

Correspondence for August 19th BOF Meeting

From: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>
Sent: Monday, July 27, 2020 8:51 PM
To: James McNair <jmcnair3@comcast.net>
Subject: Re: A stroll down memory lane

See *below*

Rob Tarlov, Chairman, Board of Finance
860-608-4293

From: James McNair <jmcnair3@comcast.net>
Sent: Saturday, July 25, 2020 5:22 AM
To: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>
Subject: A stroll down memory lane

Rob,

I'm doing an article of the history of charter revisions where important duty changes were put into the charter clarifications questions. In the case of the BoF, developing was removed and approved in 2017 and a letter of understanding to fix it approved in 2019. In between, I am fuzzy.

Was the BoF informed by the Charter commission developing was removed to clarify things? *No. Was not mentioned at the Charter Review meeting addressing Board of Finance that I attended, nor at the BOF meeting that Gregg LePage explained the changes as they pertained to BOF. At the public meeting and in the analysis of the changes the specific change in this section was not specified, it simply said technical correction.*

Were you ever told the logic of having it removed to clarify things? *They were told that the BOF did not really develop the budgets. The First Selectman develops the Town budget and the School and Admin and BOE develops the school budget. While that may be true, the word left in is "presenting" which we really don't do either. What we do is review and adjust the proposed budgets before sending them to a Town Meeting. Charter Review commission members stated that because the Charter states that BOF shall have all of the powers and perform all of the duties conferred or imposed upon Boards of Finance by the General Statutes that the removing one word had no significance.*

I know a legal opinion was rendered that stated the removal of developing did in act strip the BoF. *The legal opinion was based on flawed assumptions. He stated that the voters proactively and consciously reduced the powers of the BoF and turned them over to the BOS. He interviewed no one, reviewed no notes. The voter had no intent as no one was aware that the word was removed or at least did not believe that one word would fundamentally change the way we produced budgets for so long.*

I can't remember the reason or timing. Did Art read the approved Charter and expressed his concern it did? *That is what he said.* When was that 2018? 2019. *We went through an entire budget season with business as usual and with no one bringing up the change.*

Lastly, why did it take until 2019 to get a letter of understanding approved. *Because the issue was not brought up until early 2019. My first email to Art in reaction to a conversation we had was in early February and on February 20 the legal opinion was discussed at BOF. I don't see it in the minutes earlier than that. The draft of the MOU was created on 3/13.*

Again, the intent is not to open old wounds. Its to help the public understand the dangers of approving seemingly harmless questions. It also could lead to some type of reform where future Charter revisions will be required to have separate questions for the removal of commissions or change in Board or elected duties.

Be well,

James

From: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>
Sent: Sunday, July 26, 2020 8:41 AM
To: James McNair <jmcnair3@comcast.net>
Cc: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>
Subject: Re: Rob, maybe next year?

James,

Some of what I say below may not be shared by other Board members, so I am not speaking for the Board.

I think you can ask many people on what should be in the budget book and what should not, and you would get many opinions. Not sure this is very important to many people and to me not very relevant and I question why it is in the book at all.

As you point out, the steps also have impact, so only knowing the annual contractual increase without factoring in step increases does not tell the whole story. However, without knowing what the change in personnel has been, or will be, for each position from last year's budget, one cannot know the budget impact.

As Mary said, in many years you have contracts under negotiation and not settled when the budget is proposed. As you know, these are noted on the department pages and an estimate for those increases is accounted for in the HR budget.

Plus there are other factors. For example, this year, for the police department, you also had to factor in 3 promotions not in the 2019/2020 budget, and every year, on the school budget, teachers attaining 50% of a Masters, Masters and Phd must be factored in too.

For those contracts not under negotiation, the projected increases in regular payroll can be seen on the department pages. For instance, in looking at the Police Department I can see the dollar increase for regular payroll and can calculate the budget impact this year is 5.2%, which accounts for contractual increase, step increase, promotion, and changes in personnel. A breakdown by position can be seen on the following detail pages.

In putting together a budget book, there are limitations on how much detail can be added. A lot goes into creating a budget book which requires manual work. This must be balanced against how many taxpayers want this additional information, and if this information is available and accessible to them elsewhere.

The final budget book will be over 300 pages, it contains a lot of information, but it cannot contain everything. There are many towns whose books are comparable to ours, some with different information that I find useful for public communications, but there are many budget books with less than 100 pages, some with less than 50.

For me, it is more important that the Board of Finance has the information available in a timely and complete manner. As a BOF member the chart you reference does not help me with budget decisions. I wonder how many people other than you and me even realize it is in the book. If it was my decision, not sure I would include it at all, and if I did, rather than show the contractual increases, I would provide the link to the web page with the links to each contract (<https://www.colchesterct.gov/human-resources/pages/collective-bargaining-agreements>) for those interested in more in depth information.

Rob

Rob Tarlov, Chairman, Board of Finance
860-608-4293

From: James McNair <jmcnair3@comcast.net>

Sent: Saturday, July 18, 2020 6:08 AM

To: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>; Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>

Subject: RE: Rob, maybe next year?

Thanks for the reply. Let's see many others see it the same way. I'll be getting back to you.

From: [First Selectman](#)

Sent: Saturday, July 18, 2020 5:30 AM

Subject: Re: Rob, maybe next year?

I will jump in here to say all of the contracts, in their entirety, are posted on the town website. The step increases and the actual dollar amount are listed there. The budget book takes hours to put together. Sometimes, like this year, there is a contract still under negotiations when the budget is approved. This would prevent accurate information from being available. It seems that the best use of tax payer money and the most reliable means of providing correct info on this topic is to continue with the current set up. Just my two cents. Interested to hear Rob's thoughts
Mary

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From: James McNair <jmcnair3@comcast.net>

Sent: Saturday, July 18, 2020 5:11:24 AM

To: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>

Cc: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>

Subject: Rob, maybe next year?

Rob,

Just reviewed town budget. For years, I have bristled that we keep steps out of public light. For example, every year our adopted budget shows the following. In my opinion, it is one of the most misleading schedules. That is because it excludes the effective step increases that also impacts the wage increase. I won't even get into the additional impact of promotions. Maybe next year the taxpayers can be apprised of the additional impact of steps baked into the bargaining agreements? Rest assured more than me would see this of public value.

Just my two cents and thanks,

James McNair