

**Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Tuesday, May 2, 2023
Preston Plains Middle School Cafeteria
AMENDED**

1. Call to Order - John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Roll Call

Members

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

Alternates

Robert Castronova
Andrew Sawyer

Also Present

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier - First Selectwoman
Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director
Dr. Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools
Kimberly Lang - Recording Secretary

Members of the Public - 73.

2. Public Comments

Jill Charron, 244 Route 165, stated that she was speaking for the vulnerable population that doesn't have a voice, the children of the town; she requested no further cuts to the Board of Education budget.

Kate Allingham, 182 Old Jewett City Road, introduced herself as the President of the Library Board of Trustees and spoke on the many programs and services for all ages that the Library provides.

Ronald Curtis, 26 River Road, shared his support for the good works of the Library.

Mary Jo Nugent, 164 Watson Road, shared a letter from Maryanne O'Neil, stating her support for the Library and its many good works. Mary Jo also supports the Library and its role in the community.

Jessica Nemeth, 17 Brown School Road, mentioned a variety of reasons that the Library budget should not be reduced.

Bill Legler, 51 McClimon Road, stated that he had attended the Board of Selectmen meeting held just prior to the Board of Finance's meeting, he stated that he didn't see a need to cut the general government budget and that after the Board of Finance hears the proposed cuts that it be passed forward with no further reductions. He went on to state that he did feel that the Board of Education budget should be reduced. He stated that other towns are paying about \$20,000 per student while Preston is paying \$24 -25,000 per student.

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Drive, stated that she too had attended the Board of Selectmen meeting prior to this meeting as well as the Board of Finance meeting immediately following the Public Hearing. She also shared that there was never a motion to cut funds from the Library. She does support the Board of Selectmen budget to move forward intact, but does not support the Board of Education budget with a full time superintendent. She feels that crucial funds are not getting to the children.

Harold Bobowicz, 79 River Road, stated that he was new to town, but was in total support of the Library and the many services it provides.

Frank Ennis, Miller Road, will have a grandchild entering the school system soon and is in support of the Board of Education budget, especially the Pre-K program.

Amanda Way, 44 Long Society Road, stated that Preston's school system allows students to thrive and ensures they have the right services for their individual needs. She supports the Board of Education budget and the maintenance of the Library.

Beth Bonosconi, 5 Tyler Road, stated she supports the Board of Education budget and that any cuts to staff will create deep sacrifices for the student population.

Susan Strader, 463 Route 164, stated that taxpayers' struggles are not with the budget rather with the reval that has occurred and affected us all. She stated that there are tax relief programs by state law for seniors and those on fixed incomes. We needed to be forward thinking for all our sakes.

Victoria Spicer, 20 Mattern Road, stated that she supports the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education budgets moving forward intact with no further cuts. She also stated her support for the Library.

Andrew Stockton, 16 Lynn Drive, stated he was in support of the Library and suggested other areas that could be reduced due to, in his opinion, their lack of financial gain.

Heather Heliwig, stated she supports the budget as presented and the Library is an asset to the Town that shouldn't be cut from the budget.

Michael Hinton, 41 Long Society Road, stated that education spending across the state is at a deficit, and that he supports continuing to fund the Library.

3. Budget Discussion and Deliberation

Sandra Allyn- Gauthier thanked everyone for coming to participate in tonight's meeting. She shared that the Board of Selectmen have worked hard for the past 4 months with various

department heads and entities that comprise the general government budget to present to you, the taxpayers, a comprehensive well-developed budget that will allow the Town to meet the needs of its citizens in these unstable times. She acknowledged inflation has touched everyone with increases in gas, heating oil, food prices, and other staples giving us pause to wonder how we'll keep up. It's important to plan, failure to do so will find us falling short of the mark. Unfortunately, the scheduled reveal has come at a difficult time which has us all looking at new challenges, but we need to meet these challenges together as the strong community that we are. The Board of Selectmen met before this meeting to find a way to adhere to the Board of Finance's request to cut \$100,000 from the General Government Budget, knowing that any cuts would jeopardize programs and services to the community.

Ms. Allyn-Gauthier then took the time to clarify misinformation that was stated earlier about the Board of Selectmen's budget.

- She explained that ClearGov is a tool that would cost \$14,000 not \$45,000.
- That the HR Study was done so that staff salaries and raises could be justified rather than across the board.
- Shifting hours doesn't mean more staff, it means using staff in the areas where they are needed when there are higher than usual tasks that need to be accomplished.
- A Grant Writer is critical, to date the Town has received 3 times the General Government Budget in various grants.

In conclusion she hopes that the Board of Finance will accept and support the Board of Selectmen Budget with no further cuts.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger stated that he too supports the Library and that the school enjoys a partnership with the Library that is vital to the students. He went on to share that he realizes that everyone has burdens and that with the fluctuating economy it makes predicting the cost of what's needed difficult. He informed the audience that the Board of Education did reduce their budget by the requested \$300,000. The Board of Finance will decide exactly where those cuts will be made at their upcoming meetings next week.

He then quickly reviewed the Board of Education's budget which included: salaries, high school tuition, health care, and other fixed contractual costs. He did point out that partnering with the Town has saved in several areas - health care and fuel.

Dr. Seitsinger shared that it's important for the Boards of Selectmen, Education, and Finance continue to build a strong partnership in order to plan and anticipate the needs of the Town. He feels that with some effort the curve can be flattened to eliminate severe ups and downs in the budget. It's crucial that we work together to find solutions.

Denise Beale needs to see more being given back and feels there needs to be deeper cuts. She suggested a \$100,000 reduction for the Board of Education Budget and \$135,906 reduction for the Board of Selectmen Budget, as suggested by Andy Depta.

Kayla Thompson stated that she felt that several misleading statements were made at last week's meeting. She feels it's prudent to keep the funds that support the HR Study so that the Town can keep its staff. She pointed out that the Recreational Director just resigned and to replace her at what the Town is offering will be very difficult. The reduction to the PRA when we're so close to turning the property over isn't smart, and yes we had a mild winter and we have a lot of salt and sand, but we can't put our head in the sand and hope for the best. We need correct information to have meaningful conversations.

Andrew Sawyer stated that compared to other Towns Preston Library is much more expensive to run. He shared the yearly cost of several area libraries that were all under \$100,000. He suggested that it's time to look at other more profitable fundraisers or pay to play systems. He went on to suggest that the school look into the pay to play method that some towns have already gone to.

Bob Congdon stated that it will be painful whether we cut the budget or pass it forward to the Annual Town Meeting. He went on to share in his opinion the average taxpayer won't support this budget.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier shared the Board of Selectmen's suggested budget cuts be:

- A reduction of \$16,500 in Legal Fees
- Elimination of \$25,000 in Reval
- Elimination of \$25,000 for Grant Writer that will be paid for with ARPA funds
- \$7,500 for Servers be paid for with LOCIP funds
- \$21,000 for Road Surfacing be paid for with LOCIP funds
- \$5,000 for POCD be paid for with LOCIP funds

The total reduction from the proposed budget is the requested \$100,000; this allows us to continue to plan for the future and the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously to move the budget forward with these cuts.

Cindy Varricchio then reviewed the reductions of \$400,000 the Board of Finance had requested. She shared that the State originally reduced the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) by about \$100,000, but the State Legislative proposed budget has the \$100,000 restored and it's her recommendation that the Board of Finance increase ECS to \$50,000 as an additional revenue offset. Based on the requested \$300,000 reduction in the Board of Education budget

with the additional \$50,000 in ECS revenue, the total reduction from the BoE budget will be \$250,000.

4. Act on Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Board of Education Budget

Zachary Maurice motioned to approve the newly presented Board of Education budget of \$14,530,477.00. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

5. Act on Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 General Government Budget

Bob Congdon motioned to move the General Government Budget forward incorporating the \$100,000 cuts proposed by the Board of Selectmen in the amount of \$4,902,104. Zach Maurice seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Mr. Congdon thanked the Board of Selectmen for meeting prior to the Board of Finance this evening in order to decide where best to make reductions rather than making the Board of Finance make those decisions. He stated their efforts were much appreciated.

6. Act on Proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Revenue Budget

Bob Congdon motioned to increase the Revenue projections by \$50,000 in anticipation of Educational Cost Sharing funding and \$33,500 in LOCIP funding. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

The Board reviewed where the mil rate would fall with the approved actions that had just transpired. It was determined that the mil rate would be 23.24.

7. Public Comment

Susan Strader, 463 Route 164, thanked the Board of Education, Selectmen, and Finance for working together to move the budget forward to a Town Meeting.

8. Adjournment

Kayla Thompson motioned to adjourn at 8:20 P.M. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary

RECEIVED
PRESTON, CT.

2023 MAY 18 A 9:53

Chris Kelly
PRESTON TOWN CLERK