

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2019 AT 7:00 P.M. IN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Robert J. Oris, Jr. Chairman; Paul A. Bowman, Vice Chairman; Jeffrey Falk, Patti Flynn-Harris, Sylvia Nichols, Thomas Ruocco, Timothy Slocum; Peter Talbot; David Veleber.
Staff: Sean Kimball, Town Manager; Arnett Talbot, Assistant Town Manager; James Jaskot, Finance Director
Dept. of Education – COO Vincent Masciana
BOE Members – Marlena Sobel

Chairman Oris opened the meeting at 7:02 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.

Chairman Oris opened the meeting to public comments on the FY 2019-2020 Operating Budget.

Marlena Sobel, 25 Flager Avenue, BOE Finance Committee Chairperson, read a prepared statement into the record. Ms. Sobel commented on the Town Council stating its support of the school system; keeping the taxes as low as possible with Council deciding on a budget number, and what the BOE should do with its budget; the BOE receiving only a 2.39% increase over the current year's budget; this increase unable to fund contractual obligations; BOE will have to trim in other areas of the budget. She asked where the BOE will find the money for what is needed in the school system...out of medical benefits, teacher retirements. She stated that the funding of the BOE budget for FY 19-20 does not show Council support of the school system. Ms. Sobel posed questions on the strategic plan for Cheshire in five years, things needed to be done for school modernization, and preparing for the worst while hoping for the best.

Jamie Ferguson, 105 Copper Beach Drive, stated her support for Ms. Sobel's remarks and the BOE budget. She attended many BOE Finance Committee meetings, and said community members and BOE members vetted the Superintendent's budget and observed the process of Council vetting the Town budget. Ms. Ferguson talked about Council picking a number for the mill rate which can be handled by all departments and BOE...and fitting into that number. She commented on the 30% ratio for the Town and 70% ratio for BOE, understands the fairness of this approach, does not believe it is the best approach for funding education in Cheshire, and recommends a new approach.

3. ADOPTION OF THE FY 2019-2020 GENERAL FUND OPERATING BUDGET.

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Ms. Nichols

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-1A

RESOLUTION #043019-1A
FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020 GENERAL FUND OPERATING BUDGET

A. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council appropriates the following amounts for the Town of Cheshire General Fund Operating Budget, for fiscal year 2019-2020:

General Government (excluding Employee Benefits and Police Department)	\$18,168,667
Debt Service	\$ 6,640,186
Contingency	\$ 125,000
Capital Non-Recurring Reserve	\$ 1,100,000
Teacher Pension Assessment	\$ 284,061

Discussion

Mr. Slocum stated his support of the Town Council's FY 2019-2020 operating budget. The proposed Town Manager's budget was \$115,585,211, a \$4,369,908 increase over FY 2018-2019. This proposed budget was reviewed and refined by the Council over a six-week period of budget workshops, and a revised budget is presented to Cheshire taxpayers. The Council's budget is set at \$114,157,877; increase of \$2,942,574, or 2.65%; new mill rate is 33.22 mills, 0.60 mill rate increase of 1.84%; and the proposed tax increase to the average taxpayer is \$179. Mr. Slocum commented on several personnel matters in the budget, addition of three (3) CPD Dispatchers, assessment to the Town of \$284,061 for the Teacher Pension Contribution, which will increase to over \$750,000 in two years. The BOE increase is 2.39% or \$1,712,885. Mr. Slocum expressed appreciation to the town employees who work together to make Cheshire a great place to live and prosper.

Ms. Nichols commented on the many Council budget meetings, discussions, questions and answers, analysis, and focus on the budget numbers without affecting town services. These meetings were open to the public and on television. She received many communications, especially about the BOE portion of the budget, and Council not supporting education by cutting the BOE budget...which is an unsubstantiated claim. Ms. Nichols noted the Council members attended BOE meetings, toured schools, dissected the entire operating budget, met with BOE and Town department heads over many weeks with many reductions in the amounts requested. She said it is discouraging to read conversations on social media platforms from people who have not sat at the budget meetings, or communicated directly with Council members or people directly charged with decision making. The overall job of the Council is to manage tax dollars for expected level of services; plan ahead for ongoing capital projects (including school renovation, consolidation and possible construction); and be aware of State

finances, increased sales tax on goods and services, funding of the teacher pension plan that is moving forward. Ms. Nichols said it will be up to Town and BOE staff and Town Council to recognize the reality of the current financial climate and attempt to maintain current services to the community. Ms. Nichols supports the budget as presented.

