

**Preston Board of Finance
Public Hearing
Thursday, May 17, 2018
7:30 pm
Preston Veterans Memorial School**

1. Call to Order

Melissa Lennon, Chair called the Public Hearing to order at 7:30 pm

Roll Call

Members

Melissa Lennon – Chair
Jerry Grabarek – Vice Chairman
Stacey Becker – Clerk
Dan Duprey - absent
Keith Wucik – absent
Ken Zachem - arrived at 8:20 pm

Alternates

Ian Stammel
Lennie Spencer - absent

2. General Overview – Board of Finance – Melissa Lennon, Board of Finance Chair

- **FY 2017-2018**
- **Impacts leading into FY 2018-2019**

See <http://www.preston-ct.org/240/Board-of-Finance> for Melissa Lennon's presentation

1. Meeting packet handout
2. Slide presentation

Andy Bilodeau, Lakeview Drive: The 4% drop indicated for the average home, is that inclusive of the 25% drop in Covanta's assessment?

M. Lennon: The 4% decrease was for an average residential property. Covanta is not a residential property it is commercial so it was not factored in.

Jerry Morales, Swantown Road: If the mil rate goes down 4% for the average home, what about the houses that went up; does that go up as well?

M. Lennon: my stipulation of 1 mil applies only to those that lost in value of 4%.

Jack Smallwood, Prodehl Road: Who assessed Covanta at 25% and can it be re-assessed to get a second opinion?

M. Lennon: The Town of Preston hired a third party revaluation company. They have a very specific formula. Covanta was assessed and their property lessened in value. They appealed their value and the final approval went through an appeal process.

3. FY19 General Government Budget Presentation – Board of Selectmen

1st Selectman Congdon noted that there is a hand out available that details item by item, the General Government Budget.

1st Selectmen Congdon stated that the budget as presented is \$164,896,00 higher than the current budget, which is a 4.78% increase.

The main drivers for this increase;

- **Police protection.**
 - Increase \$112,869 over the current budget due to 2nd state trooper being restored mid-year last year.
 - The cost to add the 2nd Trooper on a yearly basis is ~ \$182,965.00.
- **Fire Chief and paid staff.**
 - \$14,000 increase, \$10,000 of this is for adding weekend shifts for premium EMTs. The additional \$10,000 is offset by \$10,000 of revenue from the Poquetanuck Ambulance. The net is zero increase to the Town. The remaining \$4,036.00 is a 3% wage increase for the Assistant Fire Chief and the EMTs.
- **Redevelopment Agency**
 - \$13,400.00 increase over the current budget, driven by the hiring of a 3rd party engineering firm, in order to meet state and Federal requirements.
 - The hiring of a Clerk of the Works to oversee remediation work on the property.
- **Parks & Recreation**
 - \$8,348.00 increase over the current budget.
 - \$4,000 to provide programs and services for senior activities.
 - \$2,000 in maintenance
 - Increase of several hours for office staff

John Marino: Why a 3% wage increase?

1st Selectmen Congdon: It is consistent with what the National Average is over a 3 year period.

Jack Smallwood: At the Town Meeting regarding adding an additional state Trooper, the estimated price was given as \$150,000. Why the 20% increase?

1st Selectmen Congdon: When we were preparing the budget that is the projection we got from the State Police.

Andy Bilodeau: Has crime decreased with the second Trooper?

1st Selectmen Congdon: I can't say we've seen a notable decrease in crime, but I can say the 2nd trooper has been an added benefit.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger, Superintendent: The 2nd trooper has been immediately available during a couple of student situations. Around student safety, which is a big topic nationally and locally, the presence of a trooper in a vehicle at the schools is a great deterrent and is recommended to us by superior personnel. He has had an immediate and positive impact on the district here.

Andy Bilodeau: You indicate Fire Chief and paid staff at \$10,000. I thought it was \$20,000 with a reimbursement from Poquetanuck.

1st Selectmen Congdon: I am showing the increase over the current budget.

John Marino: Is the Town's advisory committee going to revisit looking into using Norwich or Ledyard police?

1st Selectmen Congdon: the Board of Finance requested that the Board of Selectmen revisit that this year. Calls have been made to both Norwich and Ledyard to start those discussions.

Preston resident (name not given): Is there help from the State or Casinos, because of activity caused by the casinos?

1st Selectmen Congdon: Troop E does have regular patrols that patrol the State roads on a regular basis in addition to our resident troopers.

Jack Smallwood: All we want is efficiency. The Town wants the best dollar it can get. We are already paying taxes for a trooper. If we say go away, he's not getting fired. We are paying twice the amount for a State Trooper. We're not paying \$380,000 we're paying something like \$820,000 for 2 troopers to be in Town. We're taxed by the State to pay for the troopers, so we are being double, We already have 4 patrolman at any given time within five miles of this Town,

Heather Helwig: The people wanted a State Trooper and voted for it. Why does this keep getting brought up again and again.

