

**Preston Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, February 15, 2023
Preston Plains Cafeteria**

Call to Order - John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

1. Roll Call

Members

John Moulson - Chairman
Robert Congdon - V. Chairman - excused
Kayla Thompson - Clerk
Stacey Becker
Denise Beale
Zachary Maurice

Alternates

Robert Castronova - excused
Andrew Sawyer - seated for Bob Congdon

Also Present

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier - Selectwoman
Jerry Grabarek - Selectman
Ken Zachem - Selectman
Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director
Keith Wucik - Fire Chief
Russ Holland - Deputy Fire Chief
Adrianna Hedwall - Assessor
Roy Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools
Kimberly Lang - Recording Secretary

Members of the Public - 2

2. Public Comment -

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Drive, commended the Board of Education for their work on their budget, and then asked if there is a way to predict at what point we as a town can no longer afford educational increases.

3. Correspondence

- Jan. 19, 2023 - Email: Cindy Varricchio regarding the December budget summary that wasn't included in the Board of Finance January meeting packet.
- Jan. 20, 2023 - Email: Jill Keith sharing the finalized meeting summary of the January 18th BoF meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes

a. Board of Finance Regular Meeting January 18, 2023

Andrew Sawyer motioned to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of January 18, 2023 as presented. Denise Beale seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

5. First Select Person Report

a. Primary Service Agreement Information

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier shared that with the decrease in volunteers and the increase in emergency calls over the years it's become cumbersome for the fire department to continue in its present capacity of holding the Primary Service Area Responder Certificate and would like the Board of Selectmen to support the transfer of PSAR from the fire department to the Town. She explained that the Town would continue with the third party billing service that the Fire Department uses. She explained that it's about an 8 month process to transfer the Certificate to the Town, but the Board of Selectmen feel that the transfer is in the best interest of the Town. A breakdown of the PSA 2022 budget was shared with the Board of Finance. It showed a net income of \$57,238.00.

There was a short discussion on the topic with multiple clarifying answers shared.

b. Revaluation - Assessor Presentation

Adrianna Hedwall, the Town's Assessor was present to answer any questions that Board members had about the recent reevaluation of all property in town. She shared a Grand List Comparative Totals for 2020, 2021, and 2022. She shared that the mil rate would be 21.64 if the Oct. 1, 2022 Grand List were applied to the FY2023 Budget, a drop of 6.24 mils from the present 27.88 mil rate.

6. Board of Education Liaison Report

Zach Maurice shared that the Board of Education Budget Committee has been meeting weekly to prepare their budget. He shared that it was good to have the audit completed, while 38% of the towns in the state do not have theirs done. They have also completed a Capital Improvement Plan.

7. Finance Director's Report

a. Board of Education January 2023 Expenditure Report

Cindy Varricchio stated that the Board of Education Budget is tracking well, however, they continue to monitor salaries. She also stated that preschool collections are doing better

than expected with 58.2% of the budgeted tuition received. She reminded the group that Special Education is an area that the situation could change drastically overnight.

There was a discussion as to how the Secondary Education Budget is arrived at. Roy Seitsinger shared that the number presented doesn't include two schools. The present 8th grade class has about 40 students, which is higher than the number graduating. He mentioned the following increases: North Stonington 3%, Griswold 2.75%, and NFA 7.25%. It was also mentioned that the Town pays NFA for students in the preceding year, except for Special Education students who are paid for in the present year.

Looking ahead the Board of Finance was told that the Board of Education is still exploring options for the relocation of the Central Office. They will begin to implement ClearGov budget applications as they work on the 2023-2024 budget. The Town and the Board of Education have locked in diesel, gasoline, and heating oil for 2023-2024 as follows:

- Diesel - \$3.1166 per gallon
- Unleaded gasoline - \$2.8674 per gallon
- Heating oil -\$3.0509 per gallon

It was also mentioned that the Board of Education has been awarded a \$226,316.97 mental health grant which will be phased in over three years. It will be used to cover the cost of a Part-time Social Worker and the supplies for programs and training that go along with that position.

b. Town January 2023 Revenue and Expenditure Report

Cindy Varricchio stated that she and her staff are reviewing the audit report draft, with the audit completed there is no need to file another extension. She noted that Investment Income is performing exceptionally well.

Andrew Sawyer asked why Public Safety is so high, it was answered that the State Troopers payment is done in June.

There were no questions on the Tax Collector's Report, so, Ms. Varricchio shared a draft of a *Citizen's Guide to the Budget Process*, she pointed out where citizens can sign up for alerts to inform them of important budget activities this year.

8. Old Business

a. Audit Update/Draft Report

Ms. Varricchio shared that the audit is completed, and she gave Board members a copy of the audit draft for their review. She is still reviewing the draft herself. She did state that within the report it's cited what issues have been remedied. She informed the Board that Sean O'Grady will attend virtually next month's meeting to answer any questions.

b. Board of Education Capital Request

Roy Seitsinger shared the Board of Education's Capital Improvement Plan. The 6 page list of projects were prioritized according to a Strategic Plan Mission Priorities rating system. Safety and Wellbeing was at the top of the list and District Operations at the bottom. He stated that one reason some of the upgrades are so costly is the age of what is being upgraded or repaired. Parts have to be made or the item is obsolete. He also warned that as they well know costs are rising so decisions about these projects need to be made sooner rather than later. He asked the Board how fast the Capital Plan Process could begin. He urged them to move towards Facility Planning so that projects are "shovel ready" so as funds become available the Board of Education could move to obtain funds to reduce the burden on taxpayers.

The discussion turned to worse case scenarios that would close the school building. It was discovered that it's against the law to offer remote learning as an option, so other options would need to be looked at.

When asked about the Central Office, Dr. Seitsinger stated that at this point it's looking like leasing is the most cost effective solution at a cost of about \$7,000 a month, but there will be a presentation when the Board of Education has finalized everything.

Andrew Sawyer motioned to waive item 9a. Request for a Bid Waiver - Fire Chief Vehicle (ARPA Funds) forward on the agenda. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

9a. Request for a Bid Waiver - Fire Chief Vehicle (ARPA Funds)

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier shared that another Town had ordered the truck through a GM Fleet Account, but did not take possession. Because the truck was ordered through a fleet account it must be sold through a fleet account, therefore, this purchase needs a bid waiver approval from the Board of Finance. The cost is just under \$45,000 for the 2021 Chevrolet Tahoe (CK10706) 4WD 4dr Commercial vehicle. Chief Wucik added this vehicle is an excellent buy for the Town, and it would replace the 2010 vehicle that has 260,000 miles on it. The fact that the vehicle is available without the traditional year to a year and half wait is an added bonus.

Andrew Sawyer motioned to approve a Bid Waiver for the purchase of 2021 Chevrolet Tahoe (CK10706) 4WD 4dr Commercial vehicle from Blasius Chevrolet for \$44,899.22. Denise Beale seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

c. Board of Finance Budget

The Board reviewed the draft of their budget. It was noted that they need to complete the narrative, and that one major accomplishment was the completion of the audit.

When looking at the actual numbers they were told both Technology Support and Legal Services would be handled centrally like Part-Time Employees (Recorder), therefore those two

lines were eliminated. The Auditors line item was increased because of the additional cost of State Single Audits, Federal Single Audits, and adding \$1,500 for billable hours in order to continue receiving the expertise of the auditors as the financial office moves forward. It was decided that the line should be increased to \$26,500. It was recommended that \$250.00 remain for Travel and Meeting Reimbursement in case any members wish to attend CCM Conferences that are offered.

Andrew Sawyer motioned to approve the Board of Finance's Budget with Auditors line item at \$26,500 and Travel and Meeting Reimbursement line item at \$250 for a total budget, excluding Part-Time Employees (Recorder), at \$26,750. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

d. Board of Finance Policies - Discussion and Planning

Ms. Varricchio shared that in order to follow Best Practices and to improve the Town's Rating when going for Bonding that it was important for the Board of Finance to establish a set of guidelines. She reviewed the various kinds of policies that should be included such as: Fund, Debt, Capital, etc.

Through the discussion that insured it was decided that a subcommittee would be established to work with Ms. Varricchio to draft a BoF Policy. Denise Beale, Stacey Becker, and Andrew Sawyer all volunteered to be on the Policy Subcommittee.

Stacey Becker motioned to establish a Policy Subcommittee. Denise Beale seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Kayla Thompson motioned that Denise Beale, Stacey Becker, and Andrew Sawyer comprise the Policy Subcommittee. Andrew Sawyer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

9. New Business

a. Request for Bid Waiver - Fire Chief Vehicle (ARPA Funds)

b. Board of Education Central Office Relocation Discussion

Roy Seitsinger stated that the Board of Education is leaning towards leasing a place to house the Central Office. By moving the offices out of PPMS, the school gains two classrooms that are needed for the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year. Because the BoE is looking at leasing it would need to go to a Town Meeting. Once the BoE approves their option they will present it to the BoF, and then to a Town Meeting.

c. Board of Finance Workshop Dates - Schedule and Planning

It was asked why Boards and Commissions are still meeting at the school and not at the Town Hall.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier stated that there is still a 5-day quarantine in place, and until that is lifted the school is the better option to accommodate the public at meetings.

After some discussion it was decided that the BoF would hold Budget Workshops on Wednesday, March 29, 2023 and Thursday, March 30, 2023. It was decided to accommodate all members, 7:30 P.M. would be the meeting time. The place will be determined after confirmation of availability has been done.

Kayla Thompson motioned to approve the Board of Finance's Budget Workshops for Wednesday, March 29, 2023 and Thursday, March 30, 2023 at 7:30 P.M. at a place to be determined. Denise Beale seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

10. Public Comment

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Drive, stated she would like to make 4 comments:

1. Commended the BoE with their negotiations with the MEUI staff who would like raises. She feels that it's important to make their pay more fair and equitable.
2. Thanked the group for the *Citizen's Guide to the Budget Process* flier. She feels that this will help citizens and perhaps get them more involved.
3. Commended the BoE for their Reading Program choice.
4. And finally stated that she really hopes a New School Committee gets started soon.

11. Adjournment

Denise Beale motioned to adjourn at 9:35 P.M. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary

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PRESTON, CT.

2023 FEB 22 P 2:48

J. Keith
PRESTON TOWN CLERK