Public Hearing

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Public Hearing

~Minutes~

Wednesday, August 19, 2026 | **6:00 PM** | **Board Room**

Opening Of Hearing

Notice Of Public Hearing - 2026-2027 Operating Budget Of The Columbia-Greene Community College

The Public Hearing was declared open by Chairman Linger at 6:21 p.m.

ROLL CALL: All Legislators were present.

Ms. Ernst read aloud the Notice of Public Hearing aloud which was published in the official newspapers of the County, The Mountain Eagle on August 7, 2026 and The Times Union on August 8, 2026. Chairman Linger thanked Ms. Ernst.

Chairman Linger stated that the purpose of this Public Hearing is to hear comments from the public with regard to the 2026-2027 Operating Budget Of The Columbia-Greene Community College. Chairman Linger asked is there was anybody who wished to be heard regarding this matter.

Mr. Izzo stated, "Mr. Izzo stated, "(Audio cut out) legislature, members present from the community college.
I thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding the proposed Columbia Greene Community College budget. I want to begin by making something clear, while we are bringing community college an important institution to Greene and Columbia counties.
My comments tonight are not directed against the public, it's students, faculty or employees.
My concern is financial transparency and it's the responsibility of this Legislature, as one of the college's local sponsors, to fully understand the financial condition of the college before committing taxpayer dollars. After reviewing approximately ten years of college budget information, Board of Trustees' minutes, financial committee reports, and available audit information, I believe several questions deserve answers. The first question is the fund balance question. The college's own budget figures show substantial changes in the amount identified as fund balance as part of revenue and if you looked at your copy of the college's budget, you'll see a slide. In 2023, that figure was approximately 2.2 million dollars, and in 2024, it was approximately 1.5 million I'm sorry, 1.59 million dollars and 2025 it was approximately $557,000. For the 2025-2026 budget, it increased again to approximately $1.78 million. The proposed 2026-2027 Budget now shows approximately a negative,

negative, $23,000 in that category. That is a swing of approximately $1.1 million in a single year. Were they actually withdrawn from reserves? How much fund balance was available at the beginning of each year, and how much was actually used, and most importantly what is the college's unrestricted fund balance today? The second issue involves the current 2025-2026 budget. That budget totals approximately $19.79 million but approximately $1.078 million of its reported revenue is identified as fund balance. When that amount is removed, underlining revenue is approximately $18.72 million. Compare that with prior years, approximately $19.10 million of revenue, excluding fund balance. Underlining revenue, therefore, declined by approximately $381,000 while the fund balance component increased by $521,000. In other words, the overall budget increased slightly even though underlining revenues declined. The increased use of the fund balance line more than compensated for that decline. That is something the legislature should understand before considering the next budget, the proposed 2026-2027 budget. The proposed budget is approximately $18.46 million, a reduction of $1.33 million from the current $19.79 million budget. But that number, that number requires some explanation; underlining revenue excluding, excluding fund balance decreased by only approximately $229,500. Most of the apparent $1.33 million budget reduction comes from the change in the treatment of fund balance. The fund balance component moves from approximately a positive of $1.078 million to a negative of $23,800. That represents an approximately $1.1 million swing, therefore approximately 83 percent of the apparent reduction in the total budget can be explained by the change in the fund balance component rather than by a comparable reduction in underlining revenue. That could result in an improvement in structural balance. But the Legislature should require the college to demonstrate that fact.

Budgeted fund balance is not actual fund balance, that is another important distinction.

A budgeted use of fund balance does not necessarily mean that the money was actually spent. The college reported that fiscal year 2023-2024 ended with an operating deficit of approximately $934,000. Yet the budget information identifies approximately $1.59 million of fund balance as part of revenue for that year, those numbers are not the same. Similarly, approximately $557,000 of fund balance appears in the 2024-2025 figures. Why college management subsequently projected that the year would finish with approximately a $420,000 surplus. That demonstrates why this legislature should not rely solely upon the budget presentation when evaluating the financial condition of the college. The audits, the Legislature should also examine the audits. The college's fiscal year 2024 for audit was performed. The auditors issued an unmodified opinion, which is important and it should be acknowledged. However, the order also contained three findings and the college adopted a correction action plan, those findings should be provided to the Legislature. The Legislature should know what were the three findings? Were they related to accounting procedures, internal controls, financial reporting or other issues, and what corrective actions were required, and have these correction actions been completed? The Legislature should also determine the status of the fiscal year 2025 audit. Which I believe has not been completed, but it may have been, although it's hard to find online whether or not it's completed or not.

