

## For the Week of February 6, 2023

### Manager's Message

Aaron Frank, Town Manager

Town Meeting Day will be here soon! The Annual Town Meeting will resume in-person this year, and will be held Monday, March 6, 2023 at 7:00 PM. The ballot items, to be voted on by Australian Ballot, can be found at the following link, but will also be presented at the Annual Town Meeting: <https://colchestervt.gov/344/Ballot-Items>.

Voting by Australian Ballot will take place Tuesday, March 7, 2023 from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM at Colchester High School, but early/absentee voting is also an option. In-person and early/absentee voting information can be accessed here: <https://colchestervt.gov/325/Elections-and-Voter-Information>

Your town staff wants you to be informed about what you're voting on. Below is information on the **FY 24 Municipal Services Budget ballot item**:

**Budget summary:** The proposed FY 24 municipal services budget maintains our current level of town services and addresses additional resource needs in information technology due to expanding cybersecurity threats and increased service fees for departmental specific software and internet connectivity, as well as a Civilian Evidence Technician in the Colchester Police Department and additional resources needed for data storage and transmission required for Body Worn Cameras and Digital Evidence Software, previously approved by the Selectboard.

The tax impact of the municipal services budget, along with previously approved capital items, is a 5.7% increase to municipal service property taxes.

<b><i>Estimated Municipal Services Property Tax Increase (Compared to FY23)</i></b>			
<b>Assessed Value</b>	<b>200,000</b>	<b>300,000</b>	<b>400,000</b>
<b>Annual</b>	<b>\$66</b>	<b>\$99</b>	<b>\$132</b>
<b>Monthly</b>	<b>\$5.50</b>	<b>\$8.25</b>	<b>\$11.00</b>
<b>Weekly</b>	<b>\$1.27</b>	<b>\$1.90</b>	<b>\$2.54</b>

**Budget Approach:** First, we focus on holding down costs and reducing expenses. Four of twenty-five areas of expenditure were reduced. Next, non-tax revenues from fee-based services are maximized. Revenues from non-tax sources are expected to increase by \$224,544 or 12.4%. Property taxes are the *last dollar in*.

**Budget Background:** The average monthly Consumer Price Index through October 2022, when the budget was compiled, was 8.3%. Considering this, the Town Manager's office directed department heads, based on Selectboard input, to not include any new services in their budgets. The Selectboard evaluated and then directed the administration of on-site wastewater

program be given back to the State instead of being administered by your town staff. This change avoided an additional municipal services budget increase of \$58,000. The Selectboard reviewed a proposed new program, regional dispatch, which would have required a \$212,304 or 38% increase in our annual dispatch costs plus \$206,000 in capital. The Selectboard made the difficult decision to not provide funding for regional dispatch given the high cost increase in an already challenging year.

The FY 24 municipal services budget reflects an increase in planned expenditures of 8.3% for maintaining the current level of services with changes summarized below:

**Service Level Changes:**

- CPD Services & Utilities increase for body-worn camera data transmission and storage, digital evidence processing software, Howard Community Outreach, etc. (+\$135,649)
- Discontinuance of Admin. of State Wastewater Program (-\$58,000)

**Significant Changes needed to maintain current level of Service:**

- CPD Salaries & Wages increase due to Civilian Evidence Technician (+\$102,000 for salary, benefit and employer paid taxes)

**Significant External Costs Impacting the FY 24 Municipal Services Budget:**

- Increased cost for fuel: +\$40,000
  - Unleaded gas prices are estimated to increase 23%
  - Diesel prices are projected to increase 31%
- Increased costs for health insurance: +\$210,000
  - Health carrier raised its rates by 18%.
  - These costs would have been much higher had we not negotiated directly with multiple insurance companies.
- Increased costs for all petroleum-based products: +\$20,000
  - Petroleum-based products, i.e., oil, grease, diesel exhaust fluid, have already increased 20-38%
- Increased costs for legal counsel: +\$30,000
  - Due to recent price increase notifications from law firms, we have increased our budgeted legal expenses
- Increased costs to Maintain Current Level of Service for IT: +\$95,417
  - Resources to address expanding cybersecurity threats, increased service fees for department specific software and network connectivity.

