

**Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Wednesday, April 13, 2022
Cafeteria - Preston Plains Middle School**

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

1. Roll Call

Members

Alternates

John Moulson - Chairman

Robert Congdon - Vice-Chairman -

Stacey Becker

Denise Beale

Andy Depta

Zachary Maurice - excused

Andrew Sawyer

Kayla Thompson - Clerk - seated for Zach Maurice

Also Present

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier - Selectwoman

Jerry Grabarek - Selectman

Ken Zachem - Selectman

Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director

Roy Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools

Jim Corley - Public Works Manager

2. Public Comment - There was none.

3. Review Town Budget

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier shared that while dealing with the uncertainties of the times the Board of Selectmen has put together a budget that will meet the needs of the town while keeping spending in check. Each department was asked to put together its budget and any department with more than a 5% increase was asked to appear before the Board and justify the expenses increases. While there is an increase it is the best budget that we can present with 8% inflation rates, interest rates on the rise, fuel costs fluctuating, and disruptions in the supply chain throughout the country.

The First Selectwoman did point out that there was a focus on keeping as many line items flat as possible. Some solutions were to reallocate within a department. As far as salaries were concerned they were handled centrally. It is hoped that moving forward that with a Human Resource person salary increases can be justified by staff evaluations and job performances, rather than a blanket increase. This year a 4% salary increase for all employees has been budgeted. This is due to the increases in inflation, COLA increase of 5.9%, Health Care

and Dental 8% increase, and in the past two years, there were minimal increases.

She noted that Health Care and Dental is calculated at an 8% increase as was advised.

CIRMA has a 5% cap increase although it could be less, this won't be known until later. CIRMA policy will include cyber security.

It was noted that multiple items were moved within the budget because it was felt the moves were necessary to reflex spending more appropriately and make accounting more streamlined.

Public Works has a 27% overall increase in their budget. They are having difficulties finding a part-time person to work the Transfer Station on Fridays and Saturdays, so they would like to hire a full-time person that would cover the Transfer Station on the weekend and complement the road crew 3 days a week. This would help with a staffing shortage.

It was pointed out that technology needs to be more reliant, secure, and up to date. CIRMA insurance has a 5% increase and does include cyber liability. Traditional an Equity Distribution has been awarded to the town yearly. It was suggested that the Equity Distribution be used to offset the increases rather than put into the General Fund.

The Fire Department has budgeted \$7,000 and will continue to do so in order to replace equipment in rotation rather than all at once.

There have been two items added to the budget per request of the Board of Finance, \$25,000 for the 10-year reevaluation that is on the horizon and \$5,000 for the POCD which is presently being worked on.

After reviewing the Budget it was noted that there would be an 8.7% increase over last year. With current inflation rates, and cost and services increases, the increase in the budget is unavoidable. It was further decided that the Park & Rec mower for \$19,000; Library repairs for \$11,050; and the Highway Garage trailer for \$8,500 a total of \$48,550 would be paid with ARPA Funds.

It was stated - *We need to strive to be prepared to be poised for growth and to make our community the best it can be.*

Jim Corley then presented the Public Works budget. He shared a handout that showed the various increases justifying each. There was a chart with gathered data from area towns showing the number of maintainers versus miles of road per maintainer. It showed that Preston's 3 maintainers covering 18 miles of roads are understaffed for the job at hand; thus justifying the hiring of another person.

He also pointed out the drastic savings to the town when work is done in-house. He gave a few examples of recent work done in-house rather than contracting out the work. Completing work in-house as well as maintaining and repairing tools and equipment can lead to savings of \$95,000 or more over a year.

The Board members had the following questions and comments:

Bob Congdon asked if the Fire Dept.'s retirement plan could mirror other departments in the area to make Preston more competitive.

There was an open discussion of the TAR funds being listed as revenue rather it's traditional placement in the budget. It was clarified that the funds offset expenditures but for accounting purposes need to be listed as a revenue.

Andy Depta questioned part-time staff and certified staff. It was explained that certified staff is a teaching designation and that they are working to change the listing to show full-time, part-time, and seasonal staff.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier stated that they are looking to use APRA funds for one-time use items and that would offset Capital Project budgets more than the operating budget.

Stacey Becker stated that the Board needs the results of this year's audit before any decision can be made. That contemplating using anything from Surplus is dangerous when its unknown how much is in Surplus.

Kayla Thompson questioned the increase in Library software. It was explained that they have joined the LIONS consortium and that they have increased their digital resources. Some software upgrades are to add creativity to their programs, ZOOM, and the ability for patrons to register online.

Stacey Becker questioned the increase in the Senior Center staff. It was explained that the increase is due to the workers for the congregate meals being initially recorded incorrectly.

It was noted that Parks & Rec's Summer Program had a \$10,000 increase. It was stated that with the recent free summer school offering the Parks & Rec had a significant loss in revenue. The increase is to keep the cost down for local families.

Webmaster funds were reallocated to the two positions that have absorbed that work as part of their duties.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier explained that the town is presently looking for a ZEO and that it's proving difficult to find. Part of the reason is the few hours the town has to offer also a new person as of 2023 will need to be certified. It's hoped that a person can be found that is shared

by several of the smaller towns in the area. The budget reflects the hiring of a certified ZEO with benefits.

It was noted the significant increase in the Library programming budget. The First Selectwoman explained that they are hoping to offer 7 adult/teen programs for a total of \$3,500; 5 family programs for \$750; and continue with the Summer Reading program for \$1,500.

It was noted that the Treasurer went up 100%. It was stated that the position needs to be full-time, not part-time due to the segregated duties to strengthen her abilities to complete all aspects of the job efficiently and to comply with the recommendations of the auditors.

4. Public Comment -

There was none.

5. Adjournment -

Kayla Thompson motioned to adjourn at 8:40 P.M. Andy Depta seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary