

**Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing**  
**April 1, 2024**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**7:00 PM**

**Budget Committee members present:**

- Ephraim Dobbins, Chair
- Kathy Guilmette, Vice Chair
- Jack Cannon
- Charlotte Lister
- Ron McKinnon
- Rob Varsalone
- Beth Swanson

**Budget Committee members absent:**

- Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio
- Steve Couture, Selectboard Liaison

**Guests and members of the public present:**

- Debra Doda, Town Administrator
- Stephen O. Landau, Selectman
- Dick Trask, Selectman
- James Piper, Supervisor of Roads
- Phil Gladu, Fire Chief
- Chester PACT

**I. Meeting to Order**

Chair Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. Attendance**

**III. Selectboard Update**

There was no Selectboard update.

**IV. School Board Update**

Ms. Harris was not present to provide an update.

**V. New Business**

**a. Town Budget and Warrant Article Review**

Chair Dobbins reviewed the operating budget and Warrant Article review process. He noted the solar working group would like to present their Warrant Article to the Committee. In spite of it not involving an appropriation and the Committee not needing to make a recommendation, they would like to do a presentation anyway.

The Committee discussed the proposed salary increases. They recommended the Finance Director contract remain flat. They questioned the increase in the ZBA assistant's salary and it was explained that it is for additional hours/week. The Committee asked for justification for this.

52 They also questioned the increase in Transfer Station and Maintenance salaries. Town Ad-  
54 ministrator Deb Doda explained the Maintenance Director plans to retire this year and they  
56 are training his replacement. The Committee also discussed staffing needs in the Mainte-  
58 nance Department. They recommended reducing the salaries in the Transfer Department by  
\$10,000. Town Administrator Doda noted this salary line is underfunded in this year's  
budget.

60 Supervisor of Roads James Piper addressed questions posed at the last Budget Committee  
62 meeting regarding the equipment rental line in the Highway Department budget. The Com-  
64 mittee recommended reducing this line in light of the new equipment the Department poten-  
tially will obtain via Warrant Article. They also suggested lowering the salt line, which  
could be managed through the Winter Maintenance Fund.

66 The Committee discussed lowering the COLA from 4% to 2%. They also discussed the lon-  
68 gevity bonuses. Town Administrator Doda offered to redo the salaries with a 2% COLA and  
share this information with the Committee.

70 The Committee discussed the increase in heating system costs and why there is no Capital  
72 Reserve Fund for this in the CIP. Town Administrator Doda said there is a Warrant Article  
74 to add \$50,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance to the Municipal Capital Reserve Fund.  
Selectman Landau clarified the status of each boiler in the Town Office and Police Depart-  
ment. He also reviewed issues with leaks in the roof.

76 The Committee reviewed the Recreation budget and discussed the responsibilities of the Di-  
rector.

78 The Committee asked for clarification on a number of Warrant Articles, and Town Admin-  
80 istrator Doda, Selectman Landau, and Selectman Trask provided it. Fire Chief Gladu an-  
82 swered questions regarding the apparatus replacement fund and the associated Warrant Arti-  
cle. Supervisor of Roads Piper explained the equipment needs of the Department.

84 The Committee asked for clarification regarding the Unassigned Fund Balance and how it  
can be used.

86 **b. Budget Calendar**

88 The Committee agreed to change the next meeting to April 9, 2024.

90 **VI. Next Meeting Date - April 9, 2024**

92 **VII. Adjourn**

94 *Ms. Lister moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m. Ms. Guilmette seconded the motion. A*  
96 *vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.*

98 Respectfully submitted,  
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary