

March 5, 2020
Board of Finance and Finance Committee
#1 Board of Education Budget Hearing
2020-2021

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lainie McHugh called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Town Hall, Trumbull, Connecticut. All those present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members present / absent from the Board of Finance:

PRESENT

Michael Barker
Elaine Hammers
Marty Isaac
Lainie McHugh
Steve Choi
Paul Timpanelli
Vincent DeGennaro – Alternate
Marc Mascola – Alternate
Christine El Eris – Alternate

The Finance Committee did not have a quorum; however, Donna Siedell (left at 8:10), Dawn Cantafio and Mary Isaac attended.

Also present:

First Selectman Vicki Tesoro; Maria Pires, Finance Director; Kathleen McGannon, Chief Administrative Officer; Cynthia Katske, Chief Administrative Officer, Ralph Iassogna, Acting Superintendent of Schools; Allan Cameron, Interim Business Manager; Dr. Johnathan Budd, Assistant Superintendent; Lucinda Timpanelli, Chairman; Jackie Norcel, Secretary; Michael Ward, BOE; Dr. Kathleen Fearon, BOE; Marie Petitti, BOE.

The Chairman opened the meeting with the following statement:

Good evening! I would like to take a moment before we start to make a statement about the budget process, the role of the BOF, and some personal expectations as we begin discussing the 2020-2021 budget request.

A lot of work goes along with the lengthy budget process. The Board of Education began preliminary discussions back in October. Just after the New Year, all departments presented their budgets to the FS. The First Selectman, along with the Finance department, then crafted an overall proposed budget, which was forwarded to the BOF this past Monday. There are lots of moving parts that influence the budget process along the way, including things such as State funding, insurance premium rates, and contract negotiations.

At this stage, the Board of Finance has an opportunity to meet with each department to discuss their requests and the recommendations of the FS. We have the ability to increase or reduce any line item, or even create a new line item, by simple majority vote. We begin our hearings tonight with the BOE and then have two full days set aside to meet with the other town departments. (Monday, March 9 and Monday, March 16). These meetings are open to the public, although we do not include public comment on these agendas, as there are two separate public hearings scheduled with opportunity for input from any resident who wishes to offer their thoughts or opinions as they relate to the 2020-2021 budget.

Once we conclude our hearings, this body will vote on and pass our recommended budget to the TC. The TC then goes through similar hearings and at the end of the process, the final TC approved budget moves back to our board to set the mil rate.

To my fellow board members, some veterans of the process, some here for a first budget season, I offer some personal expectations for the tone of these hearings. First and foremost, I encourage you to ask lots of questions, ask for clarification of answers, and then ask for additional information / backup as appropriate. I simply ask, that we do so respectfully, keeping in mind that department personnel and the BOE are not our adversaries, we are all on the same team. Be mindful that in some departments this year, we have new personnel stepping in to the budget process mid- stream.

Secondly, as we have been elected to serve on behalf of the taxpayers of Trumbull, if they have taken the time to reach out by email with opinions or concerns, I'm asking that you make effort to acknowledge receipt of those communications.

Lastly, to the public, kindly remember that the members of the Board of Finance are volunteers. We spend a significant amount of time preparing outside of these meetings, and, while I do not speak for the others, I believe we all take the responsibility that comes with this process seriously and with an understanding that decisions we make have significant impact on people's livelihoods and our community.

With that, I would like to begin our hearing by Welcome the Board of Education, Interim Superintendent Ralph Iassogna and Interim Business Manager Al Cameron.

Acting Superintendent Iassogna began the meeting by showing a history of the amount that the Board has received each year since 2014. He went on to add that last year budget 2019-2020 was not sufficient. The Board of Education did not have sufficient monies to fund accounts. They added and then underfunded several programs and services. Overall, the BOE is currently \$2.9 million over budget.

He then proceeded to discuss the primary reasons why the Budget increased this year from last year:

- Salary and Benefits make up 85% of the increase
- Special Education
 - Outplacement costs
 - Paraprofessional costs
 - SRP teachers

The town is obligated to find a way to accommodate the needs of the special education children and if we cannot meet those needs, we must find someone within the state who can. This year it was necessary for the town to send one child to a special school in Massachusetts, at a cost of \$400,000, and more could come along in the next school year. The state reimburses us for excess costs.

- Increased Enrollment – normally, we are looking at a decline; however, this year Enrollment increased with 46 new students coming into the system.
- Federal wage increase of \$1.00 per hour.
- Large reserve for negotiations
- Increase in transportation costs plus the underfunding from last year, including special education. Transportation for one special education student last year was \$70,000.
- State mandated credit requirements increased from 22-25 credits. Students will now need to take additional classes in Art and STEM necessitating the addition of two teachers.
- Since we need to meet the needs of IEP, 40 additional paraprofessionals linked to special education were added last year, and not included in the budget. Funding for the paras was taken from the Food Service account.

Mr. lassogna indicated that they are continuing to make every effort to reduce the budget to include the \$2 million deficit from last year and so far is currently down to \$900,000. Mr. Cameron added that they hoped a 3.51% increase would be sufficient and then realized they needed close to \$3 million to fund all activities currently in the system.

He went on to add that they have been thinking of reducing the number of paras; possibly having a para take care of more than one child. In addition, there are 58 SRP students, so we may be able to reduce the number of SRP teachers.

Mr. lassogna went on to discuss reductions that were incorporated in December 2019:

- .2 TEAM Facilitator 25,000
- 2.0 District-wide Teacher Turnover 100,000
- 3.0 Technology Integration Specialists 150,000
- Non-Certificated Salary Reductions 200,000
- Reduction .5 Tech Support to .25 10,200

and the following made on 2/18/2020 at the BOE Special Meeting:

- Reduction of 15% from Professional Development 20,000
- Eliminate 2 online subscriptions 15,000
- New Textbooks only as required 92,000
- Curriculum writing only as required 52,000
- Facilities/Vehicles/Gas/Diesel 10,000
- Transportation – Late Buses 12,000
- Tri-State Consortium 8,000
- Phase-Out of Special Ed. Transportation Van 70,000
- Tuition Magnet: RCA, Aquaculture, Six-to-Six (Potential Reduced Enrollment) 80,000
- Elimination of .25 Tech Support 10,200
- Athletic Coaches/Related Materials (reduce budget by 10%) 48,000
- Eliminate Facility Admin Position (only .5 in 20-21 budget) 68,977
- Reduce Retiree Payments – Actual salary obligations rather than projections 95,000
- Eliminate Personnel Director Position 130,000
- Custodial Reorganization/Overtime 50,000
- PPS Reorganization 175,000
- Infinite Campus/Digital Software Reduction 15,000
- THS Turnover 100,000
- Elimination of 3 Elementary & 1 M.S. PPS Clerks 24,000
- Reassignment of 4.0 Middle School Math & ELA Chairs 200,000
- Reassignment of Department Chair of Psychology/Social Work 54,000

In addition to the above, the following are considered potential areas of reductions:

- Use of Buildings for after school/night meetings
- Class Size
- Reduce Athletic Budget
- Kindergarten Paras
- Middle School and THS Clubs/Activities
- Reading/Math Specialists
- Math Interventionists
- Literacy/Math Interventionists
- Gifted Program

Mr. lassogna indicated that a budget of 4.56% would cause the BOE to endure these serious cutbacks; 3.0% is not going to be enough with the cutbacks. There are very few options left to eliminate and we are currently seeing what happens when we don't allocate enough to cover the rising fixed costs each year.

In closing, Mr. lassogna stressed that if you add anything to this budget, something needs to be removed. He went on to add that based upon what we have reviewed this evening, we are recommending that you vote to approve an increase of \$110,960,680 or 4.56%.

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 8:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Phyllis C. Collier
Board of Finance Clerk