

Town of Salem
Annual Town Meeting
Salem School
May 3, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. **AMENDED**

First Selectman Ed Chmielewski called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

First Selectman Chmielewski led in the pledge of allegiance.

M/S/C: to elect Selectman Kevin Lyden as moderator for this meeting. **V. Smith/J. Chechille. All in favor. The motion carries.**

Selectman Lyden welcomed everyone to this 204th Salem Town Meeting.

Per Section 4.05C of the Salem Town Charter, Linda Flugrad, CCTC, Town Clerk was appointed Clerk of the meeting, and proceeded to read the notice and warning of the meeting.

Selectman Lyden recognized the members of the Board of Finance and thanked them for their work on this budget.

This Fiscal Year 2023/2024 budget is what is going to referendum. Selectman Lyden reminded that we can approve the budget as presented or lower the budget. We cannot raise the budget at this Town Meeting.

M/S/C per section 10.08C of the Salem Town Charter to approve the capital budget plan as presented. B. Ross/TJ Butcher. All in favor. The motion carries.

General Government Budget:

First Selectman Chmielewski presented the General Government Budget. He presented each department individually asking for questions or comments on each. There were no questions on department 100.

Department 105: First Selectman Chmielewski gave a brief explanation of line 5-105-114. This salary is now being consolidated into one line rather than combined out of three separate salary lines.

B. Drennen, 5 Salem Hollow Lane, requested clarification on department 240 Public Safety line 5-240-970 which gives an explanation of "Public Safety Restructure from Department 105" asking where is that from in the salary line?

Finance Specialist Lisa Jablonski stated that this is a stipend paid to volunteers for ambulance on-call services. This is not paid to employees. This was changed out of the salary line last year because it is a stipend and not salaries.

J. Miller, 19 Morgan Road questioned 5-105-125, the acting selectman salary.

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that, by Charter, in the absence of the First Selectman, the acting selectman takes over in the place of the First Selectman. This amount is a stipend paid to the Acting Selectman.

F. Hwang, 148 Old Colchester Road, stated that what we are really talking about is the \$738,000 deficit. With regards to department 105, the increase is nearly 14% compared to last year's 7%. She would like insights as to why this department doubled the cost as to last year. It reflects an increase of over \$100,000 from last year.

First Selectman Chmielewski stated reorganization, department restructuring, and some departments needing enhancements. Also our library department hadn't budgeted unfunded mandates to bring several staff members up to minimum wage.

Departments 110, 112, 114, 116, 118 generated no questions.

Department 122 Registrar of Voters: Betsy Butts, Democratic Registrar of Voters, explained the majority of the increase in this budget line is the two Presidential Preference Primaries coming up in April 2024 in preparation for the November 2024 election. \$5,000 of the increase is due to staffing of that one event. More workers are needed because we are now divided into two districts requiring additional workers,

tabulators, and supplies. These are mostly due to the State's unfunded mandates. Election workers are still paid below minimum wage in Salem. Again the increase is due to there being a Presidential election and Presidential Preference Primaries every four years. The budget will decrease in years without these events.

Departments 126, 134, 135, 138, 140, 152, 157, 158 generated no questions.

Department 210 Security – First Selectman Chmielewski elaborated that we have two resident state troopers who are very busy in Salem, including spending time at the school.

P. Donovan, 759 Old Colchester Road, questioned if this includes school security.

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that at this time it does not include school security, but that issue will be discussed further in the Board of Education presentation. Resident Troopers are at the school dealing with issues as necessary.

Department 220 generated no questions.

Department 222 – Salem Volunteer and Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Companies.

N. Rabe, Valley Drive, questioned why most line items are under department 222 but only one line item under department 220?

Department 220 has only the chief's account line in it.

BOF Chairman Skip Dickson explained that a few years ago, the BOF was having difficulty with having separate line items for each department, so the BOF asked that both Salem and Gardner Lake fire companies be put into one department budget. There are similar lines for both Salem and Gardner Lake in Department 222.

Department 230 – Ambulance

B. Martin, 104 Music Vale, stated that the Town doesn't own the ambulance, so why does the Town have all the expenses for it? Gardner Lake Ambulance bills anybody who is transported and they keep that money, so why doesn't they use that money for their ambulance expenses?

C. Philopena, of Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Company, responded that they do use the money they get from insurance billings for supplies, training, and replacing necessary equipment. Based on what they take in of revenue, this budget request is for what they can't afford. They have to accept what amount insurance pays if the patient has insurance. The ambulance company is obligated to pay medics even if insurance doesn't pay.

First Selectman Chmielewski further stated that we are doing a public safety study and the Town is also reviewing how other towns utilize their ambulance revenue.

