Preston Board of Finance
BoF Special Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 11, 2019 at 7:00 p.m.
Preston Plains Middle School: Gymnasium

1. Call to Order & Roll Call

Melissa Lennon, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

Members
Melissa Lennon – Chair
Jerry Grabarek – Vice Chair
Stacey Becker – Clerk
Sandra Allyn-Gauthier
Keith Wuck
Ken Zachem

Alternates
Ian Stammel
Lennie Spencer - excused

Also Present
Bob Congdon – 1st Selectmen
John Spang – Finance Director
Roy Seitsinger – Superintendent of Schools
Sean Nugent – Chairman of the Board of Education
Andy Bilodeau - public
Andy Depta – public
members of the Board of Education and employees of Preston Public Schools

Melissa Lennon addressed the audience by welcoming them, explained that this was a Special Meeting and that Public comments would be welcomed at the beginning and end of the meeting; but not during the budget workshop.

2. Public Comment & Questions (per posted Town Ordinance)

Andy Depta passed out a handout that asked the question of whether Preston Public Schools is a Behavioral or an Academic Institution? He pointed out that the Board of Education had added a position of a Social Worker to deal with Social and Emotional Support in the education setting; he felt that it may be more cost affective to train teachers and staff to deal with these issues rather than hire more staff. Mr. Depta also questioned why the school has to take on the role of teaching children coping skills; something that for generations parents taught their children. Andy asked that the Board of Finance not just scan the Lines of the purposed budget, but also read the narrative to understand the budget fully. The purposed budget has a 3.4% increase, which is a $430,195 increase. Pay close attention to the narrative that explains these increases.
3. FY20 Local Revenue Estimated Budget Workshop

Melissa informed the Board that the estimated numbers were not ready yet.

Ken Zachem motioned to table the FY 20 Local Revenue Estimated Budget Workshop until the Regular Meeting on April 24th. Jerry Grabarek seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

4. FY20 Board of Education Expense Budget Proposal Workshop

The purpose of tonight’s meeting was to hear the Board of Education’s financial needs for the next fiscal year. Also, the Board of Finance cannot reduce individual lines, but needs to look at the proposed budget as a whole.

Sean Nugent made opening statements to both the Board of Finance and the audience, stressing the work and the diligence that was put into this budget. The Board of Education feels that this budget will best address the needs of the students, staff, and town at this time. The Board of Education is under 4 contract negotiations this year, continuing to engage in shared services both with the town and with other Towns. As far as Social and Emotional issues in school, we are a small town, but we still have issues. Teachers need to teach, and we feel that there is a need for a Social Worker to address these issues.

Roy Seitsinger then shared a power point presentation that highlighted significant parts and changes in the budget. He pointed out that the overall strategic plan for the school system was methodically built into the budget. When showing the new positions to be added; he shared that studies are showing that nationally students are coming to school with more anxiety, depression, and emotional issues and that Preston is no exception. These issues affect the students’ ability to learn and if they are not addressed that adversely affects the school environment. Thus, the new staff that would be added are: .5 FTE Social Worker @ $31,000; 2.5 FTE Para-Educators @ $45,075 – driven by IEP’s; 1 FTE Bus Driver @ $20,413 – no spare drivers; .1 FTE Director of Special Education @ $11,000 – in-district collaboration time; and a .2 FTE Psychologist (Grant funded). Dr. Seitsinger also pointed out that the proposed budget improves Preston’s per pupil expenditure, but it’s still about $500 below the State average. After the presentation, Melissa Lennon asked if there were any questions from the Board of Finance members. Having none - the Board proceeded to look through the proposed budget by Line.

Dr. Seitsinger was asked to explain the salaries and new positions further. The salary and insurance package for the staff made up 54% of last year’s budget and 56% of the budget this year; which is a significant part of the budget. The Superintendent went over the new positions that are being requested and reiterated that contractual increases drive that part of the budget.

The Board of Finance then went through the proposed budget by Line.

