Preston Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Thursday, May 14, 2020 at 7:00 P.M.
Teleconference Call

Call to Order – John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:03 P.M.

1. Roll Call

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

Alternates
Matthew Davis
Vacancy

Also Present

John Spang – Financial Director
Sean Nugent – Chair of the Board of Education
Dr. Roy Seitsinger – School Superintendent
41 other members of the public

2. Workshop for Review of Board of Education Budget –

Sean Nugent Chair of the Board of Education presented first giving an overview of how the budget was arrived at. He explained the Modified Zero - Based Budget (Modified ZBB) and the benefits of the process. He explained that several other tools were used such as communication with other districts. Mr. Nugent also pointed out that while many districts are seeing a decrease in student populations, Preston is seeing an increase. He reminded people that the Education Budget needs to cover birth to age 21. He spoke that moving forward with societal transitions to the Covid Pathways school needs will change greatly. Schools in the fall may need to consider how to adhere to 6’ spacing on busses and in classrooms; a combination of live and virtual learning; lunches in the classroom or grab and go are all integral parts to consider before reopening schools. These are all reasons for the 4.8% increase to the budget.

Dr. Roy Seitsinger, with the assistance of Stacey Becker, presented information through a series of slides. He explained that children and the community they live in are the priority. With the ever-increasing number of deaths and requirements to participate in public our students may find the world overwhelming and because of that we are looking at Trauma Attuned Planning. At present 33% of our students receive free and reduces lunches; 19% have an IEP; 18% receive Academic Support; 18% have a 504; and 9% have Counseling Sessions. Trauma Attuned Planning tells us all these numbers will go up.

Virtual instruction is not going away and there is a demand for equity and access. There will be a great need for computers in grades 3-8. There is a possibility that summer school may be option, but likely with stipulations like no more than 10 on a bus; a monitor on the bus to take temperature and ensure that students stay 6' apart and wear their masks at all times. The question becomes how we return to school and maintain social distancing.
Modified Zero Based Budgeting that was used this year did not look at previous budgets; it was prepared by diving into operations done within the school; and staff needed to justify the needs of a program or their students.

Sean Nugent spoke about consolidating into one building wasn’t possible at this point because of the needs of different age groups; and that each building was built to meet the needs of a specific age group that uses it.

Dr. Seitsinger pointed out that enrollment continues to climb even in this health crisis.

John Spang was asked to explain the MBR – He stated that education is seen as a basic right and it was traditionally paid for by property tax. It was realized that richer towns had more in their schools and that education needed to be fair and equitable, Therefore the state stepped in and formulated the MBR to ensure that towns were meeting their obligations to education. One stipulation is that Board of Education budgets cannot be below the previous year’s budget unless certain criteria are met such as lower student enrollment.

Dr. Seitsinger continued his presentation by explaining that majority of the budget is salaries. One contract with the bus drivers will be completed this summer and the rest of the contracts are binding. That one line shows $30,000 is for a retirement incentive plan. He also noted that NFA, the town’s designated high school increased their overall tuition 3%, and significantly Special Education went up 25% and another category went up 64%.

He concluded with the following thoughts:
- There are built in some acceptable risks
- The object of the budget is to meet the needs of the students
- The virus will be with us for awhile
- A zero budget is impossible in these times
- This pandemic doesn’t have any timeline
- Deeply concerned about, although it is rare, the pediatric multi-symptom inflammatory syndrome

Stacey Becker asked who would make the final decision to open schools.

Roy Seitsinger stated the Local Health Authority Matthew McCormick.

Sean Nugent added that the state will provide guidelines, Common Safety Standards, which will provide some guidance; but it is not a one shoe fits all kind of solution. Some larger school districts may look quite different from smaller towns like Preston.

Bob Congdon stated that it is hard to do a fair budget with so many unknowns. He asked about the Federal Stimulus aid for education from the Dept. of Education. How much will Preston receive – Dr. Seitsinger indicated it was $62,000. Bob then asked how the $62,000 distribution was being used.

Dr. Seitsinger shared that it must meet Title 1 criteria and that it must be used to counter Covid-19 impact on the school system.
Bob Congdon went onto to point out that taking the $570,000 increase; the $100,000 to be used on the Capital Project, and funds that will be return to the town at the end of this fiscal year. The increase of the Board of Education’s budget would be 7-8%.

At this point Board of Finance Chair John Moulson asked each member for their questions for Dr. Seitsinger. To do so he called on each member in turn.

Stacey Becker – No questions at this time.

Denise Beale – No questions at this time.

Andy Depta – wanted to know if the Board of Education was looking at either North Stonington or Ledyard as alternatives to NFA for a designated high school choice.

Dr. Seitsinger let him know that they are presently negotiating with Griswold, and that both North Stonington and Griswold would be good options for some of the students. However, it is believed that a good number would still attend NFA.

Andy’s second question was if the town would receive a refund for the students that are registered for NFA now that the campus is closed.

Dr. Seitsinger explained that all programs they offered continued virtually when the campus closed so there would be no refund.

Mr. Depta’s third question was where para educators were listed in the budget.

It was pointed out that they are now noted as Instructional Assistance, under MEUI.

Andy’s final question was concerning the 2% salary increase. He noted that only 10 individuals received a 2% increase while others received a varying range of increases.

It was explained that the variations are due to step changes, degree changes, a shift in position, or increase in hours.

Andy pointed out that when looking at the Board of Education’s budget over a 6-year span, it shows an 18% increase.

Zachary Maurice – No questions at this time.

Matthew Davis – Matthew pointed out that enrollment drives the budget. He asked if it was anticipated that students/parents may be opting for online learning or home schooling in the fall after this experience.

There is no real sense of that at his time. It is thought that both adults and students will have anxiety for face to face learning.

Matthew’s second question was if the staff would be asked to freeze their salaries.
Contracts would need to be reopened, it’s not something that can be directed.

Bob Congdon – asked if Interns are paid or stipend
    They are given a stipend and number of Interns varies from year to year.

Bob also asked that all correspondence go through the Board of Finance, so all members have the information rather than between individuals.

John Moulson – asked about the figures for Health Insurance if they were projected or real numbers.
    John Spang answered that it’s a known number that is set with a 4.5% premium.
    Sean Nugent added that the state’s program showed that New London County at 4.5%.

John Moulson called roll again to see if members wanted to discuss the Board of Education’s budget line by line.
Bob Congdon – No
Stacey Becker – No
Denise Beale – No
Andy Depta – No
Zachary Maurice – No
Matthew Davis – No

3. Adjournment -

Andy Depta motioned to adjourn at 8:48 P.M. Bob Congdon seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Signature]
Recording Secretary