Mr. Falk has served on the Budget Committee two times as part of the process. He talked about it being difficult to look at the budget, Town and BOE increases, and decide where we want to be. He received input from citizens, and stated the Council is pro-education, and to sustain current services, the budget had to be set at a reasonable increase. The 0.60 mill rate increase is reasonable and fair, and he will support the budget as presented. Mr. Falk said there were some cuts in proposed budget increases, and looking forward to the next five years he sees deeper State reductions. He hopes to see a viable school master facilities plan, improvement of the schools and moving this project forward, along with grand list growth to offset taxes. In the BOE budget, there are two school psychologists cited as needed. In the Town budget there is a vacancy for Youth and Family Services Counselor which was left in the budget by the Town Manager. This position is funded because it is a necessity for the mental health of our youth...which is on the top of Mr. Falk's list due to ongoing substance abuse. He hopes the BOE keeps the third school psychologist in its budget, and works around its budget to make this possible. Mr. Falk thanked everyone who was part of the budget process, and he will support the budget.

Ms. Flynn-Harris said every year is a difficult year, and this year there is one huge issue to deal with, an unfunded mandate of the teacher pension payment, which will impact Cheshire now until forever. The FY 19-20 budget was a difficult budget, not the best, and wishes the BOE and every department could be given everything it asked for and wants. But, this cannot be done on her personal budget, and she can't do it for BOE and Town departments. There must be a balance and this is what the Council worked hard on during the budget process. Regarding the Council coming in with a preconceived decision on where it wants the budget to be, Ms. Flynn-Harris noted the Council has already been looking at the budget, and deals with "budget" on a weekly/monthly basis. Council reviews Finance Department figures, sees where the revenue is coming from, where revenues are lacking, where the Town is not getting paid...so by the time the budget cycle starts, Council knows what must be looked at, and impact on Cheshire's aging community. The presented budget is a balancing act; there was a fair budget process; there was less pain than in past budget years; the budget is fair and balanced. Ms. Flynn-Harris is pleased to be working with her fellow Councilors, Town and BOE staff, and she will support the budget.

Mr. Talbot expressed appreciation to Town Manager Kimball on his first budget and good job of working and walking with the Council through the process. He also thanked Ms. Talbot, Mr. Jaskot, Supt. Solan and Mr. Masciana, and their staff for guidance and work on the budget. This is his 8th budget, the decision does not get easier, but gets more difficult with more meetings this year. He does not like the budget and believes

his colleagues would not fully say it is an outstanding budget. Mr. Talbot received calls and e-mails about being too generous, and the process includes striking the delicate balance with funding and not removing services on the Town and BOE sides. He cited the future school modernization program, and being lean for a few years to be prepared for what is coming in the future...a tremendous hit and spike...similar to the treatment plant project. Mr. Talbot supports the budget and thanked Councilors for the way they handled themselves during the budget process.

Mr. Veleber thanked Mr. Kimball, Mr. Jaskot, Ms. Talbot, Supt. Solan, Mr. Masciana and Town and BOE staff for their hard work during the budget process. He would like a lower mill rate, but it's about balancing, keeping the Town and BOE budgets strong, and hedge against the future. There can be future State unfunded mandates, aid reductions and tax consequences which must be taken into consideration. Budget needs must be balanced; there is the teacher pension contribution to municipalities; there is the State's poor judgment and mismanagement which will deeply impact Cheshire. Mr. Veleber stated this budget does a good job of balancing the needs to keep municipal taxes as low as possible, while still providing the Town and schools with resources to continue the high level of quality services, resources and educational system the Cheshire community deserve and expect. He will support the budget after listening to testimony by Town and BOE staff, deliberating on their needs, and providing a quality education for our school students and Cheshire residents.

Mr. Bowman talked about future budgets, five (5) years ahead, and suggested shared combine services, purchasing, less duplication of Town and BOE services within departments, zero based budgeting, and many other things to be more effective. Mr. Bowman stated this is a difficult situation because of the State and the economy, inability to grow out of it with grand list growth, or tax perspective. It will take a lot of work and the process is not easy and few people are happy. If the BOE were granted all it requested over the last eight (8) years, Mr. Bowman pointed out Cheshire's mill rate would be the highest in the State. The Town wants to attract businesses to Cheshire, and businesses look at the mill rate, the cost to move to the community, available services and labor pool. The mill rate plays a large role in companies looking to relocate. Mr. Bowman will support the budget...and he thanked Mr. Kimball, Ms. Talbot, Mr. Jaskot, Supt. Solan, Mr. Masciana and Town and BOE staff for their work on the budget.

Mr. Ruocco stated that school redistricting and school closings should be looked at, and the teacher pension contribution costing the Town up to \$1M in a few years. This will require more efficient operations. The budget has more positions and position enhancements, costly contracts, union and non-union salary adjustments, all of which drive up the cost of government and the mill rate higher each year. In the U.S. Mr. Ruocco pointed out that Connecticut is in the top #3 for highest property taxes, and people are leaving the state because of higher costs. With the proposed budget, there is a higher mill rate affecting property taxes. On the State level there are proposed tolls, teacher pension contribution to towns, and after 14 budgets he has never seen it

more onerous for cities and towns and the impact on tax payers. Mr. Ruocco believes the budget could be lower and he will not support the budget.