1st Selectmen Congdon: It's no surprise that the 2nd State Trooper is a subject of debate at this meeting. I asked the Town attorney if I could put that question on the ballot as a standalone issue. He said the Resident Trooper cannot be voted on separately

Jill Charron, Route 165: Norwich and Ledyard police department are taxed and short staffed have limited service for their own areas at times. They call on the State for extra help many times. So if we used another Town for police protection and then State Police resources were needed, would there be an extra cost? I'm a big believer in you get what you pay for and with the State Police you have every resource available to you as far as public safety and protection.

Bridget Park, Route 164: I think the 3% increase on salaries is too high. I suggest a smaller increase of 1.5%. There is cemetery maintenance for \$500.00, which cemeteries is that for?

1st Selectmen Congdon: There are 4 or 5 cemeteries around Town that the Town Crew mow and make repairs.

Preston resident (name not given): I have a question about police. I agree 100% about safety for the children, but what happens when the children are in school and there is a domestic violence call, break in, burglar alarm. Is that trooper available or do we have to wait for one to come in from Voluntown or Plainfield.

1st Selectmen Congdon: If a trooper gets an emergency call while he is at the school watching buses unloading; he's going to respond to the most pressing emergency. So he would go to the home break in, he would go to the auto accident.

Andy Depta, 6 Young Court: asked if he could come up to the podium and present his proposed budget reductions. A. Depta presented a handout to BoF members with his \$284, 094 recommended reductions.

A. Depta noted that the BoF at tonight's special Meeting has to discuss any residents comment or recommendation for a reduction.

Andy Bilodeau: I agree with the majority of cuts Mr. Depta has indicated.

Jack Smallwood: I am in favor of the cuts as well.

Susan Strader, Route 164: I have no issues with the budget, and I want it to go forward intact.

Preston resident (name not given): I am not in favor of using surplus.

1st Selectmen Congdon: The question about surplus question is not on the floor right now. The BoF is the appropriate party to talk about the use of surplus and what their policies are. General government has no control over that.

John Marino: If the General Government comes back with no reductions, it sends the wrong message to the Town. There has to be room for some cuts, maybe not a \$100,000, but to come back and say there is no wiggle room at all sends the wrong message.

1st Selectmen Congdon: to clarify, if the BoF came to the General Government and the BoE and said cut \$100,000, we would have cut \$100,000. We weren't asked that. The BoF asked if there was a \$100,000 of fluff in the budget. We believe we presented responsible budgets.

Andy Depta: because I proposed the state Troopers be cut by 1, the BoF will have to discuss that tonight at their Special Meeting after the Public Hearing.

Andy Bilodeau: Before we go to the BoF meeting, as a resident and to appease the population of the Town who cannot afford a significant increase in their taxes, I say, reduce your budget by \$100,000 now.

1st Selectmen Congdon: we presented our budgets to the BoF. The BoF's job now is to hear public comment. They own the budgets at this point.

4. FY19 Education Budget Presentation- Board of Education – Dr. Roy Seitsinger

Dr. Roy Seitsinger explained that Preston has a Pre-K to 8th grade and is responsible for almost 700 students.

- 25% qualify for free or reduced lunch
- 33% of families have some kind of struggle with food security
- 3 homeless families
- enrollments studies show there will be an increase in student enrollment
- no activity fees
- excellent curriculum
- 99 employees in this district
- 380 official unfunded mandate directives
- Developed a Strategic Plan to predict what's coming
- 85% of the budget is fixed; makes reductions challenging.
 - This year, salary, health and secondary tuition are fixed costs
- In several meetings, going line by line we reduced the initial budget by \$136,000
- Added 1 teacher, anticipate the need for additional teachers with a growing population
- One of the few districts in the local area and the State without social worker services
 - Preston has issues where a social worker is needed

Michele Bilodeau, Lake View Drive: Regarding a Social worker have you looked into contracting or creative partnerships between districts.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: Yes. I had a conversation yesterday with another Superintendent to see if there is a way to work together and share services.

Jack Smallwood: There are stipends in the teacher's contracts for activities that don't take place. We

are paying for a wrestling and bowling stipend and we don't have a wrestling or bowling team. There is a stipend for an overnight trip for the 8th grade class but they only got a day trip. There is room in that budget to say – we don't do that so we can stop paying this money out.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: Any activity that doesn't take; the stipend doesn't go anywhere, but we have a contractual obligation to plan for the activity.

John Marino: Two years ago the residents voted the Pre-K down and the Superintendent at that time took it upon himself to start that program. How much is the Pre-K program costing us, when we didn't want it to begin with.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: It started with 1 class of 25 students and now has 46 students and a 2nd class.. An additional teacher and para educator were needed. So approximately \$100,000 total for that second class.

