

MINUTES

Board of Finance and Town Council Finance Committee

Business Education Initiative and Board of Education Budget Hearing February 25, 2013

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Elaine Hammers called the budget hearing meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. at the Town Hall, Trumbull, Connecticut. All those present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

Members present / absent from the Board of Finance:

PRESENT

Elaine Hammers, Chairman
Paul Lavoie, Vice Chairman
Cindy Penkoff, Alternate
Dave Rutigliano
Tom Tesoro
Andrew Palo
Susan LaFrance, Alternate
Vincent DeGennaro, Alternate

ABSENT

Steven Lupien

Members present / absent from the Town Council Finance Committee:

PRESENT

Debra Lamberti, Chairman
Tony Scinto, Vice Chairman
Jane Deyoe
Mark LeClair
Vicki Tesoro
Greg Basbagill

ABSENT

Ann Marie Evangelista, Alternate
John DelVecchio, Alternate

Also present: Maria Pires, Director of Finance; Ralph Iassogna, Superintendent; Dr. Cialfi, Assistant Superintendent; Shawn O'Keefe, Business Manager; Stephen Wright, Chairman, Board of Education; Debra Herbst, Vice Chairman, Board of Education; Dr. Robert Tremaglio, Principal, Trumbull High School; Dr. Linda Paslov, Curriculum Director; Michael T. Herbst, Athletic Director

Business Education Initiative

Mr. Annick presented the budget request for the Business Education Initiative, referencing page 323, section 6, of the Board of Finance Budget. He indicated that there are three parts to the BEI budget:

- Trumbull Community Television, which includes the videographers. An additional \$20,000 being added to bring supervising producer position up to a half time; this is the only increase.
- The BEI Area: Assist students in K-12 the town to learn more about the work world through career exploration program activities and events. At the end of the year, BIE holds a recognition

event for the business participants and to show them how the students put information to use, regarding the \$25,000 in contributions is used for career exploration.

- Utilities for the Helen Plumb Building.

Mr. Annick indicated that going forward his involvement with Business Education Initiative would be as a respective committee member.

Board of Education

Mr. Wright spoke indicating:

- 99% of our students graduate and 94% continue their education after graduation.
- Both middle schools honored as schools of distinction - in the top 10%
- Maintained class sizes and class structure during these difficult times.
- Per the Gibson Report, we addressed upgrading our technology. Per discussion with the First Selectman, these funds will come out of the budget and be included in a Bond.
- Standardized exams will be taken on computers in the future and we are not ready; installing Wifi will assist in security throughout the school.

Mr. lassogna indicated that the Board of Education is requesting a 4.56% budget increase. The First Selectman reviewed this request, moved Project Catapult .76% to a future technology Bond request and then reduced the adjusted amount of 3.08% by 2.06%. Mr. lassogna cited that 85% of the increases are based on the following four cost areas:

Cost Areas	Increase Amount	% of Overall Increase
Salaries	\$1,548,522	1.70%
Benefits	\$ 911,573	1.00%
Project Catapult	\$ 692,650	0.76%
SPED Tuition	\$ 375,000	0.41%
 TOTAL	 \$3,527,775	 3.86%
All Other Costs	\$ 635,682	0.70%
 2013-14 Request	 \$4,163,757	 4.56%

- The job of the BOE is to implement those programs that will benefit the school district and the most students. The job of the Town is to provide the services that the tax payers need in an efficient manner.
- BOE has implemented cost saving measures without compromising student needs, and most recently explored:
 - Alternative source of funding for insurance fees; going from fully funded to self-funded saving in the second year \$1.6 million dollars.
 - Shifting non-certified new hires from the Town Pension Plan to the new Defined Contribution Plan.
 - Increasing the pension contributions to 5 and 6 percent, comparable to the Town side.

- To offset BOE expenditures, the Town will receive \$6,000,000, mostly from the government, as follows:
 - \$3 million from ECS
 - \$1.46 million from VOAG
 - \$950,000 for Special Education related excess costs
 - \$200,000 transportation reimbursement
 - \$325,000 several combined small grants

- Accomplishments include:
 - Trumbull Public Schools' contributions 2011 by *Family Circle Magazine*
 - TPS in *Connecticut Magazine*, November 2011
 - TPS Graduation
 - Full Day Kindergarten Program
 - CMT/CAPT/SAT
 - Hillcrest and Madison Middle Schools - "highest overall performance"

- The average per pupil cost in Fairfield County is \$15,000; we spend \$12,695 and only Newtown and Shelton are lower. Per the DRG, we are below average with \$12,695.

