

Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
April 9, 2024
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:

Ephraim Dobbins, Chair
Charlotte Lister
Ron McKinnon
Rob Varsalone
Beth Swanson

Budget Committee members absent:

Kathy Guilmette, Vice Chair
Jack Cannon
Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio
Steve Couture, Selectboard Liaison

Guests and members of the public present:

Maria Veale, Solar Working Group
Ted Broadwater, Solar Working Group
Brent Richardson, Solar Working Group
Patrick Connelly, Solar Working Group
Debra Doda, Town Administrator
Chuck Myette, Selectman
Stephen O. Landau, Selectman
Dick Trask, Selectman
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. Minutes - March 18, 2024

Ms. Lister moved to approve the minutes from March 18, 2024, as written. Mr. McKinnon seconded the motion. A vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. New Business

a. Solar Working Group Presentation

The Solar Working Group presented their findings in response to a request from the Selectboard to recommend solar options to offset municipal electric costs and provide revenue to the Town. They assessed Town-owned properties to determine which site would generate the most revenue for the Town and issued an RFP to bid on the project. The Transfer Station site was determined to be the best option. They presented the results to the Selectboard, who voted in favor of presenting a Warrant Article. The project will take 18 to 24 months to complete.

They said this presents a cost savings to the Town of approximately \$2.5 million over 35 years.

The Committee commented on the report and made suggestions regarding ways to clarify it. They noted Town Counsel emphasized the need for the contract to include an escape clause. They discussed the ramifications of delaying this project and the associated ROI. The Committee suggested consulting the Town insurance supplier to clarify liability issues.

Selectman Trask commended the Group on the work they have done on this project.

b. Town Budget and Warrant Article Review

Chair Dobbins clarified items on the updated budget received from Town Administrator Debra Doda, which included changes suggested at the last Budget Committee meeting.

Regarding the hired equipment line, they agreed the Warrant Article should note that if it passes, this line would be reduced by \$25,000. They noted the budget is currently at approximately a 5.45% increase. The Committee also discussed the Tax Collector's salary and the Department budget, and Ms. Doda explained how this is derived.

The Committee discussed the logistical and financial challenges of hand-counting ballots as proposed in petitioned Warrant Articles. Ms. Doda explained what hand-counting ballots would entail. Selectman Myette noted Warrant Articles usually include the cost involved; petitioned Warrant Articles do not. The Committee discussed how to educate voters on the details involved with this proposal.

They also discussed the differences between a Town Meeting form of government and an SB2 form of government.

c. Budget Calendar

VII. Next Meeting Date - April 15, 2024

VIII. Adjourn

Mr. McKinnon moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:23 p.m. Ms. Swanson seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary