

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING AND BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2020 AT 6:30 P.M. VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (PER EXECUTIVE ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR OF CONNECTICUT)**

*Public access made available through live streaming on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4\\_xey3QjJmwe57R\\_6K94Dw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4_xey3QjJmwe57R_6K94Dw)  
Public comments accepted at [Comments@cheshirect.org](mailto:Comments@cheshirect.org) and by voice mail message at 203 271-6638. Video will be available on Channel 14 and on demand at [www.cheshirect.org](http://www.cheshirect.org) as soon as possible.*

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Timothy Slocum, Vice Chairman; David Borowy, James Jinks, Sylvia Nichols, Peter Talbot, David Veleber, Donald Walsh.  
Staff: Sean M. Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Asst. Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director; Beth Crowley, Library Director; Joan Pilarczyk, Director Arts Place.

Vice-Chairman Slocum called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**1. ROLL CALL**

The clerk called the roll and a quorum was determined to be present.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Slocum welcomed everyone to the special meeting for the FY 2020-2021 budget workshop.

Agenda item #5 was moved to current status on the agenda.

**5. Acceptance and appropriation of donations to the Human Services COVID-19 Assistance Program.**

MOTION by Mr. Borowy; seconded by Ms. Nichols

BE IT RESOLVED that the Town Council approves Resolution #050620-1

RESOLUTION #050620-1

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council accepts and approves the following donations totaling \$4,700 to the Human Services Gift Account for the COVID-19 Assistance Program:

Ron and Sharon Bergamo \$2,500  
Patricia Kochiss \$200  
Christopher and Noel Fletcher \$100

Denise White-Patterson and Johnny W. Patterson Jr. \$50  
Donald Byrne \$50  
Bruce Jacoby \$100  
William and Deborah Sherman \$100  
George and Susan Temme \$200  
Susan and Joel Chasen \$200  
Robert and Nancy Knapp \$1,000  
James and Marie Jinks \$200

Discussion

Mr. Slocum expressed appreciation to the donors for their generosity and encouraged people who can afford it to donate to the account. The donations total \$13,525 and will assist Cheshire residents in need during the pandemic.

VOTE            The motion passed unanimously by those present.

**3.      RECAP OF PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED BUDGET ITEMS**  
Postponed to Tuesday, May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Budget Committee Chairman Borowy noted that this meeting is the last one for department budget review. The Council will meet on May 12<sup>th</sup>, followed by a budget workshop and there will be a joint Council/Budget Committee meeting on May 13<sup>th</sup>.

**4.      PROPOSED 2020-2021 OPERATING BUDGET, ANNUAL CAPITAL BUDGET, FIVE YEAR EXPENDITURE PLAN**

**Library (tentative), Artsplace, and Public Works/Parks, Water Pollution Control, Public Property continued; other department reviews as necessary.**

**CHESHIRE PUBLIC LIBRARY, BETH CROWLEY, DIRECTOR**

Ms. Crowley thanked the Council for the opportunity to present the Library budget.

Ms. Crowley read the Mission Statement of the Cheshire Public Library into the record.

The background and operation of the Library were presented by Ms. Crowley.

Cheshire Public Library – The Library is open 62 hours a week, evenings, Saturday and Sunday, with less open hours during the summer months; four service desks are staffed each day in 3 to 4 hour or 2 to 4 hour shifts; Library materials and programs are provided free for people of all ages; 13 programs are held per week; the Library has 108,636 print and audiovisual materials and 60 digital collections.

FY 2018-2019 – 222,404 visits to the Library; 11,612 residents had a library card; materials were borrowed 359,027 times; 24,729 requests for information; 34,917 sessions logged on library WiFi and public computers; 669 programs held with attendance of 18,840 people.

Cheshire Public Library has more visits per capita, more circulation per capita and program attendance per capita than other similar towns; only 3% of residents borrow from other town libraries.

Programs – Revamped summer reading program had an increase of 106% with 457 students participating in grades K-6; the Library provides safe after school events for Dodd Middle School students on half days; 541 visits and deliveries were made to homebound patrons; 31 technology classes taught to 148 attendees, including outreach to the Senior Center and Beachport complex; ADA accessible scanner was installed; hosted four job recruitment tables for 2020 census; created a 3D virtual tour of Cheshire for the 325<sup>th</sup> Celebration Booth at Fall Festival; 36 virtual programs were viewed by 1,069 participants; 55 new library card registrations since March 13<sup>th</sup>; staff is assisting the Senior Center making wellness calls to Cheshire Seniors; live virtual programming for persons who cannot attend in person; help residents with job search help, computer and internet access, borrowing materials rather than buying, and attending free programs.

The Library supported creation of a successful new community group “On With Life” or O.W.L. for residents 60+ who have lost a spouse through death or divorce.

Fines – Ms. Crowley informed the Council on the plan to discontinue charging fines on overdue materials. The American Library Association passed a resolution encouraging libraries to eliminate fines, and many systems have done so as a social inequity and barrier to access.

In December 2019, the Cheshire Library Board approved a motion to support the library to become fine free, with final approval of the Town Council.

Ms. Crowley advised there is increased library use when fines are eliminated, and fine revenue is only 0.6% of the total budget. Fees will continue to be charged for lost or damaged items. With elimination of fines, Cheshire residents will have access to library services as they recover from the economic effects of COVID-19.

FY 2019-2020 – In this year, there was reallocation of money for print materials to digital; four (4) Zoom Pro accounts were purchased for virtual programming; more items need to be purchased ensuring social distancing and staff safety (masks, signs and physical barriers); \$5,700 in savings from non-salary lines and \$33,853.97 from salary lines; project of \$4,800 in loss of revenue.

FY 2020-2021 Budget

**Non-Salary** – 2.25% decrease; most line kept flat or decreased; moved Church parking lot rental fee to Public Property; Library Board budget reduced by 13.8%.

**Salary** – 2.45% increase; the increase over the budgeted 2% raise was due to minimum wage increase requirements.

Budget Committee Chairman Borowy thanked Ms. Crowley for the informative presentation. He commended staff for reaching out to senior citizens and the Cheshire community. He asked about replacement of books to keep current, how much savings there is with fewer materials going out there, and getting wear and tear.

According to Ms. Crowley there is a look at the length of library materials, and things being purchased now will last longer. The money in the materials budget pays for lost and damaged items replacement. Last year this line item was reduced by \$15,000, and is a place to make cuts. There is reimbursement from the Connecticut reimbursement for other towns borrowing Cheshire materials, and last year it was \$20,000.

Mr. Borowy said there could be wiggle room in the budget due to less replacement of materials. He asked about talking with other Librarians or town team if less hands on use is expected of materials, possible reduction of staff, redirecting staff to more on-line work, or savings with less library usage.

The Council was told by Ms. Crowley that people really want to get back to the library, get materials, and usage will not go down. There are 600 visits a day, and there may be an increase in usage of borrowing rather than purchasing books and materials, using digital content and other library resources.

Understanding the tough financial situation, Ms. Crowley will look at cuts in the library budget...it could be staff...non-union employees would be the first to be laid off versus union employees.

Ms. Crowley talked about “shelving” as a very important task in the library, the front-line people who meet patrons, get materials turned around quickly. She said it would be difficult to lose any of the library staff.

Mr. Slocum commended Ms. Crowley on the adaptations in the library accepted by the community, and the library serving the broadest population sector. He asked about the revenue generated from fines; and material growth and statistical information on the library becoming a social situation for many people...is it a recreational/education center.

Fine revenue is just under \$12,000 a year. Town Manager Kimball cited page 109 which shows revenue by department, and the library’s fine free revenue adjustment and it is down \$11,000.

Regarding the library as a social center, Ms. Crowley said this is a national trend being seen in library use, and it continues to rise. People are craving social interaction during the day, participation in the Zoom program to chat...as used to be done in the coffee shop or barber shop...people enjoying time together at educational, informational, cultural social offerings at the library without any cost or purchase required. There is interest in the craft program, teen room programs, and all library events and programs.

