

**Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Wednesday, May 5, 2021 at 7:30 P.M.
Teleconference Call**

Call to Order – John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:46 P.M.

1. Roll Call

Members

John Moulson – Chairman
Bob Congdon - Vice Chairman
Stacey Becker - Clerk
Andy Depta
Denise Beale
Zachary Maurice

Alternates

Vacancy
Vacancy

Also Present

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier – First Selectwoman
Ken Zachem – Selectman
Jerry Grabarek - Selectman
John Spang – Financial Director
Sean Nugent – BoE Chairman
Dr. Seitsinger – Superintendent of Schools
12 other members of the public

2. Public Comment –

Susan Strader stated that she hoped the Board of Education’s budget would go to Town Meeting intact with no changes from the presented budget.

3. Approve FY22 Budget Timeline.

The Board felt that there was too much work to complete in tonight’s meeting and felt another meeting would be prudent. Sandra Allyn-Gauthier reviewed the possible schedule of events leading up to a referendum. (Public Hearing - May 20th, Town Meeting - June 3rd, and a referendum between June 10-17th) The Board was reminded that a legal notice would need to be posted 5 days before the Public Hearing which would be May 15th.

Andy Depta motioned that a Special Meeting May 12, 2021, at 7:30 P.M. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Review and approve proposed BoE FY21-22 Budget

Several reasons were given to reduce the Board of Education budget that was presented last week. One reason was grants and other state and federal funds listed as income. The other reason was that

with just 1/6 of the school year remaining if the board of Education continued with their present rate of spending, they should return \$480,000 to the General Fund.

John Spang pointed out that “rainbow grants” are referred to as income because they come into the district, however, grants have very specific guidelines as to how they can be used. Some of those funds may help to pay a portion of a salary, but it must follow the established guidelines of the grant. Mr. Spang also reminded the Board of Finance that the final salary check of the year is a check that covers 5 pay periods, a balloon check.

Roy Seitsinger clarified further that Federal grants are counted as income, but they must be used to add to and/or enhance already established programs. Those funds can be used to purchase more computers, update programs, add teaching hours, purchase materials to continue or expand a program. Grants are monies coming into the district, but can not be seen as income.

Andy Depta motioned to reduce the Board of Education budget by \$120,000 from 12,602,057 to 12,482,057. Denise Beale seconded the motion. Andy Depta, Denise Beale, Bob Congdon, and John Moulson voted in favor of the motion; while Stacey Becker and Zach Maurice voted against the motion. The motion carried 4 to 2.

5. Review and approve proposed BoS FY21-22 Operating Budget

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier presented the General Government Budget to the board of Finance. Key drivers for the increase in the budget are salaries, health care, and MERS. These 3 areas make up 42% of the budget. Health care and MERS the town has no control over these costs. Health care saw a 3% increase. To help offset this town employees will be contributing 6% instead of the traditionally 5% contribution. She pointed out that salaries have a 1.5% increase overall, which is comparable to surrounding towns such as Salem, North Stonington, and Ledyard. Part of the increases in salary are due additional Infinite Vision training. There are several modules that are offered and it is hoped that additional training in payroll and accounting will help the town become more efficient.

Public Works has a 46% increase to restore cuts from previous years and to support a road management program. Other areas that have increases are:

- Technology – IT, hardware/server upgrade is 15-20K, and additional or upgrade computers,
- Legal Fees – probate, seeing more complex legal issues
- CIRMA – insurance has a 3% increase, cyber security and risk management at the schools and the town
- Fire Dept. – 15% salary increase – add a full-time position for \$72,250 which includes salary, and health care It is hoped that Federal and State funding will help cover this cost.

Sandra Allyn-Gauthier summed up that last year the General Government budget had no increases, it stayed flat. This year the budget has 4.31% increase, or an additional \$166,000. The Grand List is showing a 2.7% increase or 12.5 mil rate. This additional 336K in Tax Revenue will allow us to do more for the town. We can not keep doing more with less. It’s important to remember that a budget is the best guess of what we’ll need.

Steve Masalin then explained the increases to the Public Works portion of the budget. He explained that much of the increase is due to the restoring funds that had been cut in past years. That funding is needed to deal with a road management program that when followed will maintain all town roads at a safe level of repair. The increase in fuel price is seen in the budget.

The switch this winter from the traditional sand and salt mixture to an environmentally friendly chemical to treat roads during inclement weather has a \$10,000 increase. The increase is worth it

because less will be spent on spring clean-up of catch basins and roadways. The \$800 increase in the Transfer Station accounts is due to realignment of accounts when the town switched to Infinite Vision. The \$1300 increase is because internet has been added to the Town Garage.

Stacey Becker asked about the Repairs and Maintenance increase from \$28,000 to \$85,000. Mr. Masalin explained that several account lines were consolidated.

Andy Depta requested an explanation for the Road Foreman and a Public Works Director. It was explained that when Jim Corley was hired, he became the Public Works Director, and to make a smooth transition for him into this job, it was thought to keep Steve Masalin on as a consultant and resource.

It was clarified that fuel (gasoline and diesel) come out of the Town Garage line item except for the school and Fire Department. With the key fob and code, it easy to see the different uses of each area (Senior van, Parks & Rec, etc.), but they are not broken down within the budget.

Bob Congdon stated that by consolidating many of the lines into one that spending transparency is being lost.

The road management study will rate each of the 55 miles of town roads, then the issues will need to be prioritize, and the town will need to develop a plan. The town will need to look into alternatives to chip seal.

Part-time staff increases were due to 13 lines being consolidation. Part-time staff include: recorders, any training sessions done with Infinite Vision, additional hours for regular personnel rather than hiring.

All the consolidating of line items is due to the statewide adoption of Uniform Charts and Accounts.

Once all the Board members had asked their questions it was decided to table any action on this budget until the Special Meeting on May 12, 2021.

Andy Depta motioned to table the General Government budget until the board of Finance Special Meeting on May 12, 2021. Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Public Comment - none

7. Adjournment

Andy Depta motioned to adjourn at 9:25 P.M... Stacey Becker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kimberly Lang

Recording Secretary