

For the Week of February 27, 2023

Manager's Message

Aaron Frank, Town Manager

Tuesday, March 7th is Town Meeting Day - Please Vote!

The deadline to return your voted Town Meeting absentee ballot is Monday, March 6th by 12 p.m. Use our GREEN Drive-Up Drop Box between the Town Hall and Police Department Buildings. On Tuesday, March 7th, bring your voted absentee ballot to the Colchester High School Gym.

You may also vote in-person on March 7th between 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Colchester High School Gym at 131 Laker Lane (off Blakely Rd.).



Voter registration info: <https://colchestervt.info/VoterReg>

Sample Ballot: <https://colchestervt.gov/DocumentCenter/View/7925/2023-Town-Meeting-Sample?bidId=>

Ballot Items:

Learn more about the proposed **FY24 Municipal Services Budget** here: <https://colchestervt.gov/349/Budget-Documents> or contact Deputy Town Manager Renae Marshall at 802-264-5509 or rmarshall@colchestervt.gov.

Learn more about the proposed **Colchester Recreation Center** here: <https://colchestervt.gov/3292/Colchester-Recreation-Center> or contact Parks and Recreation Director Glen Cuttitta at 802-264-5641 or gcuttitta@colchestervt.gov.

Colchester Recreation Center Video: If you would like more information on the proposed recreation center and the amenities included, please click [here](#). For the closed captioning version, please click [here](#).



Municipal Services, Taxes, Fees and Recreation in Colchester, Vermont

Here is some information on the Town's approach to municipal services, municipal services taxes, fee-based services and recreation services.

The Town of Colchester provides \$19,124,542 in municipal services annually, not including capital expenses. Revenue for these services comes from property taxes, \$12,622,198 (66%), and user fees,

\$6,502,344 (34%). Property taxes fund services provided to all residents on an ongoing basis, such as library, police, fire, public safety dispatch, parks, economic development, road and path maintenance, as well as mandated functions of elections and property assessment. Fee funded services include: 1) Development and building permit review which is required by state law when new buildings or substantial changes are made to existing buildings; 2) Recreation and child care programs that are popular but not used by all residents; 3) Stormwater fees which vary widely based on how much land was covered by development; 4) Rescue/Ambulance service which is funded primarily by user fees which are in turn paid by resident's health insurance; 5) Sewer, a scarce resource available to about 15% of the community that is more densely developed and/or environmentally sensitive; 6) Clerk services such as permanent storage of land record, passports, and dog registrations.

Since not all residents use every fee-based service on an ongoing basis, charging fees to residents that utilize these services is preferable to increasing the municipal services property tax for all. To remove the fees from fee-based services would require a \$6,502,344 (34%) municipal services property tax increase, which could make homeownership no longer affordable for some residents.

Your town management and Selectboard are especially sensitive to holding down municipal services property taxes. The Town of Colchester provides tax-funded municipal services not offered by regional, state or federal government, that are permissible under state law, and for which the majority of voters are willing to approve.

Colchester has the second highest percentage of low-income homeowners in Chittenden County, only after St. George, as noted [here](#). Colchester has a disproportionate amount of non-property tax paying entities including state government, federal government and not-for profit organizations as noted [here](#). While the services provided by other governments and non-profits are valuable, their lack of property tax contributions shift responsibilities for municipal services taxes to town residents and businesses.

Colchester, a community of 17,612 residents, prides itself on having a job for every working-age adult. We have 12,188 people between ages 18-65, of which 10,767 are in the labor force outside the home. As of 2019, we had 9,961 jobs. Having a job for every adult requires a community that is welcoming to business. Colchester has the second lowest municipal services tax per resident in inner Chittenden County. This helps us to maintain and recruit new businesses. This is important because most adults need employment, but also because most businesses consume fewer municipal services than they provide in municipal services taxes. Keeping the municipal services property tax low helps us maintain a balance of workers vs. jobs and helps retain and grow businesses, which helps keep the municipal services property tax lower for residents.

The Colchester Parks and Recreation Department has two divisions funded by municipal services property taxes. Parks provides the goods, services and direct labor to maintain the Town's 13 parks. Recreation oversees: parks maintenance; the Parks Capital Plan, the recreation impact fees on new residential properties and the park capital repairs funded therefrom, and plans and implements special events and activities throughout the year, as noted on page 13 [here](#).

There is a separate Recreation Program Fund that is entirely funded by fees. Colchester Parks and Recreation provides over 200 annual recreation programs to 2,200 different people generating \$1M per year in program fees, as noted on the page 11 of the outside independent Town Audit [here](#). Recreation program information is available here: [summer 2023](#) and [winter 2022-23](#) .

Your Parks and Recreation staff is highly experienced in offering and providing significant recreation programming, breaking even over decades and not impacting the property taxes. Your staff have been able to evaluate market demand, offer new programs in response to demand, evaluate and adjust programs year after year to optimize the services offered to the community.