John Marino: what is the total cost for Pre-K

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: \$200,000

Sean Nugent, Chairman Board of Education: There is antidotal information

Cindy Lute, Julian Drive: There's a lot of talk that the Town's people voted against the Preschool. It was not listed as a separate item on the Referendum. The budget didn't pass. There are people saying no one wanted the Pre-K; that's just not true.

Jill Charron, Route 164: In your opinion, if we didn't have the Pre-K, would we be spending additional money for para educators and special education services? Because there are state and federal standards and the Pre-K assists in getting these kids ready to meet these standards.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: School readiness and preparation for school is all about that early start.

Bill Legler: My concern is, that the number you threw out, 25% and 33% of residents struggling, a 3 mil increase is just going to make the problem worse. It's a double edged sword that by increasing everything, it hurts those that are most vulnerable. We have retirees who are in the same boat, on a very fixed income.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: It's a delicate issue. There are people that struggle financially in different respects. One of the strengths of having support though, is those families can get support. The supports are there to shore up the families.

Bridget Park: Did I hear you correctly that there are 99 staff people for less than 500 students? That's basically 1 staff member for every 5 students in the school. That sounds high.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: That's actually on the low side. The staff includes bus drivers, custodians, administration and teachers, para educators, and lunch ladies. We have seniors who are in the same boat, they are on a fixed income.

Merrill Gerber: 30% of our students qualify for free lunch. What about breakfast?

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: Those who get free lunch also get breakfast.

Mike Clancy: What is considered a homeless family in this town?

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: They are displaced families who move in with relatives. They are considered homeless.

Andy Bilodeau: Any tax increase is going to be a burden to lower income residents. If we are paying for their free lunch, it is a burden to the residents, taxpayers and the elderly on a fixed income. This is a good budget, but I think there is still opportunity to save money. Pre-K and the transportation for Pre-K is not a mandatory cost. If Pre-K had a income based tuition, there would be money available to hire a social worker or teacher.

One of the slides indicated there is no control over secondary tuition, but I read in the New London Day that Norwich went back to negotiate a reduced tuition with NFA. So there is opportunity to negotiate reduced tuition with NFA.

I would say it is an anomaly to have 2 social workers in a school system this size, to have 1 is a luxury and to have none, use the social services system that the state provides that most elderly and low income use today. If the Superintendent worked a little harder to get savings. I think the residents are going to vote both budgets down, so I think you better find \$100,000 some place.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: Your NFA comments are timely, at the last Board meeting I requested the Board charge me with beginning negotiations with NFA. I will be sending a letter next week to NFA and I have coordinated the negotiations with the Superintendent of Norwich. We have established a Pre-school review team for design to figure out how we can do it as well as we can for the students who need it. I feel very strongly that a Social Worker is a critical need.

Tim Hotchkiss, Lynn Drive: It's important to get kids to Pre-school because sometimes it's the only safety net they have. Some students are homeless and when they come to school it's the only stability they have and during the summer they lose that free lunch and breakfast.

Mike Clancy: Has there ever been an investigation to see if other high schools in the area would charge in arrears like NFA and what the cost and services would be?

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: There is the same agreement with Ledyard. The other Magnet and tech high schools, the tuitions are all different.

Deb Berube, Old Jewett City Road: This is the first time we have come to a meeting. We got a lot of good information tonight and I want to thank you for your transparency. My grand-daughter is only in first grade but she knows you by name.

I taught Kindergarten for years, I could tell the difference between the kids that went to Pre-K, a quality day care and the latch key kids. It was quite obvious.

Jack Smallwood: On the school website there was an article about summer meals for kids. How does that effect us?

Preston schools employee, (name not given): Preston does not serve meals during the summer but we are required to advertise the locations where meals can be received.

Mary Ann Oneil, Route 164: I am curious if out reach to parents of young children has been considered. If they don't know how to engage children in conversation or engage them in activities that your expecting.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: We have to have an early identification process that does just that, to reach out because there is a definite need. The answer is not a blue screen.

Andy Depta, Young Court: Knowing what the State Statute requires, I always present my comments in writing to the BOF because I know they have to consider my comments in deliberations.

Nick Vegliante: What is the Statute that you keep referring to? Do you know the Site of that Statute? I am just curious.

Andy Depta: Title 6, Section 7-344.

Andy Depta: Here's my handout for the Board of Finance. I disagree with fixed costs. Staff and programs are included in fixed costs, nothing is 100% fixed, they can always be negotiated. I searched on Google for the industrial standards for a social worker, but it didn't exist.

