BOARD OF FINANCE

Town Hall
5866 Main Street
Trumbull, Connecticut 06611

Board of Finance/Finance Board of the Town Council Meeting
Council Chambers, Trumbull Town Hall
Unapproved Minutes
March 3, 2026
7:00 pm

Call To Order
Board of Finance Chair, Ms. McHugh, called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm followed by a moment of silence.

Present

Board of Finance
Lainie McHugh, Chair
Paul Timpanelli
David Galla
David Pia
Massimo Mallozzi
Michael Colohan
Nathan Tinker
Vincent DeGennaro

Also Present
First Selectman Vicki Tesoro
Maria Pires, Director of Finance
Kathleen McGannon- Chief Administrative Officer
Cindy Katske – Chief Administrative Officer

Board of Education
Lucinda Timpanelli, Chairman, Board of Education
Alison Squiccimarro
Lisa Nuland
Chris Bandecchi
Tammy McGee
Julia McNamee

Finance Committee of the Town Council
Nicole Satin
Christine El Eris
Mary Isaac
Tom Broderick

Board of Education Administration
Dr. Martin Semmel, Superintendent
Alison Pierce, Business Administrator
Dean Calalano, Director of PPS
Dr. Susan Iwanicki, Asst. Superintendent
Joseph Chella, Dir of Human Capital and Talent Development
Christine Hefele, Dir of Digital Learning
Kevin Dion, Director of Operations

Chairman McHugh addressed the attendees noting it was a meeting of the Board of Finance with members from the Finance Committee of the Town Council and the Board of Education and their administrative staff. She began the meeting with the following statement:

Tonight begins the BOF phase of the 2026-2027 budget process here in Trumbull. This is my tenth budget season on this side of the desk, and I spent ten years involved from the other side of the "Railing". I want to take a moment to acknowledge all of our department heads, including the TPS administration and most importantly Maria Pires, our Director of Finance and her department for all of the intricate work and detail that goes into this process. I am, and have always been, in awe of the amount of work that it takes to get a budget proposal to this point, all while the day to day operations for the current year need to get done. Mrs. Tesoro has agonized over each department's request and the delicate balance between needs and wants. It is my personal goal, as Chair, that all come away from the process with the feeling that this Board has treated them with the respect they deserve.

I also want to acknowledge my Board and thank them for the work and time they put in. Volunteers, all, they are well prepared for these discussions by attending the BOE budget meetings, other town meetings and participating in sessions from Public Works to learn about everything from paving to plowing and the flow of poop. This is a new Board of talent and experience. I am privileged to be a part of it. I ask you to acknowledge their willingness to ask hard questions and think outside the box that demonstrates a commitment to work in the best interest of all of Trumbull.

In accordance with our charter, the First Selectman has transmitted her budget proposal to the Board of Finance, as of the first Monday in March, and the BOF begins their review by hosting the BOE for the first of our department hearings this evening. We will continue our meetings with all town departments on Tuesday, March 10th and Thursday, March 19th. We will be mixing it up this year, meeting with our larger departments in person on the 10th and the rest via zoom on the 19th. Those meetings will be available to the public via **TCTV YouTube on Zoom**. Those schedules have been posted on the town website.

We will also host two public hearings, the first on Thursday, March 12th at 7pm and the second on Saturday, March 21st at 10am. While both of those are scheduled here in Council Chambers, they are planned to be hybrid meetings with an opportunity for the public to attend and comment remotely. I am amenable to hosting the second meeting at a larger venue, if requested, but it will remove the remote comments.

Every year, I think that we are in the most challenging of budget cycles, hopeful that the coming year will be easier. Yet, here we are again with a most daunting task to meet the demands of providing for critical services, public safety and education in a most unpredictable economy.

Before us sits a total proposed budget of $221,235,816. The BOE ask is $137,773,114 or 6.65% increase over last year's operational budget. Recommendation of the First Selectman is $134,344,746 or 4% with a net delta of $3,428,368.

Before we begin tonight's presentation, for some perspective, almost a decade ago, one of our BOF members lamented that the cost of education was rising exponentially faster than is sustainable and if we continue to expect 3-4% growth every year, before we know it, the budget requests will be $130,000,000.

In 2013-14 we had 6,824 students, 602 identified special education and a total BOE operational budget of $90,789,175, a 50% increase in ten years.

Let me be clear. I truly believe that every dollar we are able to spend on education is a worthwhile investment, we can never pay our teachers what they are truly worth, and the "extra curriculars" are the heart of turning our students into good citizens. I also believe it's not how much we spend on education but how much we value education in our community and homes, that sets Trumbull apart.

It serves no purpose to present a "we vs they" argument, to mis-characterize the First Selectman's commitment to education, or to catastrophize the impact of any reduction to the BOE request. We all know what is at stake. The need has never been greater for us to work together to make sure Trumbull remains a community of choice. So, as we begin our discussions tonight, I want us all to take a breath and reset. Let's level the playing field with an understanding that we are all on the same team. No matter the outcome, we will need to look beyond Trumbull to conquer ECS formulas and external factors to make growth and progress for TPS sustainable for generations to come.

Dr. Semmel thanked the Board allowing him to review his budget and for all those in attendance at the meeting. He noted his goal is not to catastrophized; his purpose is to make sure families and the community are fully aware of what he sees at stake for the education program. He is hired by the BOE to be the leader of the entire school system and takes that responsibility greatly. It is his responsibility to make sure the students get what they need. Identifying the needs and associated expenses is important. Noted that, not just in Trumbull but across the State, they face more difficult budgets this year. Temperatures have risen in different towns. Once the First Selectman's budget is identified, the only group that can make an increase is the Board of Finance. It is up to the community to share with the Board of Finance their feelings. (He noted his slide presentation is on-line.) They are about empowering the student by using the Vision of a Graduate as a guideline done in conjunction with the entire administrative team, Board of Education and many others.

Board of Education adopted 2026-2027 budget of $137,773,114; increase of $8,595,475 or 6.65% that includes:

- Contractual increases of salaries; currently 40.19% of total request
- Medical insurance rate increase estimate from the State ($3.3 million of the request)
- Increases in elementary staff (3.0 FTE) to adhere to BOE guidelines
- Adds World Language for Grade 5 (Spanish)
- Includes anticipated savings of $635,000 through staff turnover
- Utility costs, primarily electricity due to higher rates and the public benefit charge
- Includes athletics budget with $400,000 revenue offset
- Transportation budget based on estimated 4.5% contractual increase and additional buses

Last year, the BOE approved a 5.89% increase but received a 3.73% increase resulting in reductions:

- $75,000 Pay to Play increased from $165 to $190
- $290,000 of non-lapsing account paid for Bookworms
- $300,000 of non-lapsing account used to decrease technology budget
- $207,000 increased expectation for excess cost reimbursement after special legislation passed in CT
- $80,000 eliminated DFS Grade 2 FTE
- $80,000 eliminated FTE for Madison Middle School intervention
- Eliminated significant dollars in supplies, furniture, textbooks across the district

If the BOE receives a 4.0% increase this year, it would mean a $3.4 million reduction to the request; significant reduction to staff would be required:

- All new staff (7.0 FTE) and 2 additional busses
- Administrator positions (2.0 FTE)
- 16 teacher positions (16 FTE)
- Long Hill Support Staff (3.0 FTE)
- Freshman Sports or raise pay to play by $40-$50
- Secondary school activities, advisors and comp expenses
- Close elementary schools at 4pm and reduce custodian
- Security Guards (2.0 FTE)
- Paraprofessional (3.0 FTE)
- Late Busses for secondary school
- Curriculum writing/professional development

If a 5% reduction is received; $2.1 million reduction to the request:

- All new staff (7.0 FTE) but keep 2 busses
- 1 administrator position (1.0 FTE)
- 8 teacher positions (8.0 FTE)
- Long Hill support staff (3.0 FTE)
- Freshman sports or raise pay to play by $25
- Secondary school activities, advisors and comp expenses
- Close elementary schools at 4pm and reduce custodian
- Security guards (1.0 FTE)
- Paraprofessional (3.0 FTE)
- Late busses for secondary school
- Curriculum writing/professional development

401a expenses to the BOE were previously funded by the Town. Requested the Town take this expense back. Now covers 189 people. This would reduce expenses by over $500,000. Only 5.5% is left in the budget for non-discretionary spending after employee benefits and salaries.

Pupil Personnel Services – Dean Catalano spoke on the following:

- No requests for additional certified or non-certified staffing based on current actuals
- OOD tuitions increased an average of 8% for 2024-2025. Increases for 2026-2027 are anticipated at 3%
- APSEPs “a la carte” for related services increases costs
- 37 students currently outplaced; 37 projected for 2026-2027

Engaging in the following to offset costs:

- REACH, SRP and ELITE programs
- Enrolling students from Monroe in REACH
- Expanding the usage of the ELITE spaces and utilizing ecommerce to sell goods
- Utilizing Class V endorsement drivers to avoid high-cost bus routes
- Continuing to advocate for full funding of ECR and SDE monitoring of Approved Private Special Education Programs (APSEPs)

Additional statistics were presented regarding cross district budget analysis, DRG B District Per Pupil Expenditures, funding differences. Dr. Semmel urged parents to provide public comment to the Board of Finance on either of the two dates in March. Request your State elected officials to increase the Education Cost Share Grant, fully fund the Excess Cost Reimbursement Grant and stop adding unfunded mandates.

A question and answer period followed his presentation covering several topics for additional information including:

1. Tiered bus system
2. Cross District Budget Analysis
3. Retirement incentives
4. Energy programs and incentives
5. 205 and Non-Lapsing Accounts
6. Grants
7. Free and reduced lunches
8. Special Education consultants/fees
9. Impact on staff and students with potential cuts
10. Negotiation account
11. Payroll administrator and updated audit findings

Dr. Semmel reiterated his responsibility is to 7,000 students and families in Trumbull and takes that responsibility seriously. Trying to make sure families are aware of the situation with the budget and what he sees going forward, if nothing changes. Hopes the BOF will sharpen their pencils and find ways they can do more than the 4%. The Board has a sense of what he would have to do if they don't go beyond that. There are other white horses such as the bus tier situation. If they move in that direction and it is going to save money, they are obviously going to keep that in mind. He will update the Board of Finance. He is expecting more information in the next couple of weeks and he will provide what they share with him. If they think it is good chance to move forward with that and what the expected savings would be, it would be fair for the Board of Finance to hear. The other white knight that might come would be the ECS. Perhaps the State will find the money and move it back towards the towns. The ECS money could help save some positions as well. The insurance is a possibility, but only minor. We have sometimes seen insurance save us money but they keep coming back to us saying that the 15% we have in the budget is a good number and that we shouldn't expect it to come down. In the past, he has seen some significant reductions in insurance, but doesn't see that coming this year. That is another reason he is worried. He knows Trumbull feels strongly about their education program. People move into Trumbull for the educational programming. He believes that the families want to make sure they are receiving at least that level of education moving forward. He hoped that families would reach out to the Board and continue to share their thoughts about what they want for their education moving forward and telling you it's okay to increase their taxes a little bit to make sure that happens. He recognizes as a taxpayer, that it is not easy to say that taxes should be increased. Costs have gone up for everybody. He knows it is not an easy job but hopes they will take a look at it and make a wise decision on what needs to happen with the education budget moving forward. The parents are relying on the Board of Finance at this time.

First Selectman Tesoro introduced herself and noted that she has been fighting for the education budget for the last 33 years in various positions within the school system and town government. She does not take the job lightly. She is an education advocate and if she could give the BOE every dollar they asked for, she would but she needs to balance the needs of the entire town. Her budget was presented with what she knows. She knows the partnership plan, insurance plan, has a 15% increase. For the Town, that was almost a $2,000,000 increase. The Town shares the same problems as the BOE such as energy costs. She can only budget with what she knows but heard today from the partnership plan that they will not know the final number until March 17. It could come down or stay the same. It is not the end but the beginning of the process. It could change for the better.

Mrs. Tesoro spoke about the ECS funding referring to the slide discussed by Dr. Semmel. Trumbull is at the bottom of the ECS funding within our DRG, which is totally unfair. She has been fighting since her election in 2017 to increase the ECS funding. She stopped them from putting Trumbull on an accelerated track to reduce the ECS funding. We are now in a hold harmless category where they are not touching the amount we are getting, but we get far less than other communities. Comparisons include Monroe at $5,272,000; Glastonbury at $6,717,000; Trumbull $3,417,000. If Trumbull received their fair share, parents would not be sitting here tonight and she would not have lost sleep over the last six weeks worrying about the budget. Requested the parents to go on the Town website and put in testimony to the State legislators to increase the ECS funding to the Town of Trumbull. It can make a difference. She wants the children to get the education they deserve and will continue to fight for the ECS funding. The city at the top of the list was Danbury at $62,000,000. We cannot compete with that.

Adjournment
Motion made by Mr. Galla, seconded by Mr. Mallozzi, to adjourn the meeting at 8:46 pm. Approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Crandall
Acting Clerk