As recently as January 2026, the college's interim financial leadership reported that completing the audit was a priority. While the college will be viewing its financial position and addressing county backlogs. Before approving another annual budget I believe the Legislature should know whether that audit has now been completed, and what it says.

Cash is not fund balance, the college has also reported significant cash balances. For example in March of 2025, college deported approximately $6.3 million in cash balance. College officials were considered placing one million in a certificate of deposit and approximately two million dollars in a higher interest savings account, that indicates liquidity. But cash is not necessarily unrestricted fund balance. Some cash can be restricted, committed to outstanding obligations, associated grants or financial aid or otherwise unavailable for ordinary operating expenses. That is precisely why the Legislature should receive a clear reconciliation showing cash, restricted funds, unrestricted reserves and accounts receivable. Liabilities, beginning fund balance, actual additions or withdrawals, and ending fund balances. So, what am I asking this legislature to do. I am not asking that the Legislature tonight, to assume at the college is financially unsound. The information presently available does not justify that conclusion. I am asking the Legislature to exercise appropriate financial oversight, before final action on the budget. I respectively request that the Legislature obtain from Columbia Greene Community College they're completed 2024 audited financial statements, which I believe you may already have. The completed 2025 audited financial statements, if it is finished. A 10-year schedule showing beginning and ending, unrestricted, unrestricted fund balance for cash physical year. A reconciliation showing budgeted fund balance appropriations compared with the actual amount used.

I can have fund balance on my budget sheet. But I may not use that amount, I may use more, I may use less. So you need to know what was actually used, because that affects the that affects your next year budget, and also the financial liquidity of the college. An explanation of the approximately $1.1 million change in the fund balance component between 2025 and 2026, and proposed 2026-2027 budget. An explanation of three physical year 2024 audit findings and confirmation of whether each corrective action has been completed. Conclusion; the issue before the Legislature Is larger than a column of numbers added up. A balanced budget on paper does not by itself tell us whether recurring revenues are sufficient to support recurring expenditures. Fund balance can legitimately be used for certain purposes, but when reserves are incorporated into operating revenue, taxpayers and legislators should be able to determine how much was budgeted, how much was spent, and how much remains? The college's own records show substantial year-to-year changes in its treatment of fund balance. They also show an approximately $934,000 operating deficit in 2024 and an anticipated $420,000 surplus in '25. Three findings in the '24 audit and continuing work in 2026 to strengthen the college financial operations. They have, according to the minutes I reviewed from the Board of Trustees, they are working very hard to upgrade their financial accounting software, and their financial department and I give them lots of credit for that. But they do need to demonstrate a need for transparency. Before this Legislature commits taxpayer dollars to another annual college budget it should have before it audited financial statements, the actual unrestricted fund balance, the status of audit findings, and a clear reconciliation between budget and actual use of reserves. That is not an unreasonable request, it is responsible financial oversight and at the end, I would like to just mention to you on your audited financial statements, that's Greene County's audited financial statements, Note 14. This is the 2024 for audit, Columbia Greene Community College, the operation of Columbia Greene Community College is undertaken jointly with Columbia County, under the provisions of Article 126 of the Education Law and is excluded from the county's financial statements. The college is administered by

Board of Trustees.
The majority of the trustees are county board appointees, the portioned between the two counties and this is where the rubber meets the road. The counties, the counties are responsible for college costs not funded to state aid or tuition, and have individually issued bonds for capital costs. The county also assumes liability of any college operating fund deficit, should any operating fund deficit be incurred and that is in a note to your financial statements. Again, I would ask that my comments be made a part of the records of this public hearing and I have a copy for the clerk and again, I thank you very much. I know it's hard for you to get gist of what I just said. But what I am saying is you can't just pass a budget, you just can't look at a budget. You just can't go to a committee meeting and say, great, it looks great, let's pass it. That's not what you are here for, you are here for the taxpayers of Greene County and the viability of our community college, which in itself is one of the highest-ranked community colleges in the state, and I thank you very much."

Chairman Linger stated, "Thank you, Mr. Izzo. Is there anyone else here this evening who wishes to be heard with regard to the 2026-2027 operating budget of the Columbia Greene Community College?"

There was no response.

Chairman Linger stated, "One last time, is there anyone else here this evening who wishes to be heard with regard to the 2026-2027 operating budget of the Columbia Greene Community College? Alright ladies and gentlemen, thank you for attending this public hearing. This hearing is now closed, and since it is past 6:25 p.m. we can move right into the second Public hearing."

Closing Of Hearing

Chairman Linger thanked everyone for attending and closed the Public Hearing at 6:41 p.m.