



Town of Colchester, Connecticut

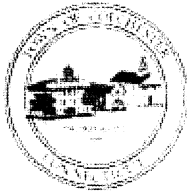
127 Norwich Avenue, Colchester, Connecticut 06415

Bernie Dennler, First Selectman

**Board of Finance
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 13, 2023 @ 7:00 PM
Hybrid: Town Hall – Meeting Room 1 & Via Zoom**

RECEIVED
COLCHESTER, CT
2023 DEC 20 AM 8:19
Michele Furrman
GAILE FURMAN
TOWN CLERK

1. Call to order and Roll Call
 - a. John Thomas (acting Chairperson), called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM
 - b. BOF Members Present: John Thomas (BOF acting Chair), Scott Chapman, Tim Vaillancourt, Mike Hayes, Mike Egan, Karen Belding
 - c. BOF Members absent: none
 - d. Others present: Bernie Dennler (First Selectman), Michele Wyatt (Tax Collector), Steven Hoffman (Fire Chief)
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Correspondence
 - a. None
4. Citizens Comments
 - a. None
5. Election of Officers
 - a. J. Thomas calls for the election of officers
 - b. Motion by: M. Egan
 - i. Motion to nominate Scott Chapman as Chairperson
 - ii. Second: M. Hayes
 - iii. Discussion: None
 - iv. Roll call: 5 ayes, 1 abstain
 - v. Vote: motion carried
 - c. Motion by: S. Chapman
 - i. Motion to nominate Mike Egan as Vice Chairperson
 - ii. Second: K. Belding
 - iii. Discussion: None
 - iv. Roll call: 5 ayes, 1 abstain
 - v. Vote: motion carried
 - d. Introduction of members
 - i. John Thomas - going on 3rd year on the BOF, been here for 8 years in town
 - ii. Tim Vaillancourt - elected 3 years ago to BOF, been in town for 26 years
 - iii. Karen Belding - elected this year, been in town for 14 years
 - iv. Scott Chapman - newly elected to the board this year, been in town for 11 years
 - v. Mike Hayes - 4th year on the board
 - vi. Mike Egan - on BOF for 6 years, in town since 1994
6. Additions and Deletions to the Agenda
 - a. None
7. Discuss and act on 2024 Calendar
 - a. See copy officially submitted on BOF website
8. Department Reports



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a. Finance Department

i. See materials attached with meeting invitation and agenda on website

ii. Expenditure report

1. S. Chapman indicates that there are questions or clarifications that would be good, but Finance Department head not present to answer.
2. B. Dennler asks for specifics he get help get addressed.
3. S. Chapman
4. M. Egan compared to September – noticed differences in encumbrances and potential changes in how handled between September and November. Noted that Finance department % is concerning - line 401105 looks like it is temp employees helping with audit. Also looks like resource brought back might be showing up as unexpected town employee spend which is why that is over. Also, looking at overtime and noted it would be good to understand what the cause is for those. Workers comp and insurance are over, but potentially the quote for budget just doesn't align to real eventual numbers. All things that most likely have realistic reasons, but getting answers would be good.
5. T. Vaillancourt asked to confirm with M. Egan if resource that was brought back is on as a town employee versus a temp. M. Egan believes that is the case, but Finance Department head should confirm. B. Dennler does believe that this is the case for how that resource shows up in the line items, but will confirm. Also noted that the Finance Department projections – OPM status meeting on audit – the OPM resource advised that our town is in serious situation from their perspective if town does not correct behavior and town needs to marshal all resources to complete the tasks for the state, so the resource cost related to getting the audit done is necessary and we'll have to figure out how to make the budget work.
6. B. Dennler now met with all department heads and has heard from many that there are concerns on going over budget this year. Looking to BOF to work cohesively to figure out how to address those situations. Will bring forward all the department heads in a joint meeting to discuss prior to budget season for the next year beginning. Notes it may be possible that some departments are in better shape than believes due to other factors, but need to confirm with each department head and review projections. S. Chapman confirmed BOF can and will be active participants in that recommended actions.
7. T. Vaillancourt asked if staffing issue in Public Works is resolved since it has been open for quite a while. B. Dennler confirmed a number of vacancies have been filled and it is approaching full capacity now. Goal is also to retain staff, which the newly approved collective bargaining agreement with wage adjustments will help. Further notes that this wage adjustment will also show an increase for that department in next year budget, but gets town in line with other communities.
8. M. Hayes noted Public Works building related expenses seem high after recent renovations. B. Dennler confirmed that this was in reference to line item 13205. B. Dennler cannot explain at present since incurred before he was in office, but will get information from Public Works.



