



Town of Colchester, Connecticut

127 Norwich Avenue, Colchester, Connecticut 06415

Mary Bylone, First Selectman

AGENDA –BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING

Budget Workshop

June 24, 2021 – Zoom Meeting – 6:30 PM

BOF Members Present: Chairman R. Tarlov, B. Dennler, M. Egan, M. Hayes, A. Bisbikos, A. Migliaccio

Also Present: CFO M. Cosgrove, First Selectman M. Bylone, Acting First Selectman Rosemary Coyle and Sgt. Tim Edwards

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Tarlov called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Regular Meeting 06/16: B. Dennler motioned to approve the minutes 2nd by M. Hayes. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
3. CITIZENS' COMMENTS: A citizen stated their opinion on the budget that
4. CORRESPONDENCE: Attached
5. FIRE APPARATUS BONDING: M. Hayes motioned to approve the resolution that the Board of Finance recommends that the Town of Colchester appropriate \$4,500,000 and authorize borrowing in the same amount for costs related to the acquisition of Fire apparatus including three Engine Tanks, one Tanker, and on Tower Ladder. The appropriation may be spend for acquisition and equipment, legal fees, net interest on borrowing and other financing costs, and other expenses related to the project or its financing, 2nd by A. Bisbikos. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
6. TOWN BUDGET DISCUSSION: A. Bisbikos motioned to increase the ECS revenue projection by \$364,175; and PILOT revenue projection by \$52,317, 2nd B. Dennler. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
7. CITIZEN DISCUSSION: Citizens commented on the use of ARPA funds, the police positions and favor of the part time positions in the budget.
8. TOWN BUDGET DISCUSSION: B. Dennler motioned to raise the revenue in the budget coming from the unassigned fund balance by \$45,000, 2nd by M. Hayes. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

M. Hayes motioned to reduce the Public Works Highway budget by \$30,000, 2nd by A. Bisbikos. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

A Migliaccio motioned to reduce the overall budget by \$61,181, (amount budgeted for one of the two new police positions), through reductions of \$57,776 from the police budget, \$3,101 from Insurances and \$304 from Contingency, 2nd by M. Egan. MOTION CARRIED

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COLCHESTER, CT
2021 JUN 29 AM 8:36
Gayle Furean
TOWN CLERK

UNANIMOUSLY

9. CITIZEN DISCUSSION: Citizens commented on budget consensus.
10. TOWN BUDGET DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION: M. Hayes motioned to send the town budget to town meeting in the amount of \$15783341, 2nd M. Egan. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
11. CITIZENS' COMMENTS: None
12. ADJOURNMENT: A. Bisbikos motioned to adjourn at 9:12 p.m., 2nd by M. Egan. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

From: Adam Werner <wernea@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 21, 2021 7:20 AM
To: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>; Andreas Bisbikos <abisbikos@colchesterct.gov>
Subject: Fwd: Residents thoughts on budget vote

Dear Chairman Tarlov and the Board of Finance,

Over this past weekend I responded to the First Selectman's request for feedback from residents who voted against the budget. After giving it further thought, I feel it is important to also share that feedback with the Board of Finance. I am forwarding you my email to the First Selectman and encourage you to share it with the rest of the Board. I hope you find it useful as you continue the budget process.

Thank you for your time,
Adams Werner

----- Forwarded message -----

From: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>
Date: Sat, Jun 19, 2021, 9:47 AM
Subject: Re: Residents thoughts on budget vote
To: Adam Werner <wernea@gmail.com>

Hi Adam

I remember you and I appreciate you taking the time to provide these details. I read your email last night and it certainly aligned with a number of points I have heard from others. I do want to respond to some of your comments and I need a little time to make sure I gather my thoughts to be presented in a meaningful way. I will get back to you. I just wanted you to know I have read your email and I will respond.

Mary

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From: Adam Werner <wernea@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 18, 2021 6:56:17 PM
To: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>
Subject: Residents thoughts on budget vote

Dear First Selectman Bylone,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Adam Werner. You may recall that we spoke once before during your campaign. I am writing you today in regards to the recent budget referendum and your request for feedback from those who voted against the budget. I am one of the people in town who chose to vote for the BOE budget and vote against the town budget and I would like to share with you my reasoning.

