

TOWN COUNCIL  
**Town of Trumbull**  
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Trumbull

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FINANCE COMMITTEE  
FY 2020-2021 BUDGET HEARING MINUTES- BOE  
MAY 6, 2020

Call to Order: The Chair called the virtual meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Present: Chairman Lisa Valenti, Vice Chairman Dawn Cantafio, Kevin Shively, Michael Miller, Lori Rosasco-Schwartz, Tony Scinto, Mary Isaac, Alternate, Donna Seidell, Alternate

Also

Present: First Selectman Vicki A. Tesoro, Town Council Chairman Mary Beth Thornton, Interim, Superintendent of School Ralph Iassogna, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessments Dr. Jonathon Budd, Interim BOE Business Manager Al Cameron, John Morello of the BOE Facilities Department, BOE Chairman Lucinda Timpanelli

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The Chair explained this is a working session for the Finance Committee. She extended her gratitude to Mr. Iassogna for coming back as interim Superintendent of Schools. The Chair noted many people's question was whether the \$500,000 reduction could be addressed to put people at ease. The Chair explained the Town Council is one body and once they fund the BOE they have no authority over how the BOE uses the funds.

Mr. Iassogna emphasized that they come together not as adversaries but as education community partners. It has been his experience when they unite they can move the Town and District forward. This is the core and draw of the Town which reaps many benefits such as when Trumbull was named one of the best 25 Towns a few years back.

This budget process started in December with a 3.51% increase, it went to 6.29% but it was known that was exorbitant and went to a 4.56% increase. The First Selectman gave a 3% increase. This is appreciated as they know it's higher than the rest of the Town. First Selectman Tesoro has been sensitive to their needs and has given more than past experience. The BOF

reduced this by \$500,000 to 2.52%. This last cut back represents a decrease of 2.404%, (a \$2.2 million reduction).

As the Council considers their request Mr. Iassogna asked to keep the following in mind. The 2019-2020 budget was replete with financial concerns from the beginning. There wasn't sufficient monies to fund the accounts that were on the books. Several services and programs were added but underfunded. Mr. Iassogna commended Mr. Cameron and how he drilled down on the budget coming up with issues that were a concern for them. Originally in January they faced a \$1.2 million - \$2 million deficit. He was pleased to tell the Committee with judicious adjustments, prudent choices, and staff restructuring, administrative eliminations and the reduced school days, they have turned it around. They are confident and proud that they will not end the year in deficit and will not have to ask the Town for a supplemental appropriation, which they originally thought. This could have been at least \$ 1 million. He praised his staff for a job well done.

Mr. Iassogna explained Mrs. McHugh was looking to the unions on both the BOE and Town-side for a contract reopener and to also a give back day or two, (furlough). Any bargaining unit anywhere in the country is reluctant to reopen a contract. There have been preliminary talks with two bargaining units. He went to the teachers union and the administrators' union. The administrators were receptive to take a hard look at this, the teachers who are 600 strong didn't want to reopen a contract. Part of the reason was because there were so many uncertainties, such as when the governor was going to open or close schools, if the lease payment would be extended, or what will happen with summer school. Currently the BOE is in discussions with the transportation vendor about the contract and getting some money back. The vendor doesn't want to. This may go to court. Because of the uncertainties the union had said no at this time. They want to know when the budget is finalized. This probably won't be until the end of May or the beginning of June. Mr. Iassogna confirmed for the Committee that the union concessions are not built into their request.

Mr. Iassogna stated they had fourteen (14) retirements and had sent out 24-25 non-tenure, nonrenewal letters. They estimate 29 staff members not being reemployed, but there are still many uncertainties. If they get back \$500,000 or any additional money some teachers and programs will come back. He didn't have specifics since his BOE had not completely addressed this issue. The BOE started at a previous board meeting, and will meet again on May 12th and May 28<sup>th</sup> to finalize the recommendations. The train of the thought is to make reductions where there is the least contact with students and keep viable programs that students participate in. They made a good effort in that but the magnitude of the reduction was such that they will have to go into staff. Unemployment has doubled, they can only equate bringing back a teacher at \$50,000 not the \$80,000-\$90,000 they used to use. (\$50,000 multiplied by 10 is \$500,000) The list of reductions is published on the BOE website. The final decision rests with the BOE which won't be until the end of May when they have a good idea of what the numbers will be.

Schools have been closed since March 12<sup>th</sup> and will now be closed for the rest of the school year, which does save money. Mr. Cameron explained they have been able to save money and is why they can say with confidence that they won't be asking for a supplemental appropriation or ending the year in a deficit. There are savings in supplies and transportation, but until the

governor said they weren't returning to school they didn't have leverage in the conversations with the transportation vendor. Now they know what they are dealing with and will be able to negotiate with the transportation providers. There will be savings.

Dr. Budd explained he had a conversation with the representatives from the commissioners' office and are actively looking at what the schools will look like in the fall, it is very preliminary. As far as budget impacts it could go both ways. There may be situations where they will have to reduce the number of students in the buildings at one time, which conjures up images of students having different sessions on different days, which could cause additional costs in transportation and personnel, but if the year was to start later there could be savings. This is one of the unknowns. There is funding coming from the federal government to the state with four focus areas. They will get information next week on what to do to apply for their slice of the grant. The grant money is if they have to hire more personnel, transportation, or cleaning supplies. This will depend on what will be required by the governor for the fall session. Mr. Iassogna explained a key factor is social distancing will continue. The classrooms are for 25-26 students, if we have to be 6' away, you can't have 25 students at a time, and another question is the cafeteria, this is where half days or double sessions could be possible. There are so many uncertainties.

Reluctantly freshman sports and other items were on the list because they didn't have enough money, not due to social distancing. Knowing 2019-2020 was \$2 million in a deficit, the cuts were to bring the year in flat. They understand the predicament of the towns and particularly Trumbull that started out with a deficit. If you go back 6-7 years 1.4%, and 1.8% are numbers that are very difficult to overcome when it's one year after another.

Mr. Iassogna explained they have not finalized the class sizes yet, but if the teachers are not replaced at the middle school the sizes would be high, elementary and kindergarten are low, the high school is at 24 and some classes such as Latin are 10.

The retirements will be back filled. One of the key negative points of this is no matter how many teachers are eliminated, they will have to have numerous transfers. That is where it gets difficult in assigning staff. The Chair noted the class sizes may change due to the virus. Mr. Iassogna stated 65 classes at the middle school 65 are 26 & 27. Dr. Budd explained they have aggressively reviewed the enrollment figures since December when the budget was submitted, the initial budget in December projected four (4) additional classroom teachers at K-5, the most recent proposal at 2.52% reduces that to one (1) but that could change. Today his office had three calls for parents who had their children in parochial or private school and will be bringing them back to the district because they are either not satisfied with their distance learning or the schools have closed or they won't pay the money next year. One of the risks inherent in this budget to the extent they get any money back, some of it may be needed to open additional K-5 classes because of the movement of people due the pandemic.

Mr. Iassogna explained budgets increase all over the state and country because 85% of a budget is usually salaries and benefits. He had been an interim in two other places, Trumbull is a special place, and it has a high standard and is a quality school district. Trumbull is not out of sync with other budgets. What has happened in Trumbull because it's a quality system and has received accolades from national magazines, people move here, also the costs are rising because special

education is expensive. Most were projecting a decrease in enrollment, but Trumbull projected 46 more students. The federal minimum wage increased by \$1.00 per hour and that cost the district \$160,000. The state graduation requirements were raised as well. Trumbull is special it has the ingredients for success with the parent community, the student population and has a quality staff, not only teachers but secretaries, custodial and maintenance staff. We wouldn't have gotten through this situation without each and every one of the bargaining units contributing their fullest. Mr. Cameron noted he had also been an interim in other districts, Trumbull is a gem because the people work together, the students are always at the center of what is said and done. That is how Trumbull is DRG B school and Trumbull High School is recognized nationally as one of the best high schools.

Mr. Iassogna stated redistricting had not been discussed to date, the only exception was at the last board meeting it was asked what would happen if the Town Council reduced the budget. Mr. Iassogna had answered drastic things would be considered such as redistricting or close a school or eliminate all sports, those are things no superintendent or community wants to see happen. They haven't talked about redistricting, it's a lengthy process and there isn't enough time, there is a lot of turmoil and downsides to that. It was done when the new school, Frenchtown was built and it wasn't an easy process.

Mr. Iassogna stated the governor will make a decision on summer programs next week. Dr. Budd explained the State Department of Education will on or by May 15<sup>th</sup> issue guidelines and mandates of what can be provided in the summer, and the when and the how. Some special need students receive mandated extended school year servicing in the summer.

Ms. Timpanelli, BOE Chairman explained there are six (6) candidates for superintendent, they will interview them at a later date and spoke to the importance of interfacing with them in person. They are hoping they will be able to interview in the fall. They are fortunate to have Mr. Iassogna as interim. He knows the schools, the budget, has a good rapport with the administration, principals and many parents remember him.

Ms. Timpanelli explained she didn't have the budget for the superintendent placement fee they have been working on resolving the deficit and hasn't yet discussed it with the board yet. The Chair reiterated that was something this body doesn't have control over and could be followed up on at a BOE meeting. Mr. Iassogna confirmed for the Committee the superintendent's salary is in the current budget.

The Committee explained that the Town Council can reduce the budget and restore only up to the \$500,000 the BOF reduced. It is up to the BOE how the money is spent. Mr. Iassogna confirmed if they were to get the money back he would advocate for the restoration of teacher positions and other programs that make a well-rounded student. Not only instructional but social-emotional such as sports and agreed people are first. It was confirmed even with the \$500,000 there would be some sacrifices. The term 'status quo' can't be used this year due to the deficit. They are hoping for more money not only from the Town Council, but from the state through the federal government, and negotiations from the transportation vendors. The BOE will make decisions on who can be hired back and which programs to be restored. There will be a lot of thought and energy put into that.

Mr. Cameron explained their priority was to end the year without a deficit. The next priority are the two revenue accounts, (legacy accounts). These are outside the budget, hopefully there will be enough left after all the moving parts settle down to be able to address the legacy accounts and if not, the request to resolve will be very modest. Mr. Iassogna explained food service, one of the legacy accounts has served 1,000's of meals since the schools closed. Food services used to have \$600,000 in the legacy account, right now they are in a deficit because the money was taken out of that account and used for other things. Mr. Cameron would like to increase that account, because the board never had to pay if a freezer or stove needed to be replaced. Food services can't replace it now because they have no money. That is why they want to give them a little pot. The governor has said the meal plan will continue but he didn't say for how long. It could be June 17<sup>th</sup>, the last day of school, or June 30<sup>th</sup> or through the summer. Mr. Iassogna is awaiting confirmation on the date from the governor's office.

The Chair extended their gratitude to all for their efforts during these unprecedented times.

There Finance Committee adjourned the meeting at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Margaret D. Mastroni  
Town Council Clerk