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9. M. Hayes asking why Road Improvements is not showing any expenditure so far this year after work was done to add funds to that line item due to work needed. B. Dennler to bring information forward from Public Works director.
10. K. Belding asked that when deeper discussions happen that information could be given around line items where there were \$0 budgeted, but now there is spend.

iii. Revenues

1. No questions or discussion

b. Tax Department

- i. M. Wyatt delivered report: collection rate at end of Nov is 59.32% – high for this time of year; second installment went out in October; more accurate trending in Dec/Jan. Tax bills due Jan 1, delinquent Feb 1. Motor vehicle supplement bills in mail next week – Jan 1 due, delinquent on Feb 1. Noted that there have been snow storms on Feb 1 in the past – so be sure to stamp or postmark or drop off payments before that date and plan in case of weather. Department is fully staffed.
- ii. K. Belding asked Michele if she has particular concerns in process this year. M. Wyatt noted that after referendum – choice was made to put due dates on taxes in the middle of the month instead of start of the month and this has caused a lot of negative feedback and confusion in taxpayers. Group rehashed why the dates were middle of the month last time. M. Egan noted that the feedback has been heard and will be taken into account with planning.
- iii. M. Wyatt also noted that in past prior iterations of BOF approached her to adjust targets on delinquencies or collection timelines to impact numbers in fiscal years. K. Belding asked to clarify what exactly she is saying she would do if BOF approached and M. Wyatt detailed that she would run projections differently on what is due to come in when, which will lead to delinquencies, etc, which can then be applied differently between fiscal years and impact mill rate calculations. M. Hayes further clarified that this essentially alters revenue in fiscal years and confirmed it can be part of budget discussions. M. Egan confirmed that talking to not only Tax Collector but other department areas about these kinds of adjustments will occur as part of budgeting (revenue, trending, etc).
- iv. J. Thomas asked what M. Wyatt thinks December will bring in – M. Wyatt says about \$20k as an estimation. J. Thomas who set the \$400k number – M. Wyatt says John C. set that number, although should have been her job to estimate the delinquency number.

9. New Business

- a. Discuss and act on BOS recommendation for SCBA equipment purchase for the Fire Department
 - i. S. Chapman noted topic for discussion and invited Chief Hoffmann and FS Dennler to speak
 - ii. Chief Hoffmann: See materials attached with Agenda and meeting invite. Justification: old airpacks purchased in 2019, but unexpectedly not meeting requirements any longer, no longer getting upgrades or updates and not universal with other department equipment. Data logging for packs is not robust enough to meeting OSHA requirements. Current air packs cannot be purchased anymore and parts are going out of production soon. If current sets break, no way to replace. RIT packs for mutual aid had to be jury-rigged, but this is only a temporary fix. This proposal replaces all packs with ones that meet requirements and are compatible with other departments. Current vendor servicing is also not responsive and not getting packs back in service quickly enough. New packs also add new functionality – packs are trackable on computers, so



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their location is known by command. Noted that prior Chief assessed legal action against manufacturer, but cost not worth potential award in the break of agreement on old equipment. Noted that ask on the page takes into account money prior allocated to this item in budget, donation by volunteer organization, and the ask for funding before the board. Also noted that as of Jan 1, 2024, costs will go up 3-4%.