Chairman Oris stated his work and votes speak for themselves during his tenure on the Council. This Council has worked hard to find a way to move the community forward in a strong and prosperous manner, and history shows his support of the school system with his votes. These are difficult times with the State, the teacher pension contribution of \$284,000 in the Town budget...which was not pushed onto the BOE this year. The budget process is a year long process, and the nine (9) Council members work hard all year long, listen to the voices of the community, think about what is coming forward on the state and national levels, and figure out how to keep Cheshire strong and prosperous. The Town wants to grow the grand list; state issues are real; and the Council works to make sure Cheshire is affordable, especially for fixed income residents. Mr. Oris pointed out that not everything can be funded; tough decisions have to be made, and Council, BOE and staff put in long hours, work to tighten belts, and make tough decisions. The Council does not take pride in slashing any of the budget requests, but works hard to do what is in the best interests of the community. November 2019 is election month, and residents elect people to represent them.

Mr. Oris has been Council Chairman for 2.5 terms, and has tried to lead the Council in a bi-partisan fashion so all nine Councilors have a meaningful seat at the table. The Councilors listen and make decisions in the best interests of the Town, have had an impact on the community, and this is important to him. Mr. Oris stated he is proud to serve with his fellow Town Council members, who impact the community in a positive way.

VOTE The motion passed 8-0-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed.

(Councilor Falk was recused from Resolution #043019-B)

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Ms. Nichols

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-1B

RESOLUTION #043019-1B

B. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council appropriates the amount of \$8,571,135 for the Employee Benefits portion of the General Government Budget and \$5,912,317 for the Police Department portion of the General Government Budget.

VOTE The motion passed 7-1-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed; Mr. Falk abstained.

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Ms. Flynn-Harris

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-1B

RESOLUTION #043019-1C, D, E

- C. BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council appropriates the amount of \$73,356,511 for the Board of Education Budget.
- D. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the sum or all revenues, transfers from Other funds and allocation of general fund equity for the fiscal year 2019-2020 Town of Cheshire General Fund Operating Budget will be in the amount of \$114,157,877, and
- E. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the tax rate be set at 33.22 mills which will Generate \$91,680,065 at a collection rate of 99.2% for fiscal year 2019-2020, and,

That the tax payments for motor vehicles and personal property shall all be due and payable in one payment on July 1, 2019; and

That real estate tax payments shall be paid in two equal payments with the first payment due on July 1, 2019 and the second payment due on January 1, 2020; and

That pursuant to Section 12-144 of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended, that any real estate tax bill on the 2018 grand list in an amount not in excess of \$100.00 shall be due and payable in a single installment on July 1, 2019; and

That pursuant to Sections 12-12 and 12-146 of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended, the last day for payment of taxes due July 1, 2019 will be August 1, 2019. Payment of taxes due July 1, 2019 which are received after August 1, 2019, will be assessed interest calculated from the original due date of July 1, 2019.

Also, that pursuant to Sections 12-142 and 12-146 of the Connecticut General Statutes, as amended, the last date for payment of taxes due January 1, 2020 will be February 1, 2020. Payment of taxes due January 1, 2020 which are received after February 1, 2020 will be assessed interest calculated from the due date of January 1, 2020.

Discussion

Mr. Slocum stated that the summary of the budget information will be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

Chairman Oris referenced the mill rate of 33.22 mills for the FY 19-20 budget. He mentioned the fact that business owners are concerned about mill rate and operating businesses in Cheshire. He commented on the importance of keeping a strong eye to attract economic development and businesses to the community based on the mill rate.

VOTE The motion passed 8-0-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed.

4. ADOPTION OF THE FY 2019-2020 WATER POLLUTION CONTROL DEPARTMENT FUND OPERATING BUDGET.

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Ms. Flynn-Harris.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-2

RESOLUTION #043019-2
WATER POLLUTION CONTROL FUND OPERATING BUDGET

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council appropriates the sum of \$4,439,832 for the Town of Cheshire Water Pollution Control Fund Operating Budget for fiscal year 2019-2020, and that the sum of revenues and allocation of Water Pollution Control Fund equity for the fiscal year 2019-2020 Town of Cheshire Water Pollution Control Fund Operating budget also be in the amount of \$4,439,832, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council recommends that the Water Pollution Control Authority consider setting the Sewer Use Charge at \$415 per year effective December 1, 2019.

Discussion

VOTE The motion passed 8-0-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed.