First I would like to say, that I reluctantly voted to pass the BOE budget. My family is very involved in the Connecticut education system. My mother works as an elementary school TA, my aunt teaches kindergarten/special ed in an urban district in the state, and my partner is a middle school math teacher and will soon be moving from the classroom into administration in the district that he works. We often

discuss education issues, both the good and bad. Having heard their opinions about how education should work and how things work in their districts, I have come to the conclusion that in my opinion education in Colchester is mismanaged and that there are many ways in which it can be improved. I believe money could be spent more effectually and that the buildings and teachers could be used more effectively. Paralleling our current BOE budget to other districts to which I am familiar, the budget seems to be right in line when comparing districts of similar populations. That being said, it seems to me that our teacher salaries are quite a bit lower, this in turn is leading to missed opportunities when it comes to hiring and keeping the best teachers. It seems to me that the BOE budget is appropriate, but how it is being used may not be. These problems that I have listed can only be fixed by the BOE and the school administrators, not by taking away the money. That is why I chose to vote for this budget.

As for the town budget, there are a few reasons I could not vote to pass it. The first and most obvious reason being the tax increase. In all fairness, there are few reasons I would support a tax increase in any budget. I believe a tax increase is a quick and dirty way to fix overspending by putting the burden on hard working citizens of the town. We should be pushing for long term, sustainable revenue streams. The best way to do that is not to raise taxes, but to get more tax payers. It is slower and a lot more work convincing businesses to move to town and creating a place where people want to move (although, low taxes can be convincing), but it is the right way to raise revenue and create long term prosperity. On top of my personal opinions on taxes, we are still in the midst of this pandemic and people are still struggling. Now is not the time to be asking people to be paying more. There are many people out of work, who may be unable to pay their mortgage, who may be looking at foreclosure or may just barely be holding on to their home. They may have to choose whether to pay for their home or their groceries. If I was in this situation and I got my tax bill for my home which I am barely able to afford at the moment and I saw there was tax bill increase, it would be crushing, heartbreaking and demoralizing. Now is not the time to put more financial and emotional stress on people.

To add to that, I have heard your arguments on the subject of salary increases and in some ways I can understand where you are coming from. On the other hand I think it is a subject that has to be approached very delicately. I understand that raises for the First Selectman were decided on before the position was held by you, but again, if I was a property owner in this town who lost my job and cannot make ends meet, and I saw a tax increase, that gave you a raise, even a raise that you did not ask for, I could see myself having a lot of animosity towards you and towards town hall in general, the optics are very poor. On the subject of salary increases for other positions, I know you have said that some positions are underpaid compared to comparable positions in other towns and because of that we have trouble filling positions and keeping good people. I do understand that and it should be corrected at some point when we are all in a better situation. These positions have been underpaid for some time now; maybe they can be underpaid a little longer while residents work on getting themselves employed again and getting their lives back in order.

My final point has to do with last year's budget process. I am happy that the decision was made to adopt the previous year's budget since we were not able to have a referendum. My problem is what it took to get to that decision. The fact that the process started with the boards and your office trying to push through a budget with significant spending increases in a year where people were not going to be allowed to vote is abhorrent. It was not until a strong response of public discontent, that the decision was finally made to maintain the previous budget. This left a bad taste in my mouth and many others. It created a wedge of distrust between residents and town hall and it made people like me question yours and others authenticity when you (collectively) try to tell people what expenditures are absolutely essential and cannot be cut. When I see actions like that, I question whether town hall has residents best interests in mind or whether they're interests are to themselves, to unions, and to just a few influential people. From what I saw, this year's process was better but there still seemed to be instances

of poor unprofessional behavior from both sides of the aisle, from your office, from the BOF and from the BOS, and that does not build trust, and doesn't encourage me to support the budget.

