

**Preston Board of Finance
Regular Meeting
Wednesday, March 29, 2023
Preston Plains Cafeteria**

1. **Call to Order** - John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.
2. **Roll Call**

Members

John Moulson - Chairman
Robert Congdon - V. Chairman
Kayla Thompson - Clerk
Stacey Becker - excused
Denise Beale
Zachary Maurice

Alternates

Robert Castronova
Andrew Sawyer - seated for Stacey Becker

Also Present

Sandra Aliyn-Gauthier - Selectwoman
Jerry Grabarek - Selectman
Ken Zachem - Selectman
Cindy Varricchio - Finance Director
Dr. Seitsinger - Superintendent of Schools
Sean Nugent - Chairman of the PRA and Board of Education
Jim Corley - Dept. of Public Works Manager
Keith Wucik - Fire Marshal
Kimberly Lang - Recording Secretary
Members of the Public - 6

3. **Public Comment** - None
4. **2023-2024 Budget: Review Town Budget with First Selectwoman and the Board of Selectmen**

The First Selectwoman made opening statements regarding the implementation of ClearGov which is a budgeting and communication tool that is critical in supporting the Town as it works to improve and move the Town forward. The goal is to launch this robust communication tool, with 5 years of historical data, by July 2023 to better inform the citizens of their Town's workings. She also stated that the overall theme in forward thinking is to gain momentum by creating actionable steps and goals with effective execution, based on strategic planning that include forecasting and communicating.

She went on to share the unavoidable external environmental influences that affected the budget such as inflation, unemployment, rising interest rates, and the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier then explained the parameters by which the budget was built with the help of various department heads who were asked that their budgets not exceed a 10% increase. She also mentioned that salaries were handled centrally, and that while the HR Study is nearly completed it will not be done before the end of the budget process, therefore \$50,000 has been added to the budget. This will be used later to adjust salaries based on the HR Study.

Then Ms. Allyn-Gauthier shared with the Board of Finance and the audience key components of the budget:

- Salaries, Healthcare, FICA, and MERS (pension) - This comprises about 56% of the overall budget. Salaries are at a 4.0% increase; Healthcare is at a not to exceed 8.5% and Dental at 2%; MERS has increased with a projected 2.02% increase.
- Finance and Treasury need to be strengthened with additional support as the Town moves towards a centralized Finance Department.
- New category *Floater hours* are not additional hours or personnel, but reallocating them to other areas as needed.
- There are cost savings with a SCCOG Code Enforcement Grant for the Building Official and the Zoning Enforcement Officer, as well as the contracted services of the Assessor with Ledyard. All of these saved wages as well as Health, MERS, and FICA costs.
- There is a savings with the State Trooper Services due to the current troopers being at a lower step than prior troopers.
- The Fire Department has added a full time paid firefighter. Also there is a new line item for Emergency Medical Director, there is not an increase here, it is just moving the Fire Chief and Captain wages. This allows the Town the ability to apply for the DEHMS Emergency Management Performance grant to offset the EMD wages.
- Public Works has a slightly over 14% increase, the road surfacing is being increased by \$27K in order to transition to implementing the Road Management System. SCRRRA tipping fees have increased, as well as gas and diesel even with partnering with the School District.
- A Grant Writer has been added for \$25K. Having a designated person to write and package the materials needed for grants and funding opportunities will allow staff to keep up with their own jobs rather than being diverted to work on grants and funding opportunities.

- Legal Services were centralized rather than individual Boards and Commissions having line items.
- Technology encompasses all departments. IT needs as well as software upgrades and an annual replacement of desktops and servers are a must. Updated technology that is safe and secure are a priority.
- Insurance and Risk Management, CIRMA, includes insurance projections for worker's compensation and property/liability, with about an 8.5% increase from last year. The group was reminded that CIRMA member equity could be used to offset this cost. The 5-year average for that payout has been about \$13K, however, it is not guaranteed.
- The Town's Fire and EMS Dept. use the Ledyard dispatcher who asked for an increase, this has been a flat rate paid over the past 12 years. There is a \$7,500 increase there.
- Capital Non-Recurring has a total of \$30K to cover the cost of the 10-year Revaluation and the Plan of Conservation and Development. This has been done in order to plan for these mandated expenses.
- Electricity has seen a 20% increase. On April 4th the Town will receive the results of a feasibility study of solar use on all the Town's properties in hopes to curb the cost of the Town's electrical use.
- Uncas Health District has been essential through the pandemic and still serves the Town in many ways has a \$2,600 increase based on their per capita formula. United Community Family Services also provides a variety of services to the community. They have served 276 Preston residents, and after flat funding over the past few years they have about an \$11K increase.
- A chart showing the various grants and funding opportunities that the Town has received or are in the process of receiving was shared. The total is a little over 10 million for a cost of approximately \$53,000 to the Town.

In summary the Government budget has an 8.5% increase which is slightly over \$388K. The Town's staff have worked hard to keep the costs down in spite of rising inflation. The Board of Selectmen are committed to the Preston community to maintain our property and equipment in good condition while balancing the increases in the budget. The BoS strives for slower incremental growth rather than large fluctuations and increases especially when planning for where we need to be in 3-5 years. The Grand List increase should help with the budget.

Working diligently on many grant applications for the betterment of our community, using ARPA funds, and working on longer forecasting and strategic plans are all keys to striving to be prepared and to be poised for growth.

There was a brief question and answer period at the conclusion of the presentation. There was a review of all budget items over \$20,000. The MERS and SS with the \$50,000 increase was explained.

The audience was asked if they had any questions. There were none.

5. Public Comment

Jill Keith, 26 Tanglewood Drive, thanked Sandra for such a comprehensive review of the budget.

6. Adjournment

Andrew Sawyer motioned to adjourn at 8:39 P.M. Kayla Thompson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary

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PRESTON, CT.

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ASV *Bence Wahl*
PRESTON TOWN CLERK