Mr. Walsh noted the salary increase nets out to \$23,000, and asked if this is due to change in staff positions.

This is a contractual increase and Ms. Crowley said it is also increase in the minimum wage requirement.

With regard to late fees, Mr. Walsh asked if other towns doing the elimination of fines see more materials being returned to the library...as opposed to fines adding up and never have materials returned.

Ms. Crowley said this has been her experience over the years...people cannot pay the fee and cannot bring back the materials.

Ms. Nichols cited her observations, the library as a wonderful place, and in the past there were social places to gather and talk...including the dump our outside the library building. The library is doing a spectacular job with activities for younger people, and she said we must be careful about salary increases and materials. The library is a great service with low impact to the taxpayers, without nickel and diming it too much, so that we are not providing a reasonably expected service. For the older residents, there is a disproportionate amount of money spent on things in which they cannot participate. The library is a place with services and programs in which they can participate.

Stating his agreement, Mr. Slocum said he is recognizing the library becoming a broader reach to the community with its benefits. The budget is all salaries and not much more.

The Council was informed by Ms. Crowley that the programming money comes from Friends of the Library, and is not in the budget. For every dollar Friends pays out we are giving back \$5 in services and materials...which is a good return on investment for residents.

Chairman Oris commended Ms. Crowley and the Library staff for all they are doing, providing more services than when he was a young kid, and summarizing why the community benefits from the services. He appreciated hearing about opportunities for people to go somewhere, interact with others without pressure to buy something, have a safe place to go, and get out of isolation.

With the impact of the ongoing pandemic on businesses and taxpayers, Mr. Oris said the reality is the library and other departments are labor intensive. The only way to provide a decent budget is with a zero mill rate increase with focus on the labor component. Mr. Oris and the Council is hopeful to get collaboration from all the labor groups to accomplish the zero mill rate increase...as no one wants to cut services. He noted that people move to Cheshire for the school system, senior center, library, athletics...and all play a major part in the value of the community and values of our homes. He hopes labor recognizes this and works with the Council to move forward with collaborative budget, which minimizes labor contracts in the next 12 to 24 months...with maintaining services to the community.

Budget Chairman Borowy thanked Ms. Crowley for the library presentation.

**ARTSPLACE – JOAN PILARCZYK, DIRECTOR**

Ms. Pilarczyk presented the Artsplace budget to the Town Council, and read the mission statement into the record. Arts is Fun!

Cheshire is the only municipality in the State of Connecticut to support the arts in the municipal budget.

**ArtsPlace** – is located at 1220 Waterbury Road since 2001.

Art classes started in January 1991 with 67 children and three (3) teachers;  
2019-20 – enrollment averages 350 students each session with 24+ professional fine artist instructors.

The presentation included quotes from Artsplace students about the importance of art in their lives and appreciation for Artsplace.

Friends of CPFA/Artsplace Inc. – Ms. Pilarczyk pointed out the importance of the Friends group and its support of Artsplace and its programming without the use of town tax dollars. The Friends started *Art Heals* over 17 years ago to provide art lessons to homebound adult residents; they recently printed the John Frederick Kensett activity book for Cheshire 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students; they sponsor free interactive ballet, theater performances, workshops and much more; the annual Author Event takes place each Fall featuring author talk and dinner.

Artsplace is an innovative partner with the community. CPFA distributes a total of \$2,500 in scholarships to CHS graduating students; art exhibits are held twice a year at the Cheshire Library; there is collaboration with the Historical Society.

Arts Day – is a successful program held at Cheshire Academy; it was not held in 2020. The day gives people the opportunity to make art, and donations are accepted for the Friends scholarship program.

COVID-19 Interruptions – Ms. Pilarczyk explained the impact of the pandemic on Artsplace. The last Monday classes of the winter season were cancelled; small refunds or credits to 50 students were completed; enrollment was halted and spring session cancelled requiring full refunds to 150 early registrants; it is most likely the six week summer session will be cancelled.