I my hand out I am suggesting the elimination of the social worker, full time teacher, and 1.5 of the para-legal. (*I think Mr. Depta may have meant Para-educator*) I am recommending to the Board of

Finance that they take a hard look and discuss my recommendation, I am recommending \$420,754.00 reduction from the Board of Ed budget.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger: that recommendation puts us below the current year budget by \$100,000, so that's a bit of a stretch for us. The practical guide lines for delivering school social worker services is from 2004 to 2013 and the standard for social workers across the country documents can help you connect with some of that national standard that I noted when I did my first presentation. The school Board voted twice unanimously to move the budget forward. As superintendent of Schools my job is to advocate for that vote.

Susan Strader: A social worker seems like a luxury, but I would challenge residents to talk to their grand children and children and ask them what their day is like and find out what is happening in school or come and visit a class room for a day. It's challenging, societal shifts are happening, two parents are working now, it's very very different. What is needed and taught is far more rigorous. What kids come with, their family life, what they're exposed to is heart wrenchingly different now, sometimes A social worker would be benefit to everyone, we are of a age where this is needed.

We have to be willing to put any monies we invest in our town towards children, they are the future. And our Town is in great financial shape. We have been fiscally responsible, we were almost the only town that still put a budget in place while the State was being ridiculous. Lets continue to move forward. Class size is an issue, our classes are very large. I implore you to be thoughtful in how you talk to each other, how you talk on social media. I support this budget 100% intact with no cuts.

Cindy Luty: It is critical that children have an adult they can trust and that they're comfortable with to go to when there is a crisis at home. The school I worked in before I retired, the social worker rarely had time for lunch, she was so busy with the children. I heard an ad on the radio for bullet proof clothing and back packs for children to go to school. Can you imagine being 5 or 6 and hearing that; the trauma. It's a different world, you cannot compare this world to the world you or your children grew up in. I totally support this budget.

Jack Smallwood: By raising taxes, you are robbing the kid and family from summertime activity. When we take 200, 300 a 1,00 0 from so and so to pay towards our taxes, we are robbing opportunity time for that family to become a family, to go to a baseball game, to go on a vacation. We are robbing those families on a fixed income by raising our taxes. We have to find a compromise between 0 and 400,000. See if you can cut \$100,000 out of it and make everybody happy.

Nick Vegliante, Old Jewett City Road: I would like to speak in favor of the budget as presented. I have lived here for 10 years and have spent a lot of time in this school on this floor. This school is what has made me part of this community. I appreciate that it's everybody's tax dollars that contribute to that. I'm proud of this school and I think the other parents are as well. I support the budget as presented. I think the social worker is a great idea, I can tell you from spending time in the school, it's a great place but it's something it can really use.

Andy Bilodeau: The social worker can be funded from a income based tuition for Pre-K if you so desire. It's a choice to fund it out of the budget and it's not mandatory. So consequently, there are alternatives. I do not agree with it as it stands. I think there are savings that can be derived to get what you want and what we want.

5. Long Term Debt Presentation – Board of Finance – Melissa Lennon, Board of Finance Chair

See <http://www.preston-ct.org/240/Board-of-Finance> for Melissa Lennon's presentation

6. FY19 Projected Local Revenue Budget Presentation – Board of Finance - Melissa Lennon, Board of Finance Chair

See <http://www.preston-ct.org/240/Board-of-Finance> for Melissa Lennon's presentation

7. FY19 Projected State Revenue Budget Presentation - Board of Finance - Melissa Lennon, Board of Finance Chair

See <http://www.preston-ct.org/240/Board-of-Finance> for Melissa Lennon's presentation

Andy Depta: What is your projected mil rate?

M. Lennon: 27.99

Bill Legler: You need to maximize what you have in surplus.

Bridget Park: I respectfully disagree with the gentleman that we dip into the surplus. I think it's a big red flag to dip into surplus that our budgets are more than our town can afford. We need to take a harder look at our budgets, not the funds we worked so hard to save.

Michele Bilodeau: I completely agree

Susan Strader: I think there is opportunity to reduce the mil rate by using surplus.

Andy Bilodeau: Many towns don't have the luxury of having the 9.5 we have currently and have and we struggled for many years to get there. To use it would be a disservice to the people in the past who held their budgets to a minimum.

Bill Legler: The reason I bring it up is because you can reduce what you use in surplus at the next meeting, but you can only increase it at this meeting.

1st Selectman Congdon: My recommendation is we use 1 mil from surplus. That would leave us ~\$200,000 for any unforeseen things that came up next year.

Mike Clancy: I want to thank everyone for all their good comments. I think you have a working plan here where you can reasonably get this through if you do a little bit of what everybody suggested.

8. Adjourn

A motion was made by I. Stammel and seconded by S. Becker to adjourn the Public Hearing at 9:58 pm.

All in favor. Motion carries

Respectfully submitted,

Roberta Charpentier
recorder