

Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Wednesday, June 22, 2022
Preston Plains Middle School Cafeteria

Call to Order - John Moulson called the meeting to order at 8:15 P.M.

1. Roll Call

Members

Alternates

John Moulson - Chairman
Robert Congdon - Vice Chairman
Stacey Becker
Denise Beale
Zachary Maurice

Andrew Sawyer - seated
Kayla Thompson - Clerk

Also Present

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier - First Selectwoman
Jerry Grabarek - Selectman
Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director
Sean Nugent - Board Education Chairman
Andy Depta

2. Public Comment - None

3. Correspondence

- June 17, 2022 - Nick Vigilante: email - regarding Board's vacancy
- June 20, 2022 - Jill Keith: email - concerning the budget process that occurred this year

4. Board of Finance Vacancy

**Bob Congdon motioned to nominate Andrew Sawyer to fill the Board of Finance vacancy.
Andrew Sawyer seconded the motion.**

**Zach Maurice motioned to nominate Kayla Thompson to fill the Board of Finance vacancy.
Stacey Becker seconded the motion.**

With no further nominations a vote was taken, Bob Congdon, Andrew Sawyer, and Denise Beale voted for Andrew Sawyer; while John Moulson, Stacey Becker, and Zach Maurice voted for Kayla Thompson. Ending in a tie.

Bob Congdon stated that the loss of a Republican party member and with two viable candidates at the ready he felt that the vacancy should be filled with a Republican to keep the Board politically balanced, therefore Andrew Sawyer should fill the vacancy.

John Moulson stated that Kayla Thompson, although she is an alternate she is also the clerk, which is the busiest job on the Board and felt that she should fill the vacancy.

At this point Andrew Sawyer withdrew his vote and it was determined that Kayla Thompson would fill the Board's vacancy.

5. 2022-2023 Budget

a. Set Mil Rate

Andrew Sawyer motioned to set the mil rate at 27.99. Zach Maurice seconded the motion.

Stacey Becker suggested that an additional \$50,000 be taken from the Undesignated Fund Balance to offset the budget further to keep it just below 1 full mil increase. She stated with the current inflation and price increases that taxpayers would appreciate that. Andrew Sawyer stated, looking at the past 8 year history of the Undesignated Fund use, that the increase being suggested isn't that aggressive and therefore should be done.

Stacey Becker amended the original motion to set the mil rate at 27.88. Andrew Sawyer seconded the motion. John Moulson, Stacey Becker, Denise Beale, Zach Maurice, and Andrew Sawyer voted in favor and Bob Congdon opposed the motion. The motion carried 5 to 1.

Andrew Sawyer motioned to set the mil rate at 27.88. Zach Maurice seconded the motion. John Moulson, Stacey Becker, Denise Beale, Zach Maurice, and Andrew Sawyer voted in favor and Bob Congdon opposed the motion. The motion carried 5 to 1.

Andrew Sawyer motioned to use \$900,000 of the Undesignated Fund Balance to offset the budget. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. John Moulson, Stacey Becker, Denise Beale, Zach Maurice, and Andrew Sawyer voted in favor and Bob Congdon opposed the motion. The motion carried 5 to 1.

b. Budget Discussion

Board members requested the results of the Referendum. They were told the Board of Education Budget received 279 voted yes and 246 no; and the Town Budget received 295 voted yes and 230 no. There are still absentee ballots to count, but there aren't enough to change the outcome of the Budget passing.

6. Public Comment - None

7. Adjournment

Andrew Sawyer motioned to adjourn at 8:30 P.M. Zach Maurice seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary

Nicholas P. Vegliante
Chair, Preston Democratic Town Committee
npvdtc@gmail.com

June 17, 2022

VIA EMAIL (financeboard@preston-ct.org)

John Moulson
Chair, Preston Board of Finance

Re: Vacancy

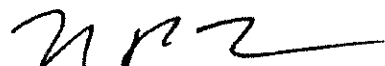
Dear John,

I am writing to support the candidacy of Kayla Thompson for the currently vacant regular member seat on the Preston Board of Finance. Kayla was previously endorsed by the DTC to fill a vacancy as an alternate and then ran and won as the endorsed candidate for an alternate seat. Kayla was then endorsed again by the DTC to fill a vacant regular member seat in December, 2021 (for which she was not chosen) and I have no doubt that if time allowed the DTC would formally endorse her for this current vacant seat as well. As I am sure you already know Kayla is an entrepreneur, owning and operating a small business, she has an interest in the issues affecting our community and a desire to become involved in shaping our town's future. In addition, appointing Kayla to fill this vacancy would be consistent with the will of our voters as she has already been duly elected to serve as an alternate member of our Board of Finance.

Most importantly, Kayla has already demonstrated a willingness to work diligently when called on by the Board. Despite serving as an alternate and being a new member Kayla has taken on the role of Clerk for the Board of Finance. This is a significant responsibility and Kayla stepped up when the Board needed her. If I recall correctly, during the recent public hearing on the town and school budgets, you referred to Clerk as perhaps the hardest or most time-consuming job on the Board. The Board trusted Kayla to be Clerk and Board should now reward Kayla's dedication and trust her to serve as a regular member.

Unfortunately, I will be unable to attend your June 22, 2022 meeting. As such, I would ask that you not only share this letter with the other members of the Board, but also read it during public comment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Nicholas P. Vegliante
Chair, Preston Democratic Town Committee

An Open Letter regarding my opinion of the "Preston CT BOE Fiscal Year Budget Draft"

From: Jill Keith (jillskeith@gmail.com)

To: financeboard@preston-ct.org; john.23@comcast.net; s.t.nuge@gmail.com; seitsingerr@prestonschools.org; allyngauthier@preston-ct.org; hfb95@aol.com; dbggrabarek@sbcglobal.net; craymond@99main.com; gallantm@prestonschools.org; dupointec@prestonschools.org; bob.congdon@att.net; dbealebof@preston-ct.org; sbeckerbof@yahoo.com; adepta235@comcast.net; andrewprestonbof@gmail.com; kaylathompsonbof@outlook.com; kzachem@preston-ct.org; jgrabarek@preston-ct.org

Cc: jillskeith@gmail.com; c.bessette@theday.com

Date: Monday, June 20, 2022, 03:22 PM EDT

Dear Preston Board of Finance/Mr Moulson, Preston BOE/Dr Nugent, Preston District/DR Seitsinger, Preston BOS/Mrs Allen-Gauthier, The Day/Claire Bessette, Preston Taxpayers and the Preston Community:

An Open Letter regarding my opinion of the "Preston CT BOE Fiscal Year Budget Draft"

I am writing to express my concern about the current proposed Preston Board of Education budget. I understand my time to communicate this information has since passed given the referendum vote begins in less than thirty-nine (39) hours.

Part of my concern about this year's Preston budget process, in addition to the 7.8% increase over last year's "Adopted Budget," is that I did not feel comfortable in the "stacked" public meetings that occurred most certainly because of the series of meetings held by school staff this spring in which only parents of school-aged children were invited (including the day before the Public Town Hearing). I have already expressed my concern about those meetings running afoul of the SEEC guidelines in my Public Comment after the Hearing, as you may recall. I'm hopeful our elected leaders will investigate.

In preparation for the Town Meeting, I sent inquiries to the Preston Board of Education and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to help me understand Preston's school district funding. I am pleased to say I received a response from the Preston Superintendent's Office (first time without requiring a "FOIA" form of me, thank you!). I received a most comprehensive response from the Connecticut State Department of Education, which represents audited data that the Preston School District Officials have submitted to the CSDE throughout each year, most of which is publicly available on the edsight.ct.gov website.

At the Preston Town Hearing, I expressed concern about the 9% increase in the salary line item and the ongoing large allocation in the legal fees line items - and suggested the BOF reduce the Board of Education budget proposal by \$250,000, as that was the approximately the amount the CSDE had confirmed that the Preston BOE and NFA were able to pay in legal fees against me in 10 months (a few years back) without going to a referendum - when I had no attorney and received a demand letter from the Preston BOE, which was made a public not private case and was dismissed. You may recall at the Town Hearing that the BOF dismissed my suggestion and voted to send both proposed budgets (BOS and BOE) "as is" to the Town Meeting and then to the Referendum.

I would like to applaud Preston taxpayers, as evidence proves that we fund education 5% greater than most towns, our per pupil expenditure is greater than the state average and is as high as towns with much higher financial means than us, and we hire local professionals and reward staff longevity because we believe in their expertise and value their continuity, as well as the opportunities they offer our children and our children's children.

Personally, I found the Teacher Union rhetoric during the Town Hearing's Public Comment to be nauseating. As a Professional Educator and Retired School District Administrator, I was embarrassed that the Board of Finance was spoken to in the ways I heard. I hope I expressed that to each of you during the Town Hearing. When I was an educator and a school district administrator, we always advised parents and families to never make derogatory comments or threats about school programming to our elected officials - and to encourage everyone to vote - not just to vote YES as a threatening means to avert large class sizes, the loss of favorite teachers or create fear about the elimination of PreK or after-school activities. I hope someone will stand up and disallow that behavior in the future. In particular, I hope that all future meetings will include invitations to all taxpayers and that all facts and opinions will be encouraged as well as taken into consideration.

Now that I have some facts that I did not have at the time of the Town Hearing or the Town Meeting, I would have recommended that the Board of Finance reduce the Board of Education "FY2023 Budget Draft" from **\$13,459,495** dollars to **\$12,482,057**, a total reduction of **\$977,438**.

The reason for this is that the **FY2022 adopted budget was \$12,482,057, which is \$381,000 greater than the actual expenditures of \$12,101,874 the school year prior.** Unanticipated expenditures above and beyond an Adopted Budget should follow procedure and be brought to the Town Referendum process.

But more importantly, I learned from the state that our district enrollment in the last 3 years has dropped 28 students (661-633 from 2017-2020) and the PreK-8 enrollment has dropped 77 students from 504 in 2006 to 427 in 2021, but the number of staff during the last three years has increased 14.1FTEs (from 92.2 to 106.3) and the expenditures have increased \$301,297 (or about \$100,432 annually).

Thus, a million dollar increase request in one school year is unconscionable, in my humble opinion.

I especially find such an exorbitant request to "maintain the status quo" and "fulfill contracted salary increases" as inappropriate budget drivers that do not demonstrate encouraged "efficiencies" and problem-solving that benefits kids, their learning and their future. The Preston schools don't even do some things the CSDE encourages or requires, such as assessing all kids and identifying/reporting those as gifted and talented - and adjusting class sizes and the curriculum - all of which can be achieved without increasing our current funding levels and has huge learning benefits for all students!

I'd like to see the BOF use our surplus to bring our mill rate down two (2) mills each year until the taxation level meets our actual annual expenditures. Let's spend from our own pockets, not our children's.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jill
Jill S Keith
cell: 860-884-9719
jillskeith@gmail.com



Preston PreK-8 enrollment, 2006-2021.JPG
89.4kB



Preston G-T, 0, 2016-.JPG
130.3kB



Preston PreK-8 staffing trend report, 2017-2021.JPG
119.4kB



Per Pupil Expenditure, 2019-2020, Preston District, PreK-8.JPG
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Per Pupil Expenditure, 2017-2018, Preston District, PreK-8.JPG
113.8kB



Per Pupil Expenditure, 2018-2019, Preston District, PreK-8.JPG
113.1kB



Preston PreK-8 FTE staffing, 2001-2021.JPG
137.4kB



CSDE gifted.jpg
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Preston PreK-8 enrollment, 2016-2021.jpg
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