Thank you for your time, I hope that you read this and it provides you with some insight into why I did not support the budget. I am sure there are other reasons people have but I am also sure that I am not the only one who feels the way that I do. I know there are opportunities to be involved in the process which I and apparently many other did not utilize. We could go to meetings, make public comment, contact your office or the boards, but with Covid, and the current political climate, most of us just do not want to. We have busy lives, we work, and we have families. In your video you said that you spoke to many people to come up with this budget, but you need to remember, many of the people who gave up time to speak with you during the process were mostly likely from the far ends of the political spectrum, they either really love you and your ideas or really don't, or they are people with a lot of free time, retirees and the like. It may have seemed like a lot of input, but it's apparent that the people you spoke with did not truly represent the diversity of people and their life situations here in Colchester.

Best regards,
Adam Werner

From: Mike D <dubreuil@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, June 17, 2021 6:49 PM

To: First Selectman <selectman@colchesterct.gov>

Cc: Robert Tarlov <BOFChair@colchesterct.gov>; Andreas Bisbikos <abisbikos@colchesterct.gov>; Taras Rudko <trudko@colchesterct.gov>; Jeff Burt <jburt@colchesterct.org>

Subject: Why I voted No: Education & Dirt

Hello Mary,

I am responding to your request for citizen comment on the recent budget votes. For some background information, my household income is approximately \$200k/year and I traditionally vote Republican. In the past election, I voted for you for First Selectman. In town, I volunteer as an assistant baseball coach on my son's minor league baseball team. For what it's worth- I'm fully vaccinated against COVID-19 with the Pfizer vaccine.

On the recent budget votes, I voted "no" for both budgets. I sympathize with citizens who wanted a zero increase due to the pandemic. However, the increase didn't affect how I voted; it was a principled "no" on both budgets. The Board of Education budget received a "no" and that had nothing to do with the budget, it was a rebuke of the Board of Education regarding their poor handling of the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19. The Town budget received a "no" because the budget isn't aligned with my vision for where the town should be spending money.

I voted no on the education budget because I have no confidence in the Board of Education. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed them as incapable of the leadership required to educate our children. In the early Fall I attended a Board of Education meeting. This was back when all students were learning remotely. There was no discussion about the current pandemic response or when/how to get children into the classroom. The only pandemic discussion pertained to "recovery" in the 2021+ school year; apparently after they have failed the students in the current school year.

It's important to note, Colchester started the school year in remote learning in contradiction of state guidelines. At that time, state guidelines and local health indicators supported full in-person learning. It wasn't made clear to the citizens that this was the case. I had to send a letter to the Superintendent/Board of Education in October that led to some in person learning starting in November.

Personally, as far as my beliefs in regards to COVID-19 safety, the best prevention was "if you are feeling ill you should stay home." I don't believe in mask wearing guidelines. If a person has an N95 mask and the proper training- they can prevent the spread of viruses. Indoor mask wearing with untrained individuals and cloth masks is public safety theater. At best, they limit the spread of viruses from people who continuously spit when they talk. Thankfully, few individuals actually do this. Outdoor mask wearing is for the insane.

In regards to mask wearing in the school system, there is a significant population who believe this helps control the spread of COVID-19; therefore, I reluctantly support policies for indoor mask wearing. The state guidelines on outdoor mask wearing were less clear- and almost deftly avoiding the topic. From a Colchester school system policy perspective, it would have been completely acceptable and reasonable to not require outdoor mask wearing. However, the school system chose the most aggressive mask wearing policy and required their use outdoors. Eventually state guidelines directly addressed outdoor mask wearing and did not recommend their use. The school system didn't immediately relax the outdoor mask wearing guidelines. The policy was only changed after I had sent a cease and desist letter to the Superintendent . Therefore the policy change wasn't punctual. To be fair to the Superintendent, I don't think he had realized the state guidelines had changed; but that begs the question, who in the school system was responsible for monitoring changes in state guidelines during an emergency?

It's important to consider how the school's mask wearing policy affects other organizations in town's mask wearing policies around children. For example, the Colchester Baseball & Softball League (CBSL) was essentially mirroring school policy in regards to mask wearing. This meant for the majority of the season, we were wearing masks outdoors while socially distanced. As an anecdote, our team would play baseball games in the town of Salem. The Salem players weren't wearing masks- their parents weren't wearing masks. The Colchester players/coaches were wearing masks because the CBSL/school wanted us wearing masks. The Salem folks thought we were crazy- "you're going to wear masks... outside?" Yes, it felt like I was participating in and endorsing an insane policy.