- Focus of the 2013-2014 request:
 - Maintain what we have in academics.
 - Operational responsibilities.
 - Implement in Operating Budget and 3 year technology plan – Project Catapult – to enhance infrastructure and equipment.

- Based upon the First Selectman's recommendation, we will be short \$1,862,000. This reduction may have funding cliff ramifications. He believes that although the cut is significant, we can mitigate any reduction using funds under the Board's discretion.

- There are potential funding sources in 2012-2013. There are unspent funds that we are still assessing as we are only 5 months into the year. We will not know until April or May.
 - Kindergarten funds.
 - Transportation bids; may be up to 3.25% savings; will know this week.
 - Possible premium savings from the 9% projected insurance rate; based upon claim rates.
 - Not guaranteed and must be approved by the Board.

The Chair indicated that if any additional follow up is needed, she should be contacted and the information will be made available at the 3/11 meeting. She also indicated that the figure used by the Finance Director, which was approved last year, does not include the \$875,000. These funds have not yet been given to the Board of Education. There is the thought that a supplemental appropriation is made and then added to the base. When we give you access to the surplus, instead of putting those funds back into the general fund, we have already once taxed the residents of this town for that money; we built it into a mill rate and everybody paid. Now, because we have the ability, we should carry it in a separate account until the Board needs it, but it will not be transferred into the Base. You haven't needed these funds yet and we are not putting them into the Base for a second year.

Mr. Iassogna indicated that the \$1,862,000 is still a reduction regardless of the Base. We'll need to find the \$875,000 as well as the \$1,862,000.

Mr. Tesoro asked what would be affected with the \$1,862,000 budget cut. Mr. Iassogna will provide the breakdown.

Mrs. LaFrance asked what impact the Discover Magnet School would have on our school system. Initially, she was told, grades 9-10 will be affected by approximately 40-44 students; Trumbull HS will be affected minimally. Impact on the elementary school will be significant in 3-4 years.

All of our elementary schools are maxed out, except for Middlebrook. We are looking to get out of the modular units and might have to look at tweaking the Booth Hill area and possibly the Daniels Farm area.

Mrs. Penkoff asked about the high school modular units. She does not feel that they should be using them with the facilities provided with the renovated high school. Mr. Iassogna indicated that we own

them. He went on to add that they are very nice, have air and lavatories, provide a great learning environment, and the students enjoy using them. Dr. Tremaglio indicated that room usage at the high school is at the max so they are using them throughout the day.

Mr. Palo asked what was in the budget for additional security upgrades at the schools. Mr. Iassogna indicated that for 2013-2014 there will be a separate security proposal; the First Selectman has it and it will be \$750-\$800,000 with a myriad of different vetted protocols and areas of emphasis to make us more secure and safe.

We had \$692,650 in our operating budget for Technology that the First Selectman wants to bond. In addition, there are field improvements that need to be addressed:

- Football field \$400,000
- Track \$200,000
- Tennis Courts \$319,000
- Soccer Field \$700,000 (to be implemented eventually- don't have one now.)

Mr. Tesoro asked for an explanation of Project Catapult. Mr. Hackett indicated that Project Catapult will get us to where we need to be with technology and that it is a 3 year initiative. Mr. Tesoro asked if teachers will then maintain their websites and use Gray Book. Mr. Iassogna indicated that we are working in that direction. Dr. Cialfi indicated that teacher websites are replacing paper bulletins in backpacks at the elementary schools, and we are nearly complete. The transfer is complete at the middle schools and about 50% complete at the high school. Mr. Iassogna indicated that there is a lot of change going on, and therefore we are not pushing the issue.

The Chair indicated that there would be additional meetings regarding the technology upgrade. In addition, she asked what the goal would be, since the technology becomes outdated fairly quickly and we therefore we will be bonding for a short period of time. She also expressed concern that not everyone will be comfortable using this technology; that we won't be keeping up with our students; that we won't be responsive to their needs.