Revenue projections as of May 2020 – due to refunds to patrons, the current revenue is \$85,132; before the pandemic Artsplace was on track to produce revenue of \$125,000 this fiscal year.

Artsplace will develop and offer virtual art workshops with online registration for local, Connecticut and out of state students. There will be specialty workshops by the artists. Once successful, seven week classes will be offered in the same manner; there will be filming for a variety of age groups. Students will have to purchase their own supplies. Ms. Pilarczyk hopes to utilize both library and Artsplace staff for these programs.

The learning curve will work, and Ms. Pilarczyk said Artsplace will reopen.

Mr. Talbot thanked Ms. Pilarczyk for a good presentation and said he enjoyed reading the many quotes from students about Artsplace. He cited page 160, line item 5403 VT System Rectrac, \$3,165.

Ms. Pilarczyk agreed the cost was a huge jump, and explained this became cloud based. There was a question about Apex Technology handling some of this cost in their budget. She agreed it is a big increase.

Town Manager Kimball said he would check this out, as some systems are in the Apex budget. He will inform Council on the shared cost numbers.

Rental and Lease – Mr. Talbot asked about Cheshire Academy starting to charge for Arts Day space rental, noting the charge of \$600 in the budget.

Ms. Pilarczyk explained that a few years ago there was difficulty with people parking in fire lanes. The Academy asked for Arts Day to hire two of their security staff at \$450 a year, so Cheshire Police are no longer hired. This year Arts Day was cancelled; the Academy has \$225 of Artsplace money towards next year's day; there can be a reduction in this budget line item. The revised budget (from \$97,148) is \$89,080; this is minus \$8,000.

Looking at the total budget estimate of \$222,897 against a reduced revenue of \$85,000, Mr. Slocum said this means the operating budget without other adjustments was at \$138,000. The actual cost (after revisions) of Artsplace to the taxpayers is \$137,897. He said this is one of the highest percentages of costs borne by people willing to pay for art classes, is pleased people take advantage of the art programs, and revenue is produced against expenses.

In response to a question from Mr. Borowy about the flow of the revenue in this fiscal year or next fiscal year...Mr. Pilarczyk said revenue is unknown until workshops are rolled out and revenue comes in. The first class could be in this fiscal year.

Mr. Kimball pointed out that Artsplace is less dependent on summer revenue that goes from one fiscal year to the other.

Chairman Oris expressed appreciation to Artsplace on behalf of the Town Council and pride in supporting the arts, with Cheshire the only municipality to do this in their budget. There is a great return on investment; the classes almost pay for themselves; and he likes to see people of all ages working together in art classes and the library. Mr. Oris is confident everyone will do their part to get to the zero mill rate increase budget.

Mr. Walsh commended Ms. Pilarczyk and Ms. Crowley for their thinking outside the box, using the internet to figure out a way to reach more people. He asked about equipment on hand, or to be purchased, or town equipment available for the virtual classes to generate more revenue...or purchase of needed equipment.

According to Ms. Pilarczyk she needs I-pads (2) at \$300 each for the virtual programs. They are unavailable until September. For videotaping she has hired a professional who has the needed equipment.

For the online classes, Mr. Jinks asked about the estimated number of classes and students, and open to all ages.

There will be eight (8) students in each class, and Ms. Pilarczyk said they would be running consecutively...three (3) classes of eight (8) students for the same class. She is receiving messages from people interested in online classes, and they are well accepted in the art world. The first five (5) classes will be 90 minute workshops to include every age, and classes could be for 6 to 7 weeks.

Mr. Borowy thanked Ms. Pilarczyk for the great presentation.

## **6. Personnel negotiations, executive session, joint with Board Of Education.**

MOTION by Mr. Veleber; seconded by Mr. Borowy.

MOVED to enter Executive Session at 7:45 p.m. to include Town Council members, BOE members interested in attending, Town Manager Kimball, Asst.Town Manager Talbot, Supt. Solan, Mr. Masciana and Mr. Jaskot.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Mr. Borowy; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 p.m.

VOTE           The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk