

**Preston Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
Thursday, March 30, 2023
Preston Plains Cafeteria**

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

Members

John Moulson - Chairman
Thompson
Robert Congdon - V. Chairman
Kayla Thompson - Clerk - seated at 7:35 P.M.
Stacey Becker
Denise Beale
Zachary Maurice

Alternates

Robert Castronova - seated for Kayla
Andrew Sawyer

Also Present

Jerry Grabarek - Selectman
Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director
Dr. Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools
Sean Nugent - Chairman of the Board of Education
Victoria Schwert - Financial Assistant, Board of Education
Kimberly Lang - Recording Secretary

Members of the Public - 17

3. **Public Comment**

Andy Depta, 6 Young Court, pointed out that there are two budget schedules and questioned which is the correct one to follow. After a brief look at the two different schedules, it was determined the one on the Facebook page was incorrect, and it was clarified which to follow.

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Dr., stated that she attended the BoF workshop previous to this meeting and it was good to see the progress that is being made to develop Budgeting Policies.

Susan Strader, 463 Route 164, reminded the Board of Finance that both the BoS and the BoE worked diligently on their budgets and they are the experts of their perspective areas and keep in mind as the Board of Finance moves forward you need to make sure you meet the needs of the town.

4. 2023-2024 Budget: Review the Board of Education's Budget

Sean Nugent, Chairman of the Board of Education shared a few opening remarks regarding:

- Growing number of students
- Must move the central office to use for classroom space
- New State mandated Reading Program
- ClearGov - partnering with the Town
- Adding a bus driver
- Added a Social Worker

He then reviewed the process to use to develop and arrive at the budget being presented.

Dr. Seitsinger then shared the highlights of the budget with the audience. He stressed a cooperative vision and long-term planning must be done to meet the needs of all the students. This is being done by shared positions, services, and assets with the Town. He implored the need for a Community-wide Strategic Planning to meet the needs of the entire Town not just the school. He went on to explain that while the pandemic may be considered ended the effects are still being dealt with.

He then shared the following facts about the student body:

- ❖ 450 students: last year 439
- ❖ 207 high school students at 8 different schools
- ❖ 9.8% or 44 students with 504s
- ❖ 19% or 86 students with IEPs
- ❖ 33% of the student body is Free and Reduced Lunch
- ❖ 12 different languages being spoken at home
- ❖ 16% of the student body, BIPOC (Black and Indigenous People of Color)

The Superintendent then shared the proactive interventions and efficiencies that the Board of Education has taken to move forward and continue to provide a high standard of education to students. Steps like:

- ClearGov
- Fixed fuel costs at \$2.87 and heating oil at \$3.05
- Fixed healthcare at 8.4% or lower
- Relamping both schools - to cut electricity costs
- BoE Finance Committee has reduced the budget by over \$281,067
- HR LEARN reorganization
- Attract and keep staff
- Request two new staff - a para and a bus driver

It was shared that the school actively looks for cost savings and applies for grants whenever possible. He then shared a chart showing the various grants that help reduce the cost to taxpayers.

He then reviewed the budget by numbers sharing what makes up 85% of the budget; which are:

- Salaries 47% or \$6,986,179
- Health 12% or \$1,827,615
- Special Education 11% or \$1,646,847
- Secondary Education 15% or \$2,279,777
- Total BoE budget for 2023-2024 \$14,780,777 with adjustments for an increase of \$1,321,283 over last year's budget.

Finally, Dr. Seitsinger answered questions from the Board of Finance members that were shared with him before the meeting. These were regarding:

- ★ If a 4th grade teacher was added
- ★ Cost of substitute teachers has gone from \$85 to \$150 a day
- ★ Transportation Coordinator
- ★ Special Education costs
- ★ Teacher salaries
- ★ Home growth and sales in Town *

At the conclusion of the presentation several Board of Finance members had questions. The ensuing discussion included the following:

- Grade 4 - the looping of a teacher as a bubble group moves through the system was clarified to some extent
- Special Education - even though there are fewer students out sourced, depending on the program prescribed by the IEP depends on the cost
- The State mandated that every school district must choose 1 of 7 acceptable programs and implement it. The mandate does not come with purchase or implementation assistance.
- The need for so many Chromebooks and computers was questioned. It was explained that there are computer labs within both schools, smart boards in every classroom, each student and staff has a laptop as well as 1-2 extra ones in every classroom. There is a need to be cautious to back away from computer use at this point because of possible new educational mandates from the State.
- The thought to consolidate administrative roles was briefly discussed, but pointed out that it doesn't save cost and simply isn't plausible for Preston.

There was a brief discussion by Board members concerning the April 6th meeting and it was decided that it would be canceled and that the Board of Finance would meet in April on the 19th, its Regularly scheduled meeting and again on April 20th at a Special Meeting. The meeting on the 20th could be canceled if all the business can be conducted and completed at the meeting on the 19th.

Kayla Thompson made a motion to move the Board of Finance Special meeting of April 5th to April 20th. Denise Beale seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment

Meegan Glallant, 23 Tanglewood Drive, stated as a parent, Board of Education member, and taxpayer she supports the Board of Education budget as presented; and would like to see it moved forward as presented to the next step of the process.

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Drive, agreed with Meegan that the budget process was diligently worked on and was well presented. Moving forward, she would like to see information concerning the budget process to come from one source so as to not confuse taxpayers who are wishing to follow the process. She also appreciates all the hard work of the many individuals who work on the budget for the Town.

Vicky Spicer, 20 Mattern Road, as a taxpayer, teacher, and future parent of a student she stated that she supports the budget as presented and would like to see it move forward.

6. Adjournment

Kayla Thompson motioned to adjourn at 8:55 P.M. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary

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PRESTON, CT.

2023 APR -4 A 9:52

Denise Beale
ASST. PRESTON TOWN CLERK