In my opinion, the Superintendent earns a "C+" in managing the 2020-2021 school year. I believe he is doing a reasonably decent job. I support him continuing in his position. I think he was put into an unfair position by the Board of Education who have absconded all leadership responsibility. There was a time during the school year that health indicators took a turn and a strict following of the state guidelines would have moved Colchester to remote learning. I commend him for continuing in-person learning during that time.

The Board of Education earns an "F"; I am embarrassed for them. Typically the board maintains a hands off approach to the day to day operation of the school system. I'm unsure why it hadn't occurred to them that during an emergency, when students are not in-school, they should take a more proactive role. For example, JJIS students were in school for half-days on Wednesdays to allow the classrooms to be cleaned. When the CDC removed recommendations for surface cleaning did the Board ask the Superintendent why the half days were kept? Do they care? This board has failed the students and

citizens spectacularly. I thank them for volunteering... I recommend they tender resignations so the citizens may have an opportunity to re-evaluate membership on the Board of Education.

Let's move to the town budget... I voted no on this budget because it lacks vision and clarity for a small rural community with minimal commercial development. If I wanted extravagant town services I would move to Glastonbury. However, currently I live in the rural community of Colchester. In Colchester, we fail to deliver the basics.

The basics will change for everyone. For me personally, the basics are: fire/emergency medical, public roads, education (covered above) and recreational fields.

Fire:

The fire department should be fully funded. Everyone in our town requires fire and emergency medical treatment. They need to be fully staffed and have modern equipment. The current fire apparatus emergency is completely irresponsible. It's unbelievable that we have a piece of fire equipment that is 38 years old. We should be trying to resell our used equipment; not donating them to a museum. I recommend we establish a program that replaces fire/emergency apparatus on a regular basis.

Public Roads:

I do not have a strong opinion on the town's performance in this area. I do think the construction on South Main Street could have been managed better.

Fields:

As I said above, I've been coaching baseball in town for several years. My biggest complaint is the town has failed to support the fields. We can't even get dirt!

This year I'm helping out players who play on Cody Camp at JJIS. I arrive an hour before every game to prepare the field. I grab a rake and attempt to groom the infield dirt. It's impossible because I'm scraping hard-pack. There's no professional grooming done so I'm also scraping grass along the first and third base lines.

As an anecdote, our non-mask wearing Salem friends, they have an absolutely beautiful field with gorgeous dirt. Check it out on Round Hill Road in Salem.

Now I'm hearing that we can't use the fields because they need to "rest". What exactly is the purpose of a recreational complex if the citizens can't engage in recreation on it? This is insane. Install irrigation systems in all Colchester fields. It's time the town actually supported the citizens who would like to utilize these outdoors areas. We're not asking for much- just some nice grass, dirt and occasional maintenance/upgrades.

Things I support eliminating from the town budget: any and all things that can be replaced by individuals engaging in free market activity or external non-profits. This would include: all youth services, all senior services, the library, etc.

I'm also not excited by minor salary increases. It serves as good partisan fodder but unfortunately distracts from actual issues. For example- the town failing at the basics.

The discussion on police services isn't aligned with reality. The reality is Colchester is a town with near

negligible violent crime (if it wasn't, people like me wouldn't live here.) Colchester does have an increase in personal property crime. To prevent that, some individuals advocate for an increased police budget. Those people are mistaken.

The average criminal is in-and-out of a property crime in minutes. It's not even clear that if we could have 24/7 sub-5 minute police response times it would actually deter property crime. Frankly, the increase in non-violent property crime is acceptable because in order to combat that activity we would likely need to massively increase the police budget (3-4x)... and maybe see a minor decrease in property crime. The cost/benefit proposition is just not realistic for a town with negligible violent crime.

That's my 5, maybe 10 cents... Thanks for reading.

Michael Dubreuil
180 Woodbine Road