- iii. B. Dennler noted that ask is for supplemental appropriation of \$242,359; if approved, BOS will move forward with purchase. Does not need to go to town meeting or referendum because below threshold for that by supplemental appropriation. Charter states that supplemental appropriation is allocating funds not prior allocated in budget – so the prior allocated money (\$74k) does not get included in total and the money that is being directly paid by the volunteer fire department (\$150k) never reach the town so are not part of the total being appropriated (will be paid directly to vendor). Asked Chief what the quote process was – Chief confirmed using Sourcewell as a competitive bidding service, reviewed the available packs available from those bids, selected these packs and using the bid pricing.
- iv. S. Chapman asked if it is safe to say this vendor is solid and will not be in same situation again. Chief confirmed this vendor is well established.
- v. B. Dennler clarified that bid package and cost came in first and then the numbers were run to validate the donation and the amount already allocated and then the amount of the supplemental appropriation ask were determined – there was no work done to pre-determine a strategic value and back-trace what would be purchased to keep below a certain threshold.
- vi. J. Thomas acknowledged all the fire fighters in the room and thanked them for their service. Stated he will not stand in the way of safety. Questions: 1) timeframe to get new packs? (Chief said 3 months) 2) what other costs will come with the new packs? (Chief confirmed annual maintenance and other costs are built in) 3) previous chief bought packs that did not end up lasting as long as they were supposed to, how do we know we won't face that again with this vendor? (Chief stated that this vendor has been around for over a decade and are heavily investing in upgrades and advancements and are very standard to other towns in our state) 4) are these packs upgradable if things like masks get upgraded? (Chief indicated that they are adding options, not making current masks obsolete)
- vii. T. Vaillancourt thanked fire fighters for help with disabled family member and the respect with which that has always been done. Concurred that this is a no-brainer. Question: 1) was this considered for ARPA fund use (Chief confirmed parts of it were considered) 2) why are we doing this so quickly right now? (Chief confirmed that increase of 3-4% is one factor, but degradation of current equipment becoming more concerning more quickly now, too)
- viii. K. Belding thanked the chief for inviting the whole BOF and BOS to the recent training exercise for the department and taking the time to answer her questions and discuss the running of the department. Question: 1) Is the Sourcewell bidding firm a service that satisfies our requirement to RFP or bid this type of purchase and is there a precedent for using it? (Chief confirmed that Sourcewell is a typical municipal service that does the bidding work for towns and cities and confirmed that using this service is a standard practice for our town and others, too). B. Dennler expanded to say that if the town did not use this type of service, many more resources would need to be hired as procurement resources to do this type of work. 2) what is the relationship between town fire department and volunteer organization – budgets and money are separate,



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but equipment purchased would belong solely to the town fire company although it would be used by fire fighters from both? (Chief confirmed that volunteer group is a 501©3 organization so finances are completely separate, but the units work as one group and equipment is the property of the town)

- ix. M. Hayes noted that Chief Hoffmann has done a lot of work to advance this department with grants, purchases, process overhauls, etc. Noted that this board is 100% behind this department and him as the Chief. Chief Hoffmann noted that it's a team effort.
- x. M. Egan reiterated thanks for the department and volunteers again. Noted that plan is solid and well thought out. Noted that we do need to make sure we are implementing maintenance and upkeep actions for property and equipment, too. Called out that the motion or minutes should indicated what the 2% threshold that allows this to be allocated via this method.
- xi. Motion by: S. Chapman
 - 1. Motion to appropriate \$242,359 from unassigned fund balance (that is under the 2% threshold for town budget minus debt services and capital).
 - 2. Second: K. Belding
 - 3. Discussion: none
 - 4. Roll call: All in favor
 - 5. Vote: Motion carried

b. Liaison Assignments

- i. Review of current boards and commissions list (December 1, 2021 historic agenda)
- ii. Commission on aging, Parks and recreation, Board of Education, ARPA, Economic development, Youth first, Board of selectmen, Water and sewer
- iii. S. Chapman makes recommendation to carry this item over so board can reconsider which boards and commissions we need to cover and be prepared to make assignments.
- iv. K. Belding asked that list being created includes typical meeting day/times for consideration.

10. Old Business

- a. None

11. Liaison Reports

- a. Board of Education – M. Egan – business director, administrators, and BOE did meeting on Monday night to review the budget process to outline how it's developed, etc. S. Chapman will request the presentation from this meeting to provide to BOF as reference.

12. Citizens Comments

- a. None

13. Adjournment

- a. S. Chapman moves to adjourn; M. Egan seconds