Mr. Hackett indicated that we are looking at a 3 year plan; the majority of the bond is for replacing equipment – computers. We have computers out there that are 12 years old. Mr. Iassogna mentioned that full wireless access was moved ahead, and smart boards were put on hold, based upon student feedback. Apparently, smart boards are not available where they can be effectively used at all time; classes are assigned to rooms without regard to whether or not the smart board will be used.

Mrs. Herbst indicated that smart boards are very important for class interactions. Project Catapult would bring technology up-to-date.

Mrs. Norcel, principal of Frenchtown School, spoke about the usefulness of the smart boards in her school, indicating that they are only as good as the teacher. It is an interactive chalk board, which can be connected to any device. It can also be considered a modern day overhead.

Mr. Scinto asked what curriculum has been built around the \$693,000. He hasn't seen anything in writing in reference to putting in smart boards; are you looking to cross platforms; how are teachers going to incorporate this into teaching.

Mr. Hackett indicated that we cross platforms and are not limited to certain devices. Children are encouraged to BYD – bring your own device – to school.

Dr. Cialfi indicated that technology does not drive the curriculum. Dr. Paslov indicated that technology is a tool to deliver the curriculum. We write the curriculum and we address which technology must be used, as well as which books must be used. Some books can be downloaded; how do the students access – do we provide an e-reader. We find that not all homes have individual computers for each child and that can present a problem if they are expected to use an e-book. In some districts, schools are providing students with IPADS.

Mr. Lavoie expressed that his concern with the technology and bonding has to do with utilization. He finds that he has to change so his employees can thrive in their environment. What are we going to do to provide the right environment, tools and philosophy? If we bring it in, we need support it with a strategy, philosophy and utilization plan.

Dr. Paslov indicated that the 3 year plan included technology and integration. If a student takes an on-line test the teacher can correct it on an I PAD. Technology includes teacher training and data storage. Teachers seek out the specialist when they need assistance with technology. Dr. Tremaglio indicated that we are doing a lot of research.

Mr. Tesoro asked if what new positions, if any, were being added and why. Mr. lassogna indicated that the addition of 2.5 new positions had to do with mental health. This has to do with the high student to counselor ratio.

Mr. Scinto asked what savings would be recognized if 44 students go to the new school. Mr. lassogna indicated that monetary saving would be negligible.

Mr. Tesoro asked that Mr. Rinaldi be present at the next meeting to discuss insurance. Mr. lassogna indicated that the rate could drop to 8% depending on the claims. March and April usually have a lower rate of claims than in December.

Mrs. LaFrance asked if there is a way that the application process for college bound students can be streamlined. Dr. Tremaglio indicated this is being worked on and the report will be forwarded to the Superintendent. We have a much high student to guidance counselor ratio than surrounding schools at 1/240 students. Mrs. LaFrance indicated that the national average is 1/250 students. Mrs. Tesoro indicated that not only 12th graders need assistance; the other students also need assistance. Dr. Tremaglio indicated that many of our guidance counselors take on social work also since we only have one social worker at THS.

Mrs. Penkoff indicated that she would like to know how many guidance interns are on board; what their role is and if they can assist. Dr. Tremaglio indicated that there are usually 1 – 3 each year. Their ability to help is dependent on their expertise. They assist with paperwork and with specialized programs. They are involved with early intervention and standardized testing.

Mrs. Herbst indicated that we can look at the numbers; however, she looks at the student need. We need more people to address the needs and issues that the students come with to HS.

Dr. Tremaglio indicated that the children need connectedness. Guidance is currently working outside the normal workday and participating in other areas.

The Chair asked if anyone of the staff would like to bring any issues to the Board.

Charlotte Janis, Principal, Tashua Elementary School indicated that the Staff does not use the technology because the computers freeze and they can't use some of the programs. There is not a lot of technology in the elementary education classrooms.

Mr. Palo asked if the possible Federal sequester on March 1st have any effect on this budget. Mr. Wright noted that it is 8%, but not until the next budget. Mr. lassogna indicated that there would also be some special education funds coming.

Mr. Herbst indicated that there would be a need to bond for the football field turf, tennis courts, track and soccer for safety related reasons. The Chair indicated that these issues would be addressed when we go for bonding.

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Phyllis Collier
Board of Finance Clerk