It was pointed out that Superintendent salary last fiscal year was an 11-month position rather than the typical 12-month and further, and one of the lowest in the State.
The Business Manager salary is 80% of the full cost due to 20% share with the Town.
It was stated Fiscal Assistant increase is due to a staff change.
PVMS both Reg Ed and Spec Ed Teachers salary changes are contractual and due to staff moving from one school to another.
It was asked if the Para Educators had the same Medical Plan as the rest of the staff. The answer was yes.
It was asked if the custodial staff was under contract. The answer was yes.
Why the increase in Staff Development? It was explained that it is set based on per pupil and by building.
What does Health Services cover? It’s school nurses. At first it was thought that the school system could hire an LPN, but after a closer look at what the job entails, it was decided to continue with RN qualification.
It was pointed out that Psychological Services will have some grants to help offset the cost.
Social Worker is a new position – SW has been trained, qualified, and legally can go into homes to assess and assist in a situation; whereas others don’t have those legal rights or the training.
How many custodians? There are 2 per school and 2 shifts.
It was pointed out that the Itinerant Teachers are specialty teachers.
Difference in the Pre-school Teacher Line? There has been movement within the system, with a change in teacher assignments.
It was asked if the collection for Pre-School tuition is on track at this time? The answer was yes.
Why the decrease in Teacher Subs? There are fewer days allotted per contract.
Reason for Stipends? It must be provided per contract.
COLA Adjustments? Is budgeted for potential staff raises.
Increase in Transportation Clerical? A new person has been hired who is at a higher step.
Uniforms for who? This for the Custodial staff and bus garage mechanic.
Prof & Tech Service? Software contract for specialized work such as the auditor.
Lease increase? The school district was working with EastConn and now with LEARN to create a new technology plan, which will include the copiers. The results of that plan will guide future investment.
Are the copiers under contract now? The annual lease for the copiers has expired about a year ago.
Currently the district has different month-to-month agreements in place.
Increase in Tuition Reimbursement? This is needed per contract.
ERIP? Early Retirement Incentive Program? In an effort to decrease the FY20 budget, $3,000 of the original $10,000 FY20 ERIP money will be taken from the current operating budget at the end of the year, which will leave a $7,000 ERIP expense for FY20.
Property Liability Auto Insurance decrease? This is due to a reduced rate due to a 3-year commitment with the company.
Refuse Removal? The school asked for more containers, recycling increased because of the increase in tipping fees, and it is the first increase in 8 years.
Maintenance Equipment Repairs? This is needed to keep buildings in good repair.
Non-Instructional Equipment: what does this included? No big-ticket items, a floor scrubber was purchased this year, so nothing else is needed. However, every year 3 windows are replaced, and that’s what the funds are allocated for in FY20.
Transportation Training? The training is in house, which brought the cost down and includes new videos.
Is Heat Energy cost for just PPMS? This is for PPMS and the bus garage.
Natural Gas/Propane? Have signed a contract yet?
Electricity – expecting a rate increase?
Regular Tuition – Designated high school increases? NFA cost $12,800; the BoE is hoping to renegotiate with NFA.
Special Education Services? This is due to Special Services evaluations required per PPT, the testing that can’t be done in-house
SPED Tuition – Out of District? This is per IEP.
What is SPED Vocation? 18 to 21-year-old Special Needs person’s training and continued education until their 22nd birthday per State Law.
What kind Tech Support? It is contracted out to EastConn.
It was explained that Lines for Tech Equipment (site budget) and Tech Plan Infrastructure (new) have just been divided into two categories; there is no real increase. It was asked, where the BoE is with the MBR, $8,000 short fall and will the same situation be avoided in the coming year? Dr. Seitsinger explained the State sent a letter to Preston that states it is not eligible for a waiver. A letter to an appropriation request will be given to the Board of Finance for the shortfall in MBR. The new MBR amount is figured out after the State Budget is finalized, then the calculation is sent to the Appropriations, which means it could be October before Preston’s MBR is known.

5. Public Comment & Questions (per posted Town Ordinance)

Andy Depta stated it was nice to see the Board of Finance go through the numbers, but the Board needs to look at the narratives that explain the expenditures. Improving behavior increases academic scores, perhaps it would be more cost effective to start out training all staff to deal with these problems rather than a possible 3-4 mil increase. There are all kinds of on-site trainings that are more affordable.

Dr. Seitsinger commented: as we solve one social issue, there will be another on the horizon, there will always be a problem, and this is an affordable way for a small town to address these issues as they come.

Ed Gauthier asked for the date of the next meeting? Melissa Lennon answered April 24th. He questioned whether the Board would act on the budget within 10 days of receipt? He was told no.

Andrew Bilodeau had 2 questions - #1 He commented that he read that 2 out 5 towns don’t have nurses within their schools, yet Preston has 2 nurses and other staff. And then questioned how does the Boards balance cost between it all? #2 Questioned the legality of holding the next referendum to vote on the budget, if the date scheduled conflicted with the ROV obligations and a new Board of Selectman ordinance regarding the change in polling place.

6. Adjourn

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier motioned to adjourn at 9:02 p.m., Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Recording Secretary
Kimberly Lang

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PRESTON, CT.
2019 APR 16 A 11:55

Kimberly Lang
PRESTON TOWN CLERK