## HOW DOES THIS IMPACT THE MUNICIPAL SERVICES PORTION OF YOUR TAX BILL COMPARED WITH FY23?

<i>Estimated Municipal Services Property Tax Increase (Compared to FY23)</i>			
Assessed Value	200,000	300,000	400,000
Annual	\$66	\$99	\$132
Monthly	\$5.50	\$8.25	\$11.00
Weekly	\$1.27	\$1.90	\$2.54

**FY24 Tax Rate: \$0.6080**  
(per \$100 of assessed value)

**5.7% Tax Rate increase compared with FY23**

## Comparison – Inner Chittenden County Municipal Services Taxes per Resident

Williston	\$ 645
<b>Colchester ( 2nd lowest)</b>	<b>\$ 735</b>
Essex Town	\$ 795
Winooski	\$ 789
Burlington	\$ 919
So. Burlington	\$ 932
Essex Jct.	\$ 987
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$ 816</b>



**Fiscal sustainability efforts over the last two years:**

- Secured \$1,200,000 in grants supporting 38% of Town FY 23 capital expenses.
  - Working to Secure \$2.1M in grants to support 22% of the Town's capital expenses from FY 24-FY 28.
- Evaluated options for federal funding, advocated with state and federal officials to gain \$3M more in federal funds, and reviewed options and made recommendations for use of funds to the Selectboard which voters ultimately approved as part of the funding for the Malletts Bay Sewer.
- Successfully appealed the State Equalized Educational Grand List, annually saving the taxpayers roughly \$136,641 in State education taxes in FY23.
- Continued careful management of the budget in FY 22 which allowed revenues to exceed expenses which allowed \$260,000 to be used as revenue in FY 24, to offset tax increases.
- Renegotiated agreement with Green Mountain Transit, saving \$15,000 (30%) annually.
- Avoided a 21% increase in healthcare costs by aggressively negotiating with multiple insurance carriers and by utilizing a high deductible plan.
- Converted to bi-weekly payroll across all workgroups, which accommodated staff time needed for increased federal reporting.
- Completed revenue contract negotiations with Verizon for the Center Fire Station for \$978,000 over 20 years, refinanced two fire trucks saving \$60,000 and replaced \$1.3M of fire equipment with a \$269,000 truck
- Saved taxpayers \$58,000 in FY24 by discontinuing administration of the State Wastewater Program since the passing of the Malletts Bay Sewer Project.
- Obtained \$1M in grants for COVID related expenses and lost revenue over the last two years

You can find more information on the [Budget Document Page](#) (Budget Presentation, Revenues, Expenses, and Budget by Area of Expenditure). If you have any questions, please contact Renae Marshall, Deputy Town Manager at [rmarshall@colchestervt.gov](mailto:rmarshall@colchestervt.gov) or by phone at 802-264-5509.

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Learn more about the proposed **Colchester Recreation Center** too! Check out this recent [news story](#) covering the ballot item or read below for a letter from your Colchester Recreation Advisory Board:

To the Colchester Community,

The Colchester Recreation Advisory Board encourages you to vote **YES** for the Colchester Recreation Center.

On the March 7<sup>th</sup> ballot, we have the exciting opportunity to expand recreation opportunities in our community. The Colchester Recreation Center has something for everyone- a walking/running track, multi-purpose gym, fitness/cardio facility, fitness class spaces, community/meeting spaces, and more. Furthermore, the site for the Recreation Center is in a centralized location with access to three schools, Bayside Park, and the bike path.

This project is the culmination of 20 years of community engagement with surveys, focus groups, and information gathering. As a result of this process, it was identified that while our community has many outdoor recreation opportunities to offer its residents and visitors, more indoor opportunities are needed. The amenities most desired by our community were identified and incorporated into the facility.

The Colchester Recreation Center project provides the perfect opportunity to use the Local Option Tax (LOT) to fund its construction. The Local Option Tax is a 1% tax applied to all taxable goods sold in the Town of Colchester. By the time of construction, Colchester's LOT fund balance will be \$9 million (which must be used towards capital projects), like the Recreation Center. By using the existing \$9 million and future LOT funds to finance the \$6.9 million remaining over the next 10 years, we achieve a goal for our residents with the Recreation Center, as well as retain LOT funds for other capital projects.

**Therefore, the construction of the Recreation Center will not be funded by property taxes.** Operating costs for the Recreation Center will be paid by membership and facility rental fees.

There is no doubt that recreation is the heartbeat of our community- from the lake to our parks, trails, and open spaces. We look forward to the opportunity to continue to commit to the physical, social, and mental well-being of our community.

The Colchester Recreation Advisory Board fully endorses the Colchester Recreation Center project and hopes that you will also support it as well by voting **YES** on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

Sincerely,



Adriane Martin

Chair

Colchester Recreation Advisory Board

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**Projecting Colchester Recreation from the Past into the Future**  
**Saturday, February 11, 10 a.m.**



**Meeting House, 830 Main Street, Colchester**

From the historic days of Clarey's Bayside Pavilion to the proposal for a new recreation center, our speakers will give us the scoop on this important ballot issue for Town Meeting in March. Presenters will be Aaron Frank, Town Manager, and Glen Cuttitta, Director of Parks and Recreation. All are welcome to attend. Free parking, admission and refreshments. (Accessible entry to the building is at the lower level towards the back of the building.)