To offer recreation programs for free, we would have to increase municipal services property taxes by 8%, to cover the \$1M in annual fee-based recreation programming. Likewise, the proposed Colchester Recreation Center with an annual budget of \$646,382 for equipment, utilities, staff and capital replacement is proposed to be funded through membership revenues and facility-use fees as illustrated here on slide 29 [here](#), instead of a municipal services property tax increase of 5%. New and some existing recreation programs—which we cannot offer now due to lack of available space--will be offered from the Colchester Recreation Center. Community groups will have the opportunity to utilize space within the Colchester Recreation Center for a modest fee.

The Colchester Recreation Center is a longstanding project initiated by community members who supported the purchase of the Bayside/Hazelett parcel for this purpose, with voter-approved taxpayer funding in 2004. But for that purchase, the property would likely have been purchased by a private developer and developed for housing or commercial use. The Colchester Recreation Center has had some stops, starts and waits as staff and the Selectboard responded to the great recession, more space from which to provide municipal services, water quality, and financial sustainability. With voter approval of the Local Option Tax in 2015, which is restricted to voter-approved capital projects, there is now an opportunity to address a community goal going back at least 20 years, with no impact to your property taxes.

Your Town Selectboard and staff want taxpayers to understand how different services are funded in different ways and the town's reasoning behind this approach. The Selectboard and staff remain focused on utilizing taxpayer resources in the most cost effective and efficient manner to serve the residents of Colchester.

Letter of Support for the Colchester Recreation Center from the Colchester School Board:



Colchester School District

Colchester Board of Education, PO Box 27, Colchester, Vermont 05446
Phone: (802) 264-5999 • www.csdvt.org • Fax: (802) 318-4669

January 10, 2023

Dear residents of Colchester,

We, the members of the Colchester School Board, wish to express our enthusiastic support for the construction of a new recreation center to serve Colchester residents and visitors as proposed on the 2023 Town Meeting Day ballot.

The 450 employees of the Colchester School District strive every day to prepare and empower our students to think critically, act responsibly, communicate effectively, and learn continuously to achieve their fullest potential. Succeeding in this endeavor requires the ongoing support and partnership of families, community members, private organizations, and public institutions.

The Town of Colchester’s Department of Parks and Recreation has demonstrated time and again its immense value in helping the District achieve its goals by providing irreplaceable before- and after-school care programs, as well as engaging year-round programming to help make our students more active, well-rounded young members of the community. The new Recreation Center would enhance the Department’s ability to provide these services to our students and allow the Department to greatly expand the recreational opportunities it offers to the general public. In doing so, the Recreation Center would join the town’s schools and parks as dynamic spaces of connection and growth for the entire community.

Furthermore, we would like to commend the Town of Colchester for the thorough and inclusive process it has used to determine the scope of the project, and for its commitment to a funding model that requires no new investments from the taxpayers of Colchester.

We believe that Colchester thrives when individuals, organizations, and institutions work together to make the community a healthier, more vibrant, and more connected place to live, learn, work, and play. We urge the voters of Colchester to vote “yes” and embrace this exciting new commitment to the health and wellbeing of our town’s residents of all ages.

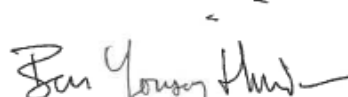
Respectfully submitted,



Lindsey Cox



Nic Longo



Ben Yousey-Hindes



Laurie Kigonya



Felix Anderson

Lindsey Cox
Board Chair

Nic Longo
Board Vice Chair

Ben Yousey-Hindes
Board Clerk

Laurie Kigonya
Board Member

Felix Anderson
Board Member

Colchester Recreation Center Information, Glen Cuttitta, Parks and Recreation Director



As we approach March 7, I would like to clarify a few details about the Colchester Recreation Center. There will be many opportunities for non-members to recreate during the day, after school and evenings. Outside of memberships, we will have paid programs, free events, free programs and community group space rentals that will be able to use the kitchen and classrooms for programs and social gatherings. The Colchester Recreation Center will provide a place for residents to purposefully gather and engage socially. We hope a new phrase in our community is “Meet you at the Rec Center!”.

The Colchester Recreation Center’s cost was estimated in December 2022, assuming construction would take place in 2024 and 2025, at \$15,907,000. We waited until then to provide the estimate, understanding that costs were changing as the design evolved and time passed.

Below is additional information with eight areas of cost which include contingencies and inflation. Additional detail is not subject to disclosure under the Vermont Public Records Act as it would disadvantage the town in obtaining fair pricing and negotiating fair contracts on the project.

An individual or private business would not share how much they have in the bank with contractors giving pricing for a replacement roof. If they did, they would likely pay more than fair market value. The same is true for the Town.

Colchester Recreation Center Capital Cost Detail	
Estimated December 2022 assuming 2024-2025 construction	
Site development costs	\$ 2,978,000
Building	\$ 7,494,270
Interior finishes/fitness	\$ 394,270
Elevator/HVAC/electric/sprinkler	\$ 2,771,549
Solar	\$ 1,225,000
Insurance/permits	\$ 211,898
Consultants/engineers	\$ 440,213
Intersection/traffic signal	\$ 391,800
Total	\$ 15,907,000



Colchester Town News
VERMONT

Colchester – What do you want to do today?

For more information or to comment, call 802-264-5509 or email townmanager@colchestervt.gov