meeting. One citizen spoke in support of the C3 (Collaborative for Colchester's Children) and urge the boards to continue to fund the program.

One Citizen commented that most Towns were experiencing declining enrollment and asked what the BOE budgets of other towns were. Chairman, Rob Tarlov reported that he was continuing to do research on declining enrollment and that almost all of the towns he had already checked had declining enrollment, and with about 70 of the 169 towns reporting so far this year, Granby was at 0%, like Colchester, although they were at +2.39% last year compared to Colchester at +0.34%. He reported that only one other town was below 1% and most ranged from +2% to +5% with several in the 5 - 6% range.

No one commented on the Town budget.

The BOF then adjourned to the Budget workshop and began with a review of the Town. The largest increases in the Town Budget are funding for the Capital Plan (up 286K), Health Insurance (+222.8K), Road Maintenance (+100K), or about 609K of the 676K increase. The First Selectman, Art Shilosky was asked what he would cut if asked to reduce the budget by 50K, without reducing roads, capital or C3. The insurance cannot be reduced. The CFO stated that the rest of the increases don't come to 50K. Art stated that he wasn't sure what he could cut to arrive at 50K as other new initiatives and discretionary increases in service levels did not add up to that number. Questions were asked about the additional \$12K for seeding of the Rec Fields (in addition to the \$16K in last year's budget). Will this additional expenditure make a difference, or would it simply be wasted due to the fields' overuse? The Publics Works Director felt there was a plan in place that would make a difference with the use of the additional money.

It was decided that BOF would come back to the Town budget after reviewing the Schools Budget. The Board then went on to discuss the School's budget. Rob Esteve stated that although he had advocated for a 0% budget, after hearing the many comments about restoring the BOE reduction, and with no one speaking against, he would be in favor of restoring part of the 242K. Tom Kane and James McNair agreed.

Andreas Bisbikos stated even though no one had spoken against the increase that when he was campaigning last fall he heard many people that were hurting and needing relief and that the BOE budget should remain at 0%

Rob Tarlov stated that he had also pushed the BOE hard for 0% and had come to last week's meetings expecting to hold on that number. He said that, although he would like to have seen more numbers in the BOE presentation for the public, he had researched the numbers himself, and felt that the Board of Ed presentation had explained the reasons that the certified personnel reductions were not as highly correlated to declining enrollment as he would have expected. He stated that

over the last 3 meeting nights, many citizens had spoken in favor of increasing the budget above 0% and none had spoken against it. He had gotten one letter from a citizen who thought the schools needed additional funding, but that was because he was concerned with the budget passing and said he felt a 0% was needed for that. Another person that Rob spoke to said he couldn't comment on the 0%, but would like to see the per pupil cost increase stay at 3% or below. Rob stated that the Board has been asking for people to come out and express their opinions, and with so many coming out and speaking about increasing the budget, he needed to listen and not dig his heels in at 0%. He stated that there were items in the 242K that he did not feel needed to be restored. Technology Equipment would be still be purchased as notification of a grant was received on 1/29. The part time facilities position was no longer needed as the work was being transitioned to other employees. Rob thought that those that had spoken were concerned with the reduction in staff and the need for more special education positions, and that restoring 100K of the 242K, would provide enough funding for the BOE to consider those changes. The majority of the Board of Finance agreed. This increase in the schools budget put the schools budget increase at +0.25% with the impact on the mill rate at -0.14 mills, or -0.68%.

Rob Tarlov stated that he would like to see the total budget increase under 1%. He stated that 72% of the survey respondents said they would accept a budget increase greater than 0%, 53% said they would accept a budget increase greater than 1%. He is hoping that by being under 1% that a good portion of the ones between 0 and 1% would join those above 1% to pass the budget. To do this, the combined change needed to be about +50,000.

Chairman Tarlov proposed a reduction of the 100K increase in the Road Maintenance item by 50K. The maintenance plan had called for another 50K for the next year, but Mr. Tarlov had asked Art to increase the roads budget by another 50K above the plan because the plan had been reduced in 2014/2015 because overspending in the Snow Budget. Mr. Tarlov went on to state that subsequently he had received the Town Audit for that year and saw that due to FEMA reimbursement for the snow and some other modest underspending, that the budget was underspent by 77,000 that year, with that money now in Unassigned Fund Balance. He stated that as that money was originally intended for Road Maintenance, that we should use the money now in the General Fund to keep the plan on target rather than increase the budget. The Board agreed and remove his requested increase from Road budget. The BOF agreed and the Town budget was reduced by 50K.

These combined changes would result in a net mil rate increase of about 0.29 mills or +.94%.

The revisions in the budget schedule were discussed. On March 16, the Board of Finance will approve the budget that will go to the public hearings on April 4 and 5th. At either the April 6 or April 20 BOF Meeting a decision will be made on the budget that will go to Town Meeting. The Board of Selectman will vote on 4/21 to set the Town Meeting date, with May 3 as the proposed date and with a referendum to be set at the Town Meeting, potentially for May 10.

In the final Citizens Comments, 2 citizens comments that they were disappointed that the BOF had increased the school budget. One asked Rob T to confirm that he had previously said the school had net reductions in several large items of 800K and now were adding 100K on to that. Rob confirmed and stated that the amount he had previously stated was 2% of the budget with most going to contractual increases.

Another citizen asked what the increase would mean to the average homeowner. Rob T stated that the Town would be doing the tax calculator and tax charts again this year, but he estimated for the average home assessment of 152K (70% of the market value) the increase would be about \$45 per year. For a car assessed at 15K, about \$4 to \$5 per year.

Budget information will be posted on the Town Web site as it becomes available;

http://www.colchesterct.gov/Pages/ColchesterCT_WebDocs/Popularlinks/Budget/budgethomepage

Robert Tarlov

Chairman, Colchester Board of Finance

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