J. Miller, 19 Morgan Road stated that we have no access to the line in the ambulance budget as to how much revenue they receive and what they spend. He feels we should have access to that information to determine how the Town should set the ambulance budget.

Department 240 Public Safety

C. Philopena, Rattlesnake Ledge Road, asked if budget line 5-240-970 regarding on-call fees was for the weekend on-call ambulance fees.

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that right now there are other items in this line as well. It is for on-call services for volunteers from both fire companies. This line has been raised slightly because ARPA paid a portion of it last year. It is a Town management decision that some of these payments could go to members of Salem Volunteer Fire Company as well.

B. Drennen, 5 Salem Hollow Lane, requested information on where we are with the actual budget with moneys expended at this time in the fiscal year?

Finance Specialist Jablonski explained that the budget book presented shows expenditures as of 12/08/2022. It is difficult to tell exactly what the actual is at this time, but we believe it is trending approximately where it should be in this fiscal year.

Departments 310, 410, 600, 610, 630, 640, 645, 710, 810, 910, 920, 925, 926, 935 generated no questions.

Board of Education

Board of Education Chairman Sean Reith reviewed the proposed FY2023/2024 Budget. The Board of Finance reduced their proposed budget approved by the Board of Education in February, 2023 by \$88,000 or 0.02% from the current FY2022/2023 budget. The Board of Education has not yet determined where

that \$88,000 reduction will be realized. It will probably come from the Salem School (Pre-K through Grade 8) portion of the budget.

F. Hwang, 148 Old Colchester Road, recognized that the Board of Education saved \$300,000 on the East Lyme portion of the budget this fiscal year and questioned why this savings wasn't given back to the Town? It looks like that approximate amount was just moved to the tutors' line. She questioned why this savings was not passed back to the Town.

Chairman Reith stated that this is not necessarily a savings, but rather avoided a large increase in the budget. He referenced inflationary costs and contractual obligations indicating that those increases will continue year after year.

Chairman Reith responded to a question regarding the current enrollment in Salem School stating it is roughly 390+ which is comparable to last year's enrollment and could be off by +-2 students.

With no additional questions for the Board of Education, Selectman Lyden called for the motion to move the 2023/2024 budget to referendum in the amount of:

General Government: \$ 4,824,791
Board of Education: \$11,304,501
Capital Expenditures: \$ 1,086,302
For a Total Budget of: \$17,215,594

M/S/C: C. Philopena/TJ Butcher. All in favor. The motion carried.

2. Consider/Act on any other business, which may come before the meeting.

Selectman Lyden asked if there was any other business

M. Casciano: asked for a status on the Public Safety and Fire Commission Study report.

First Selectman Chmielewski will be briefing the Board of Finance at their next meeting. The Public Safety Study is about to be completed. First Selectman Chmielewski is hoping it will be completed within 30 days or so. The plan is to present it to the Town for the Town's input and discussion.

T. Phillips, 85 Round Hill requested to know who is the grant administrator for the Town? Who is looking online for grants? T. Phillips would specifically like to see if there is a grant for school security.

First Selectman Chmielewski said there are several employees and volunteers in town looking for grants.

Salem Volunteer Fire Company Chief C. Weston stated that the Salem Volunteer Fire Company also applies for and receives grants for their projects and purchases. They have hired a grant writer for writing their grants.

Selectman Lyden mentioned several grants the Town has applied for and received throughout the years for projects the Town was able to accomplish with the funding.

B. Drennen, 5 Salem Hollow Lane, questioned if there are any plans for the Town to work on our roads this year?

Selectman Lyden stated that chip sealing and repaving will be done on some Salem roads.

T. Natoli, Music Vale Road, questioned if the farmer will continue to lease the field at the pavilion and what is the criteria to maintain it?

Selectman Lyden stated that field is leased for \$2,000 per year revenue and maintained as providing work compensation as liability for his workers, cutting back the saplings, and is maintaining it well.

N. Rabe questioned what the net was this year for income and expenses?

Selectman Lyden explained that this is what will go to the referendum and then back to the Board of Finance. There is additional funding that will come back this year due to LOCIP funding and the school renovations.

F. Hwang, 148 Old Colchester Road, questioned how the Board of Finance plans to balance the \$739,000 deficit?

Board of Finance Chairman Dickson explained that there are several options including using some of the unassigned fund balance and perhaps a mill rate increase. They will also look at projected budget numbers

to see if any could be adjusted. The Board of Finance will meet next Thursday, the day following the referendum, at their regular meeting to discuss possible options.

A. Valentini requested that in the future at these Town meetings a microphone be used to aid those with hearing difficulties.

Adjournment: B. Butts/M. Rucci at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

L. Flugrad, CCTC Town Clerk