**CWD-Owned Colchester Water Systems  
Budgets FY23-34**

The Champlain Water District (CWD) owns and operates four water systems in the Town of Colchester: Colchester Town, Malletts Bay Water Company, Colchester Fire District (CFD) #1, and CFD #3.

Annually in December-January, CWD develops Operating Budgets and Capital Reserve Fund Plans for each of these systems. CWD's fiscal year runs from July 1<sup>st</sup>-June 30<sup>th</sup>. Each year the proposed budgets are voted on at CWD's annual meeting which occurs on the first Tuesday of April. This year the Annual Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday April 4<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm at the CWD facility in South Burlington. The proposed FY23-24 budgets for the CWD-owned Colchester water systems will be voted on at that meeting.

Each Operating budget projects the financial needs and resources for providing high quality drinking water while investing in the long-term sustainability of the system. The proposed budget takes into consideration historical actual expenses as well as anticipated changes, such as wage/salary increases, benefit increases, inflation, and changes in costs of materials, supplies, transportation, and utilities. The proposed Operating budget includes investments in the rehabilitation and replacement of smaller scale infrastructure.

Larger scale projects and programs for each system are captured in the Capital Reserve Fund Plan, which forecasts the Capital Reserve expenditures over the next 5 years. The Capital Reserve Fund Plan is developed to maintain critical asset management programs while conducting small projects out of the Capital Reserve. Larger projects are funded through bond-approved debt. The primary focus of each Capital Reserve Fund Plan is to fund projects and programs that are critical to the long-term sustainability of the system while also serving as an operating revenue source during cash flow shortages.

Information on the FY23-24 proposed budgets can be found on CWD's website, [www.champlainwater.org](http://www.champlainwater.org). The following is the link to a summary of the CWD-owned Colchester water systems FY23-24 budgets: <https://www.champlainwater.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=42>

Contact CWD at 802-864-7454 with any questions.

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**Department Updates**

**Police Department:** On January 31, 2023, CPD Sergeant Michael Fish retired after a distinguished 34-year career. Sergeant Fish was the most decorated officer in CPD's history with three medals of valor and a certificate of merit. He has been recognized twice by the Vermont Governor's Highway Safety program for his exemplary work in traffic safety. Mike served as a training officer, a detective, and a patrol supervisor during his career.



Sergeant Fish is seen here at a final "walk-out" where he recognized by fellow officers from Colchester, Essex, Milton as well as co-workers and officials from the Town of Colchester.

### **Burnham Memorial Library:**

#### **AARP Tax Assistance**

This is a free service that runs from February until early April for people over the age of 50 who have a low to moderate income. The time slots are filling fast, so book your appointment today by calling the library at 802-264-5660! Saturday morning and Monday afternoon slots are available, and the service takes place at the library.

#### **AARP Volunteer Tax Assistance**



## **Upcoming Town Meetings**

**Selectboard:** Tuesday, February 14th, 6:30 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road. Residents are welcome to attend the meeting or alternatively send a note, up to 1,000 words, to [TownManager@colchestervt.gov](mailto:TownManager@colchestervt.gov) with "Citizens to be Heard" in the Subject and their name and address in the body of the email. The email will be shared with the entire Selectboard prior to the meeting and included in the information packet at the next meeting (as the information packet for the current meeting is sent out along with the agenda).

- Watch the Meeting Online via Live Stream: <http://lcatv.org/live-stream-2>
- Agenda: [www.bit.ly/Colchester-SB-Agendas](http://www.bit.ly/Colchester-SB-Agendas)

**Recreation Advisory Board:** Wednesday, February 8th, 7:00 am at the Colchester Town Offices, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road.

**Development Review Board:** Wednesday, February 8th, 7:00 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road. Residents are welcome to attend the meeting or public comments can be submitted prior to the hearing by email to [zmaia@colchestervt.gov](mailto:zmaia@colchestervt.gov) or by mail to Town of Colchester, c/o Development Review Board, 781 Blakely Road, Colchester, VT 05446.

**Library Board of Trustees:** Thursday, February 16th, 4:00 pm in the Burnham Room of the Burnham Memorial Library.

**Conservation Commission:** Monday, February 20th, 6:00 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 2nd Floor, Champlain Room.

**Planning Commission:** Tuesday, February 21st, 7:00 pm at the Colchester Town Offices, 3rd Floor Outer Bay Conference Room, 781 Blakely Road.

**Agendas available:** <http://clerkshq.com/Colchester-vt>

**Note:** Agendas are posted at least 48 hours before the meeting, so you may find past agendas when clicking the link. Revisiting the link closer to the date of the meeting should provide you with the current agenda.

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For more information or to comment, call 802-264-5509 or email [townmanager@colchestervt.gov](mailto:townmanager@colchestervt.gov)