5. ADOPTION OF THE FY 2019-2020 COMMUNITY POOL FUND OPERATING BUDGET.

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Mr. Talbot

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-3

RESOLUTION #043019-3
COMMUNITY POOL FUND OPERATING BUDGET

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cheshire Town Council appropriates the sum of \$961,305 for the Town of Cheshire Community Pool Fund Operating Budget for fiscal year 2019-2020, and that the sum of revenues and transfers from other funds and allocation of Community Pool Fund equity for the fiscal year 2019-2020 Town of Cheshire Community Pool Fund Operating budget also be in the amount of \$961,304.

VOTE The motion passed 8-0-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed.

6. ACCEPTANCE AND APPROPRIATION OF A \$190,000 DONATION FROM ELIM PARK BAPTIST HOME INC. TO THE CHESHIRE POLICE DEPARTMENT GIFT ACCOUNT TO BE USED FOR GENERAL PURPOSES.

MOTION by Ms. Nichols, seconded by Mr. Talbot.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-4

RESOLUTION #043019-4

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council accepts and appropriates a \$190,000 donation from Elim Park to the Police Department Gift Account for general purposes.

Discussion

This is the annual donation from Elim Park to the CPD.

Regarding this donation, Mr. Ruocco asked if it is received every year, and if the gift account is depleted every year.

Mr. Kimball replied that, at the end of the year, there is usually use of all these funds.

If so, Mr. Ruocco suggested the CPD and CFD scale back on purchases, and let a balance build up in their gift accounts.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

7. ACCEPTANCE AND APPROPRIATION OF A \$190,000 DONATION FROM ELIM PARK BAPTIST HOME INC. TO THE CHESHIRE FIRE DEPARTMENT GIFT ACCOUNT TO BE USED FOR GENERAL PURPOSES.

MOTION by Ms. Nichols; seconded by Ms. Flynn-Harris.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-5

RESOLUTION #043019-5

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council accepts and appropriates a \$190,000 donation from Elim Park to the Fire Department Gift Account for general purposes.

Discussion

Mr. Veleber commented on the generous gifts from Elim Park for CPD and CFD purchases, and expressed appreciation for the donations.

Chairman Oris thanked Elim Park for the generous donations to CPD and CFD gift accounts, and their continued use of these funds for department needs. He noted that Elim Park receives and uses the Police and Fire services at their facility.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

**8. APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS TO JOB DESCRIPTIONS AS ACCEPTED
 IN THE FY 19-20 ADOPTED BUDGET.**

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Mr. Talbot.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-6

RESOLUTION #043019-6

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves the following amended job descriptions and reclassifications as accepted in the adopted FY 19-20 operating budget, as attached.

Union (as recommended by the Labor Management Committee)

- Program Supervisor (Youth Services)
- Assistant to the Fire Chief
- Administrative Assistant, Human Services
- Secretary, Fine Arts
- Head Desk Attendant, Cheshire Community Pool

Non-Union:

- Deputy Treasurer
- Budget Treasury Analyst

Discussion

Mr. Talbot cited the fact that the Personnel Committee looked at these recommendations, and he commended the Labor Management Committee for its work and finished product.

Mr. Ruocco stated these positions were referred back to the Budget Committee, not the Personnel Committee, for decision during the budget process.

Chairman Oris thanked the Labor Management Committee for its hard work, review of the positions, and recommendations which were reviewed by the Council in decision making.

VOTE The motion passed 8-0-1; Mr. Ruocco opposed.

9. APPROPRIATION OF TOWN CLERK SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS.

MOTION by Ms. Nichols; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council approves Resolution #043019-7

RESOLUTION #043019-7

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council appropriates the following amounts from the Town Clerk's Special Revenue funds as detailed below:

- \$40,000 from the Historic Preservation Fund for remodeling and installation of new floor in the Town Clerk's vault, and for the conversion of the 1780 to 1932 land indices to digital format;
- \$17,000 from the Community Investment Fund for a temporary, part-time 15 hour per week position in the Town Clerk's office;
- \$9,500 from the MERS Fund to purchase cabinets and for training.

Discussion

These items were not in the Town Clerk's budget, and the funds will be used to update and upgrade land records, the part-time position to organize paperwork, and staff training.

Mr. Kimball has discussed the part-time position with Town Clerk Brennan. It is \$17K per year, 15 hours a week, for one year, and is subject to change. The appropriation is \$17K for the first 12 months.

This is a part-time position, and Chairman Otis noted that the Council knows where the funding will come from for the position.

Chairman Oris thanked Town Manager Kimball, Ms. Talbot, Mr. Jaskot, BOE and Town staff for their work during the budget process.

Ms. Nichols extended the Council's appreciation to Council Clerk, Ms. Milton, for her time, work, and submission of minutes to Council and staff.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Slocum; seconded by Mr. Veleber.

MOVED to adjourn the special meeting at 8:00 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk