Call to Order – John Moulson called the meeting to order at 7:33 P.M.

1. Roll Call

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Alternates</th>
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<tr>
<td>John Moulson – Chairman</td>
<td>Matthew Davis –</td>
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<td>Bob Congdon - Vice Chairman</td>
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<td>Stacey Becker - Clerk</td>
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<td>Andy Depta</td>
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<td>Denise Beale</td>
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<td>Zachary Maurice</td>
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   Also Present

   Sandra Allyn-Gauthier – First Selectwoman
   Jerry Grabarek – Selectman
   Ken Zachem - Selectman
   John Spang – Financial Director
   Sean Nugent – Chair of the Board of Education
   Dr. Roy Seitsinger – School Superintendent
   Chief Tom Casey – Fire Department
   37 other members of the public

2. FY21 Budget Presentations with Public Comment and Questions (after each)

   • Introduction & Grand List – Board of Finance

   John Moulson presented the actions the Board of Finance has taken so far concerning the Board of Education and the General Government Budgets. He explained that the Board of Education submitted a budget of $12,604,319, a 4.80% increase. The Board of Finance proposes a reduction of $363,000 a 3.02% decrease. The Board of Finance is presenting a Board of Education Budget of $12,241,319 a 1.78% increase over last year.

   He went on to explain that the General Government presented a budget of $3,918,082 a 1.54% increase. After reviewing the budget line by line making calculated adjustments the Board of Finance proposes a reduction of $59,477 a decrease of 1.54%. The Board of Finance is presenting a General Government Budget of $3,858,605 a -0.001% increase.

   John then presented the Grand List numbers. For FY20 the Grand List was $440,219,319 making 1 mil worth $431,415; whereas in FY21 the Grand List will be $444,013,380 this is an increase of $3,794,061 or an increase of 0.86%. this increase makes I mil worth $435,133.
At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the Grand List.

Felicia Argento asked if a budget is cut what exactly is cut from the budget.

Andy Depta pointed out that question wasn’t relevant to the Grand List.

Bob Congdon pointed out that it’s approximately $98,000 additional revenues.

Stacey Becker pointed out that Felicia may not have understood what the Grand List is and how it plays a role in the budget process.

John Moulson explained that the Grand List is the revenues generated by taxes being paid. He furthered explained that it helps to know the value of the Grand List so reasonable budgets can be set.

- **General Government Budget – Board of Selectmen**

  Sandra Allyn-Gauthier explained the FY2021 General Government Budget to the audience. She stated that through strategic planning they were working towards a Zero-Based Budget. They examined actual cost, projected cost, and cost efficiencies. It’s a process where you look at wants vs. needs. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the direction of our goal. We are now focusing on the needs of the taxpayers while maintaining the towns workings and ability to respond to citizen’s needs.

  She then shared where the group started which their budget process:
  - April 5 a budget of $4,030,988 an increase over last year of 4.47%
  - April 23 a budget of $3,925,474 an increase over last year of 1.73%
  - May 4 a budget of $3,918,02 an increase over last year of 1.54%
  - May 20 after the BoF adjustments $3,858,605 a decrease over last year of -0.001%

  There are 327 Line Items in the General Government Budget. 30% of the Line items increased, while 70% of them decreased or remained. There is a $35 decrease in the budget compared to last year. Looking at the times we are in, it will be important to maximize what we can be done with a small staff through staffing and cross training. Public Safety, Fire/EMS/State Trooper will be priorities. Hopefully, this pandemic will end, and we will see a quick recovery after the second quarter. We will need State and Federal aid to help both individuals and businesses with their long-term recovery. We will need diverse committees moving forward to deal with the issues that lay ahead. The Tax Deferral Program per Executive Order may greatly impact our revenues. Final thoughts using the FY21 Grand List with a flat mil rate(same as in FY20) would generate $98,000 in additional tax revenues.

At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the General Government Budget.

Nick Vegliante commended the three first term Selectmen in these difficult times in providing a lean budget to the townspeople.

- **Education Budget – Board of Education**
Roy Seitsinger stated that these are difficult and disruptive times and voiced his concern for the potential spread of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in children that is related to Covid-19. With all the COVID-19 challenges, what is the best way to move forward?

He informed the audience that there are funds in the amount of $63,000 from the CARES Act to help the school district deal with the affects of Covid-19 above and beyond the budget; however, those funds are presently frozen in the courts.

The reduction of their budget to 1.78% increase over last year’s budget is difficult. Ninety-five percent of the budget is comprised of fixed costs such as contracts, tuitions, and other fixed costs items. Our number one concern is safety, upkeep of the buildings, and community well-being which includes students, staff, and the community at large.

Many people move to Preston because of the quality of the school. We need to maintain that quality this Fall when schools resume, but there is a laundry list of challenges we’ll need to face. Challenges such as:

- Combination of face to face learning and online learning.
- Monitoring social distancing.
- There will be an increase in needs and services to students.
- Intensive cleaning will need to be done.
- Possible increase in medical staff.
- Only 8-10 students per classroom and on the bus.

In the past we have worked with families with opioid issues, food insecurity, and mental health issues. These problems aren’t going away and now we’ll need to deal with the fall out from the pandemic as well. After Tuesday’s Board of Finance decision to reduce the budget we are looking at several avenues to deal with that reduction. Our choices are:

- Open all contracts for renegotiation
- Pay to play for sports and other after school programs
- Longer bus rides
- Eliminate programs

Members of the Board of Education and myself have met in regional committees with the governor to figure out these pressing issues of developing budgets, Covid-19, and meeting the educational and emotional needs of children. These are difficult issues and at present there are no answers, we are trying to prepare for the unknown without any firm guidelines or answers yet.

At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the Board of Education Budget.

Amanda Phelps supports the original Board of Education Budget, schools are important, and the town should use the rainy-day fund to meet the Board of Education’s needs.

Amanda Convey stated that she has a special needs child and is fearful with the reduction in the budget programming that service her child will be cut.

Danielle Sanoval stated that she is a teacher and strongly feels that this is not the time to take away from children. They have had their word changed drastically and the schools will need all their funds to help children come this fall.

Heather Ballestrini stated that when she was in school there was no Library and doesn’t want to see that happen again to children, they need access to all the programs that our school offer and cut jeopardize programs.
Susan Strader read her email that was sent to the Board of Finance. In her email she shared that we need to keep residents employed, need to support children, that the Board of Education traditionally returns funds to the town at the end of fiscal year because of how well they manage their budget. She is in favor of restoring the Board of Education’s budget.

Vicki Rabovsky stated that other towns are making this work, suggested that teachers take a pay freeze to help the town in these difficult times. The health insurance premiums are 5% and that is very low.

Bob Congdon made a point of reference - the premiums that the Board of Education pays is 13-18%, not 5%.

Pat Biggins read a letter analyzing Board of Education budget and feels that the present budget is overly generous in this economic climate. The quality of education is not determined by how much money you spend. There are too many unknowns if more money is needed, we can revisit this and allocate more. Now is the time for fiscal belt tightening.

Jason Hicks supports the restoration Board of Education budget, if that’s not possible dip into the rainy-day fund.

Felicia Argento fears the cuts will affect the Social Worker who has greatly helped her with her child that has a 504. The Social Worker has support her through many difficulties this year. Her final question – What will be cut?

Roy Seisinger answered that when the Board of Education gets the final numbers, they’ll make decisions on what to cut or how best to deal with the monetary amount they are given to work with.

Vicki Spicer supports the original Board of Education budget to ensure our schools are fully staffed with all programs in tack.

Susan Theve stated there are too many uncertainties now. She feels that if the school needs more funds later than money should be taken from the rainy-day fund.

Debra Good stated that there should be no increase due to the economic hard times that people are facing.

Jill Keith stated that the Board of Finance is doing well with their difficult task, she reminded others that the cuts in the board of Education budget are not the job of the Board of Finance and that the Board of Finance can give additional appropriations in the future. She asked that the Board of Finance be as conservative as possible.

Melissa Lennon stated that $363,000 is a drastic cut, she understands the hardships and difficulties that people are facing; but not sure of the solution. She trusts that the Board of Finance will make a good decision.

Matthew Davis pointed out that the $363,000 was not cut from their budget (BoE) it was cut from their proposed increase.

Beth Bonosconi supports the original budget to ensure a better outcome for students.
Ian Stammel warned against always taking from the Surplus Fund and that to keep taking will cause a domino affect that will not end well for the town.

Bill Leggler stated that the Board of Education use $225,000 to supplement the Science Lab project without going to the town. Right now, there are 41 million out of work and that the BoE employed their staff this entire time. Bottom line is people are financially hurting not knowing where their next meal will come from. We can’t afford a 2 mill increase.

Ian Stammel stated that eventually the surplus won’t be there to offset, and we’ll have a significant increase.

Rick Bates a Naval Officer is concerned that a 2-3 mill increase will affect retirees and the schools will become inferior. It will affect town’s ability to pay for their operations. There will naturally be reasonable yearly increases. The increase needs to be for the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Susan Strader asked about the Public Notice regarding June 10th as Town Meeting.

John Moulson explained that was an error that June 10th will be a Special Meeting of the Board of Finance that the public will have access to.

Pat Biggins warned that it would be dangerous to take $850,000 from the Surplus. The full effects of the pandemic aren’t known yet. We should be hesitant to dip into the Surplus.

Tom Wilbur stated that he feels some children are being left behind, that the Board of Education is not presenting the data that shows children’s progress or lack of progress. With 18-22% unemployment now is not the time to raise taxes.

Amanda Phelps stated that she has 3 children and that they need a good school environment to return to in the fall.

Susan Strader asked for clarification of the Surplus Fund.

Stacey Becker explained what the Surplus balance is at this point and clarified that $650,000 was allocated last year to offset the town budget to avoid a large mill increase.

At this point Stacey Becker requested to read the emails that were submitted per the Public Notice. Stacey read 14 emails for the public records.

Kimberly Demara stated the need for programs and proposed no cuts to BoE budget.

Tracey Turner asked for no further reduction to the BoE budget.

Carol Verville requested that no more cuts be made to the budget, we owe this to our kids.

Samantha Williams stated, for the sake of the my children’s school experience she supports the BoE budget.

Bridget Parks stated she was in favor of a 0 dollar increase to the BoE Budget at this time because there are too many unanswered questions.
Steve Ballirano stated that based on the plight of many there should be no increase.

Michele Bilodeau stated that contracts should be renegotiated due to the economic climate.

Andrew Bilodeau stated that contracts should be renegotiated because we’re all in this together.

A. Costa stated that this is not the time to raise taxes.

Mariah Hornsby urged the Board of Finance to consider reinstating the Board of Education’s budget.

Jill Charron stated that there should be no further reductions to the board of selectmen or the Board of Education budgets.

Lori Killiany stated that it is a difficult job wading through the emotions of both sides with the many uncertainties of the future. We need to hope for the best yet prepare for the worse.

Cara Sawyer asked that the Board of Finance reconsider the cut to the BOE budget.

Amanda DiFrancesca wrote in support of keeping the social worker position.

*The Public Comments e-mails are presented at the end of these minutes.*

- **Long-Term Debt Presentation**

  John Moulson shared with the group that the town’s debt is in a steady decline now because several Capital Projects have ended or are about to end. He also stated that there will be other Capital Projects that will come up that will increase the debt at some point.

  *At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the Long-Term Debt.*

- **Local Revenue Budget Presentation – Board of Finance**

  Stacey Becker showed a chart showing the project Local Revenues which are projected to be down $125,550 from last year.

  *At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the Local Revenues Budget.*

  Andy Depta asked if people are still building why do we think we need to reduce Liens and Fees so drastically.

  Bob Congdon felt that that is a discussion that should be made on June 10th.

- **State Revenue Budget Presentation – Board of Finance**

  Stacey Becker then shared the State Revenue projections for FY21 which indicated that it would be $25,992 less than last year; with PILOT, Mashantucket, and Educational Cost Share all remaining the same.
At this point Chairman John Moulson asked for comments concerning the State Revenues Budget.

3. Adjourn – Chairman John Moulson officially ended the Town Hearing at 9:46 P.M.
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for taking a more conservative approach toward the 2020/2021 budget. You will hear many emotional pleas to spend more because the teachers deserve it; because the children deserve it; because the children are our future. These statements are all true. You have the difficult job of sorting through the emotional noise on both sides of the argument, looking at our reality, and leading us forward through the difficult times ahead rationally and responsibly. What we do know is our state is looking at a 1 billion dollar deficit this year and projecting worse next year. We know state funds available for towns will be less. It appears the amount will be much less. The funds for the Norwich Hospital site cleanup can not be counted on. The US economy and the global economy have suffered an unprecedented shock. Corporate downsizing and bankruptcies are already beginning. The banking industry is suffering. Please note the links attached. What we don’t know is how many residents will lose their jobs permanently or how draconian cuts to pay and benefits will be. We don’t know what the “new normal” is going to look like. We do know it will not be normal. Everyone loves playing Santa Clause and giving their children what they want for Christmas. When the bills come due in January and you can’t pay the mortgage, did you give your children what they need? We need to position ourselves to maintain the ability to give the children and to give the town what they need. We need to hope for the best but plan for the worst. We need time and financial resources to creatively maneuver through the interesting times ahead.

Thank you,
Lori Killiany

https://yankeeinstitute.org/2020/05/01/connecticuts-covid-budget-deficit-is-1-billion-this-year-next-year-will-be-much-worse/

https://www.cnbc.com/amp/2020/05/22/imf-says-banks-will-struggle-to-be-profitable-through-2025.html
I just wanted to write in to say that I do not agree with the budget cuts proposed tonight. Our children should not bear the brunt of the pandemic. If anything, when they do return to school they will need the “extra” programs more than ever to decompress from the regular day and stress from the massive changes they have been through. We are all sacrificing in our own way right now and I think most parents agree that the children have sacrificed enough as it is. Please don’t continue to take more from them. Thank you

Kimberly Demara
Dear Board of Finance,

Please do not reduce the Board of Education budget any further. We do not want larger classrooms next year. We do not want any programs cut. I do not want to see any further reductions in the Board of Education budget. I support it 100 percent! Thank you Tracey Turner

Sent from my iPhone
I just simply wanted to state no more reductions to the budget, we owe this to our kids.

Thank
Carole Verville.

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S10+, an AT&T 5G Evolution capable smartphone
From: Amanda Phelps  
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 7:28 AM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: Board of Education Budget

Dear Board of Finance,

I am writing in support of the Board of Education Budget. I request that you restore the Board of Education Budget to the originally requested amount. If restoring the full amount is not possible, then I request that you elect to use a portion of our “Rainy Day Fund” to fund the Board of Education budget to the full request. Using money put aside for such a “Rainy Day” as this is the fiscally responsible thing to do, depleting the resources of the Board of Education is not.

Our schools MUST be funded. If the Board of Finance is of the opinion that our taxpayers aren’t able to fund the budget this year, then using the “Rainy Day Fund” is the responsible option.

Thank you for your willingness to serve our town.

Amanda Phelps  
361 Old Jewett City Rd.
From: Samantha Kay Bardenhagen Williams
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 9:02 AM
To: Board of Finance
Subject: Making our voices heard

To whom this may concern,
That is how I would begin this email but I am the one concerned. For the sake of my children’s school experience I support the Board of Education’s budget. As someone who moved here almost four years ago I will tell you in all honesty, it was the school and what they provided that attracted us to this town. If you cut the budget and are unable to keep the amazing programs that this district provides not only will you no longer have the appeal to bring in others, you will lose many. Being a military spouse for almost 15 years and having followed my husband through 6 moves from state to state, this was the first place we decided to buy a home and settle in because we thought this town had everything we had ever hoped for. We thought it to be a place our children could finally put down roots. We thought it was a place that valued their children and saw them rightfully as our future. We thought it was a place that recognized the value in investing in our future. I implore you to be that town, that place, that community. Give our children the opportunities that they deserve. My husband would also be writing an email but he is currently deployed.
Thank you,
Samantha Williams

Sent from my iPhone
From: DiFrancesca, Amanda J.
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 11:38 AM
To: Board of Finance
Subject: Comment from Preston Alum/Soon-to-be Social Worker

To Preston’s Board of Finance,

My name is Amanda DiFrancesca. I am about to complete my first year in the Master’s of Social Work program at Southern Connecticut State University. My internship during this time has been at Preston Veteran’s Memorial School and Preston Plains Middle School. As a lifetime resident of Preston, I attended both of these schools, and remember interacting with most of the current staff. The communities both inside and outside of these institutions are close-knit, collaborative, and in need of a district-wide position that embodies the importance that all families place on the overall well-being of their children. I consider it a privilege that I was able to experience the initiation of the social worker role in this district, and witness firsthand the necessity for this position.

Even as a Preston resident and a student pursuing the field of social work, I did not fully comprehend how much a social worker has to contribute to the Preston community. Throughout my many busy days working alongside Ms. Repos, I became enlightened to the realities that an unfortunate number of students face. On top of their typical academic and social pressures, they struggle with personal predicaments that the school system may be unaware of, either partially or completely. Many students – whether a kindergartener or an eighth grader – live in unstable homes with much less than ideal circumstances. Many parents work inconsistent hours and night shifts, or juggle multiple jobs. Often they do not have the resources to assist their children with homework, provide proper nutrition, ensure a quiet work space, approach mental health concerns, or provide transportation. Individuals struggle to co-parent, and uneasy relationships between caregivers can greatly deteriorate the mental health of the children involved. Many have limited financial means, limited access to transportation, and have experienced trauma themselves. Some admit that they do not know enough about mental health, emotional regulation, or trauma in order to provide the support that they believe is necessary for their child to succeed. Some students do not know what it is like to have a permanent home, their own room, meals every day, or a full night’s rest. They are in need of resources to help them cope with a parent’s divorce, the death of a family member, exposure to substance abuse, and even exposure to physical violence.

These students are not always the students who are able to communicate their needs, whether through words or behaviors. They may continue to suffer under the radar, and need guidance to show them how to advocate for their needs. They need someone from whom they can learn coping strategies, emotional recognition and regulation, and family dynamics. They need an empathetic voice outside of the classroom to remind them that their struggles are not unnoticed, and will not be trivialized. The more people there are to listen, the stronger their
voices will feel. A social worker serves as a mentor and friend to these vulnerable students, and very well may serve as their only healthy or consistent relationship, one in which they find trust and comfort.

The parents of our student body are equally in need of support and validation. They may not know how to understand or communicate their children's needs, and require a social worker to whom they can express their concerns without fear of judgement and advocate for a child’s best interests. Particularly when it comes to community resources, parents often seek guidance from those who are more knowledgeable. Parents who are worried about their child’s mental health are at a loss – they do not know who to talk to, what kind of specialist to consider (if any), and where to find suitable, affordable resources. A social worker serves as a bridge between the school system and families that do not feel fully understood or connected. Beyond that, a social worker shows them that their child’s mental health and emotional safety are just as paramount to the district as is their academic success.

Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,
Amanda DiFrancesca
From: Bridget Park  
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 5:40 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: Budget vote

To the Members of the Board of Finance:

I will keep this brief. I am in favor of a zero dollar increase for the BOE budget. With a $300,000 surplus last year, a zero dollar increase is in fact $300,000 more than needed last year. At this time there is far to many unknown factors about what will be required for the upcoming school year. It makes no sense to increase a budget with so many unanswered questions. When we know what is required to start the 2020-2021 school year, the budget should be reviewed at that time.
Thank you all for your public service
God Bless
Bridget Park
FW: 2021 Budget

From: Board of Finance (financeboard@preston-ct.org)
To: sbeckerbof@yahoo.com; john.23@comcast.net; rcongdonbof@preston-ct.org; adepta235@comcast.net; matthew.davis7819@gmail.com; zacharymaurice@hotmail.com; dcbsharp@aol.com; dbalebof@preston-ct.org; rcongdonbof@preston-ct.org
Date: Wednesday, May 27, 2020, 05:43 PM EDT

From: Sandra Allyn Gauthier
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 5:42:55 PM (UTC-05:00) Eastern Time (US & Canada)
To: Board of Finance
Subject: Fwd: 2021 Budget

FYI

Sent from Outlook Mobile

From: sballirano@aol.com <sballirano@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020, 4:01 PM
To: Sandra Allyn Gauthier
Subject: 2021 Budget

Sandra:
Thank you for the notification about Thursday's Budget Meeting. Because I am not on Facebook, and do not have the email programs linked to contact you, I am sending this note. I reviewed the proposed Budget for 2021. Based on the plight of most of Preston's taxpayers due to the pandemic, I would urge you not to raise property taxes this year. Consider applying the 2020 Budget Surplus in its entirety to the 2021 Budget. Determine what other cuts can be made, or what other funds might be applied instead of raising our property taxes, at a time when no one can afford to pay more.
If the Town has a problem next year, we can simply borrow the money needed, as interest rates are at historic lows. Please consider any and all options to raising taxes at this critical time for residents. Thank you.

Best Regards,

Steve Ballirano
From: Cara Sawyer  
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 9:48 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: BOE Budget Support

To Whom It May Concern:  
I am writing to ask that you consider re-instating a portion of the BOE budget that was reduced at the last meeting. It is my understanding a good portion of the increases requested are due to contractual obligations and to renegotiate those at this point would be costly and onerous. Knowing that this is a continuous issue, perhaps a consideration would be to do this in a year when contracts are up for negotiation and not after the fact.

Also important to consider as we move into the 2020/21 school year is that we are entering uncharted territory in terms of what "school" will look like in September and through the remainder of the year. We need to be cautious about overspending, but also realistic about the unknowns:  
*What if we need to split the grades into 2 sections?  
*What if we can only have 10 kids in a class at a time and there are 44 kids in a grade with 2 teachers and we need an additional para/spec ed teacher or other to instruct the extra 4 kids?  
*What if more kids then expected come back with social emotional trauma that can't be handled by the counselors and school psychologist we have?  
*What if the students have staggered start times and only minimal kids can be on the bus at a time so we need additional bus drivers, fuel etc?  
*What if one, two or three families who have special needs children move into town and we are a baseline staff with baseline budget and no wiggle room?  
*What do we do if additional funds are needed mid-year if this gets more instead of less complex?

I am not advocating for a no questions asked increase or even a full budget as requested, but I implore you to consider that this is not a normal year and more than just the base needs must be considered. No one wants taxes to go up, but we also have to recognize the reality we are currently in and to treat things as they always have been is impractical and possibly foolhardy. Our school is one of the gems of this town, and I would hate to see it put in a weaker position during a time when it needs to be stronger than ever.

Thank you for your consideration.  
Cara Sawyer  
Miller Road
From: Melissa Lennon
Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 10:45 PM
To: Board of Finance
Subject: FY21 Budget

Good evening,

This year’s budget process has been challenging in new and different ways. Like each year, the Board of Finance is tasked with creating the most fiscally responsible budget possible that meets the needs of the town and its ability to afford those needs. In so many ways, the town budget process reflects the best educated guess based upon the information known at time. Over the past few years, Preston has seen its share of unpredictable surprises, such as the State withholding state aide just a few years ago after municipal budgets were passed. Each budget year has its story. This budget season is no different. With COVID-19 in our midsts, we can see that a truly novel virus creates a truly novel budget season; accurately predicting the future is less certain and educated than ever before.

I respect the concerns and fears of residents as to how Preston can afford an increase in taxes due to the education budget when there are residents who are struggling financially as a result of layoffs, etc. I also understand and respect the need to be financially flexible in order to adapt to the ever changing mandates, needs, and requirements of our community to provide services, albeit safely, during COVID-19. If our community wants to be able to serve its residents safely during this pandemic, residents need to trust and allow the elected governing bodies to advocate for the needs of Preston and seek funding that can flex with the needs - even if those needs are unexpected or unpredictable. Ultimately, a loss in trust of elected officials can be expressed during election cycles. Looking at the present, though, we need our Boards to advocate for a budget that allows some flexibility.

If this had been a typical budget cycle, I would have advocated for a $200,000 reduction from the original FY21 Board of Education budget proposal after review. However, no one knows what public schooling will look like in the upcoming academic year. The true cost to educate students in FY21 has become uncertain. Some predict schools will be back to “normal” with significant restricts in the fall such as a limit of ten students per bus with an aide to ensure social distancing. Thinking of PVMS and PPMS alone with a gross estimate of 400 students, that would require 40 bus runs IF all students could come to school daily! That’s just the tip of the iceberg in potential increased costs. Another predicate is that public schooling could remain virtual until January. In that scenario, where are the cost savings compared to a traditional school year? Teachers surely need better technology, virtual materials, and in-service training to ensure quality learning for such an extended amount of time. Additionally, there would be a greater demand for mental health intervention as students struggle with isolation, anxiety, and the lack of peer socialization. Finally, you have the blurry middle scenario where public schooling is a casserole of virtual days mixed with physical attendance on certain days or partial days. When you consider the staff continues to work full-time while students are bounced back and forth in some predetermined group size and in a scripted manner, where is the cost savings in this scenario? Analyzing all the scenarios and supplies required to accompany the littlest of details to protect staff and students, becomes an overwhelming task.

Knowing that the future of public schooling is a complete mystery at the moment as a result of this COVID-19 journey, I do not support the Board of Finance’s decision to cut $363,000 from the Board of
Education’s original proposed FY21 budget is drastic. The uncertainty facing the Board of Education budget is far more significant than in recent past budget years. When the State withheld aid, the Board of Finance and Board of Education knew the “worst case scenario” numbers and could plan for them. This time, there is no known bottom floor.

Rather than making a drastic cut to the Board of Education FY21 budget, the Board of Finance may want to discuss and consider the use of the Unassigned Fund Balance. Although it is not a preferred avenue at times, the use of “surplus” can achieve the goal of maintaining valuable services while reducing the tax burden on residents. If the goal is to keep both the General Government’s budget and the Board of Education’s Budget at a zero percent increase, then perhaps the solution is to take the amount of increase in the Board of Education’s proposed FY21 budget from the Unassigned Fund Balance.

Best wishes,
Melissa Lennon
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have contended in the past that we should always compare budget proposals to current year actual spending. Comparing to budgets year after year only perpetuates the fuzziness of plans made far in advance of changing conditions. In looking at the BOE numbers as provided in the last BOF meeting packet, I calculate that the education operating expenditures are forecast at fiscal yearend to total $11,652,323 (see Exhibit 1). That’s $374,676 below the current budget - $225,887 in operating funding that was transferred to the Science Lab capital job ($65,887 in January & $160,000 in April) and the estimated surplus at fiscal year-end of $148,789.

Working from this baseline, the increase that was originally proposed by the BOE totaled $951,995, or 8.2%. If you look at history (Exhibit 2) since 2017, spending has increased 2% to 3% each year. In fact, the $363,000 cut you voted on last week brings the total current proposed increase to 5.1% (or $588,995). I believe this is overly generous given the current economic climate.

I can hear the outcry now. The facts are: (1) we don’t know how school operations will change in the fall and what the requirements will be (2) we don’t know if or how much the state or feds will provide to offset any additional costs (if there are any) and (3) we can always appropriate more funds to cover any shortfall specific to the pandemic if not provided for elsewhere but I contend that we deal with that when it’s quantifiable.

The fact is that the quality of education is not determined by how much money you spend. The fact is that the Preston public has heard how programs are going to be slashed and the students adversely impacted by the cuts we voted for in the past. The fact is none of that materialized – and those reduced funds actually provided for several unplanned programs in addition to those budgeted and surplus funds were still returned to the town. The 2% to 3% historic increases in spending as shown in Exhibit 2 still accommodated staff pay increases and healthcare increases as well as our special needs children.

I think sometimes we can miss the bigger picture when we delve too deeply into the details of a budget. A zero-based budget of $12,026,999 provides a 3.1% increase over current year spending. That is in line with our actual experience since 2017. I believe that it’s easier to add back if conditions warrant than to take back once plans are implemented.
We have no idea how well or when the economy will recover but I suspect it won’t be in the near future. Already, forecasts of GDP are to continue to contract from an annualized rate of 40% in the current quarter to a 5.6% contraction in the 4th quarter of this year. Unemployment is expected be at 16% in the 3rd quarter, 12% in the 4th quarter, improving only to 9.5% in the 4th quarter of 2021 (per the CBO on April 24th). And that number doesn’t include recognition of the many folks who have or will return to work in a part-time capacity. There is enormous uncertainty about not only general economic conditions but also the impact on state revenues. We also face the possibility that our rate of tax collections may drop as Preston families cope with economic challenges.

I suspect we cannot escape using some of our surplus funds to help cover our needs this year but we should be aware that, in all likelihood, we will need to tap these funds again next year. Let’s ensure that dipping into our savings covers our essential needs only. Now is the time for fiscal belt tightening.

Sincerely,

Pat Biggins
102 Watson Rd.
Preston, CT 06365

Attachments – Exhibit 1 & Exhibit 2
### Board of Education Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020 Approved Budget</td>
<td>$12,026,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less: Surplus Used for Science Lab</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred in January</td>
<td>$(65,887)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transferred in April</td>
<td>$(160,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less: Est. Surplus to Be Returned</td>
<td>$(148,789)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-Total</td>
<td>$(374,676)</td>
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<td>Projected Actual 2019-2020 Expenses</td>
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<td>Original Proposed Budget 2020 - 2021</td>
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<td>Increase</td>
<td>$951,995</td>
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<td>% Increase</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOF Proposed Reduction</td>
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<td>Net BOF Proposed Increase</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Increase</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 2017 Actual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$</td>
<td>$ 11,146,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incr/(Decr)</td>
<td>$ 361,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(1) FY 2017 - 2019 Actual from BOE Budget Proposal - pg. 37
### Board of Education Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2017 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2018 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2019 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2020 Projected Actual</th>
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<td>$11,146,954</td>
<td>$11,508,914</td>
<td>$11,732,045</td>
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**Incr/(Decr)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2017 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2018 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2019 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2020 Projected Actual</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$361,960</td>
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<td>$(79,722)</td>
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**%**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2017 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2018 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2019 Actual</th>
<th>FY 2020 Projected Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>-0.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) FY 2017 - 2019 Actual from BOE Budget Proposal - pg. 37
Good evening. This is Beth Bonosconi, 5 Tyler Drive, with a comment:

I have been a taxpaying resident of Preston for 28 years. I believed in and supported education long before my children were of school age. I would like to make it clear that my opinion does not rise from my employment with the Board of Education. I would not like for my opinion to be dismissed or not contemplated simply because my job educates the young minds of Preston to provide them with all possible opportunities for a bright future.

I was in support of the original budget amount and a $363,000 reduction would have a devastating impact on the children of Preston. I was very disappointed that the Board of Finance cut a seemingly arbitrary amount. I propose that the fund balance be used to off set this reduction and bring the budget whole. With BOE money being returned to the town, the budget can be restored to ensure better outcomes for the students of Preston.

Respectfully,

Beth Bonosconi
I support a 0% increase in both Municipal (General Government) and Board of Education (BoE) budgets. The cost of any contractual obligations in both budgets should be carefully reviewed and renegotiated as an opportunity to save taxpayer money. Particularly, the BoE seems to find significant extra funds each year in their budget to spend on expensive discretionary projects/programs instead of returning it all to the taxpayers. This suggest that the BoE budget is already padded significantly and could well be managed with a 0% increase or cut.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Michéle Bilodeau
99 Lakeview Drive
Preston, CT 06365
From: lvd99@juno.com
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 9:44 AM
To: Board of Finance
Subject: Public Hearing - Proposed Preston Budgets for Fiscal Year 2020 - 2021

Good Morning,

This Email is written to support a 0% increase in both Municipal (General Government) and Board of Education (BoE) budgets. The current proposed increase in the BoE budget, should be further reviewed to determine its actual necessity given the opportunity of renegotiating any contractual obligations.

As they say, "Were all in this together"; all voters (who have lost their right to vote on these budgets), taxpayers (who may not have a means for an income and may be struggling), residents & homeowners (who may be on a fixed income, not able to afford any tax increase), and all the children/students (who are home safe with their parents and in touch & learning with their school officials) in this fine Town, called Preston

Thank You - Sincerely,

Andrew Bilodeau
99 Lakeview Drive
Preston CT 06365

Top News - Sponsored By Newser

- Wolverine Sighting Almost Too Rare to Be Believed
- Cops: Driver Rams Into Man Who Opened Fire on Bridge
- Increasingly, the Word 'Airborne' Is Being Used for Coronavirus
From: A Costa
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 1:46 PM
To: Board of Finance
Subject: No to increase in mill rate

Please...this is not the time to be raising taxes. I am concerned that so many people have yet to experience the impact this will have, and is having on our economy. How about people out of work right now? We are experiencing this as we speak. Now is not the time for any increase. NONE. The Board of Ed needs to look at a few things... maybe eliminating PK, cut down on Spanish classes for young children. How about the different music classes at the elementary school? Why is that? If we were not in the situation we are in, I would support this budget and the Board of Ed. Right now lets focus on the basics.

Concerned Parent and Preston Resident
From: Jill Keith  
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 4:54 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: public comment for tonight's meeting(s) from Jill S Keith - 5/28/2020

Dear Preston Board of Finance:

As you approach tonight's important meetings, I encourage each of you to continue being unapologetically and staunchly focused on your collective tasks and responsibilities as a cohesive Board.

You were elected and have been entrusted with extensive data as well as enormous responsibility. Only each of you know what is right for all of us.

I trust that each of you must and will balance the financial predictions of revenues and guesstimates of expenses currently at your fingertips in a manner that will consider each resident from all age groups.

I am among many who will encourage and support the Board of Finance to exercise a conservative approach and extreme caution at this difficult time - and revisit future expenditures monthly and make adjustments if necessary.

It is reasonable to me and perhaps also to numerous taxpayers given the economy's expected contraction that the Board of Finance may ultimately move to finalize our Town and School Budgets at or below the amounts that were approved by voters in 2019.

This should not cause hysteria. While our Superintendent did notify parents using social media and other means that students' favorite programs would be first cut, that is ultimately on the Board of Education to address, not the Board of Finance. It would be better if all adults were confident that all of our needs can and will be met provided we support the Board of Finance to fulfill its tasks and responsibilities. Prematurely committing residents to overexpenditures has disastrous consequences for our children, families, community, state and our country. The BOF may of course recommend additional appropriations in the future if such is determined necessary. Future monitoring allows for more time and more data to make more informed decisions - as well as confirm that an additional appropriations are used for critical, verifiable, intended purposes.

I am hopeful the Preston Board of Finance will be as conservative and draconian as necessary to protect our financial future.

Thank you,

Jill

26 Tanglewood Drive
--

Jill
Jill S Keith
cell: 860.884.9719
jillskeith@gmail.com
From: Mariah Hornsby  
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 5:01 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: Board of Finance Public Meeting

Good Evening BoF,

I apologize for the late submission of my opinion for the Board of Educations budget. Unfortunately, with the changes to our world currently and juggling 3 children and the professional positions that I have to maintain, the grand plans of writing out a well thought out and eloquent email to you has been overrun. There are many parents that would love to have a couple uninterrupted hours to write you the perfect email to voice our support of the school budget, but alas, we have an overwhelming amount on our plates.

I URGE you to restore the $363,000 previously cut from the BoE budget. If it will affect how seriously you consider my opinion, I am not employed by the school system... although that should NEVER negate someones opinion.

Thank you,  
Mariah Hornsby
From: Jill Charron  
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 5:49 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: FY 20/21 Budget Comments

Hello,

I am writing to ask that no further reductions be made to either the General Town or Board of Education budgets for FY 20/21. I believe that during this time of great uncertainty and difficulty further cuts could have a very negative impact on the Preston community both in the present and for the future. It is during this time that we must maintain a stable and strong community. It would be reckless and irresponsible for the Board of Finance to cause any further fiscal damage to either budget when the effects of recent events due to COVID 19 have yet to really set in. Certainly no one knows that the future will hold but I am asking that it be fiscally stable to support the growing and changing needs of the town. In addition, now more than ever we will need to ensure that the public safety resources in town have everything they need to help assist and serve the community. We need to take care of them so that they may do their best to take care of us!

In addition, I ask specifically that the Board of Finance be very sensitive to the needs of the Board of Education during this time because the school community is struggling with what the future looks like. There is an entire generation of students who will forever carry the weight of this pandemic burden. Their futures and social-emotional well being is priceless. Taking more money from the BoE budget will likely result in the elimination of the people and programs that these children need to survive such difficult times. Also, considering going back to school for these children will be far from normal the resources needed for day to day operation will grow and need to be adequately funded. These children have suffered enough and for many it is far from over.

Please be kind and be mindful that your decisions will and can effect the well being and futures of those students that one day will be in your shoes taking care of this place we all call home. I thank you for your time and consideration. Please be well and safe during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Charron  
244 Route 165
From: Penny Avalos  
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 2:00 PM  
To: boe@prestonschools.org; Board of Finance  
Subject: Social Worker funding for Preston Schools

Hello.

I am sending a letter in support of the Social Worker position at Preston Schools.

Thank you for your time and please feel free to reach me with any questions at all if I can lend any further insight into this position that may be helpful.

Have a nice afternoon.

Sincerely,

Penny Avalos
May 28, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I recently became aware that the Social Worker position at Preston Schools may be in jeopardy of losing its funding. I understand that you may question why I am writing this, since I don’t live or work in Preston. The reason I am writing is because I am also a school social worker and have been employed at a neighboring district, Griswold Public Schools, for seven years. First and foremost, as a child advocate, I just wanted to share some reasons that I hope you can continue to offer these services to the children of Preston.

Last fall, I spent time with Leigh Reposa, your school social worker, to talk about the commonality of our positions, what the responsibilities of the position are and to become more acquainted with each other as professional colleagues. Since Leigh was hired last fall, she has provided Preston students with counseling and crisis intervention, referrals to families for basic needs such as food and housing, provided suicide prevention professional development to staff as well as actual suicide assessments for students, and reported neglect or abuse to DCF on behalf of students at risk. Leigh is available to provide consultation to parents, faculty, staff and administration regarding the emotional well-being of your students. Much of her work is geared towards a major issue in education today…working with students that are chronically absent and engaging parents so that children will be in school to obtain their education. The number of children that are chronically absent is growing by the year and often the reasoning behind it is that the children are experiencing anxiety and/or complex issues in the household are preventing them from attending. This work is perfectly suited for a social worker to take on and I know that Leigh is committed to it. Honestly, the social worker position entails many other responsibilities which are too many to mention here.

I completely understand and respect the work that you are doing as you attempt to balance your budget in the worst times imaginable and the challenges you face as you do so. I believe the social worker position will pay for itself over and over again. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this and I wish Preston the best of luck.

Sincerely,

Penny Avalos, MSW, LCSW
Social Worker
Griswold High School
From: Wanczyk-Karp, Steve  
Sent: Thursday, May 28, 2020 4:18 PM  
To: Board of Finance  
Subject: letter to the Preston Board of Finance

Dear Board Members,

I request that the attached correspondence be distributed to the Finance Board at tonight’s meeting.

Thank you,

Stephen Wanczyk-Karp

Stephen A. Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW  
Executive Director  
NASW/CT  
2139 Silas Deane Hwy., Ste. 205  
Rocky Hill, CT 06067  
860-257-8066  
www.naswct.org

Social Workers: NASW is Here for You!  
Find Coronavirus resources at socialworkers.org/covid19  
Please be safe.

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May 28, 2020

Preston Board of Finance
389 Route 2
Preston, CT 06365

Dear Board of Finance Members:

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter representing nearly 2400 members we write in opposition to the proposal before the Finance Board to eliminate the .4 FTE position of school social worker for the Preston Public Schools. While we are sympathetic to the fiscal pressures facing localities we believe that the benefits of having a school social worker far exceed any fiscal gains of eliminating the position.

Children today have more stress than ever before that place increasing numbers of children at risk. This was the case before Covid-19 and it exponentially more so since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. School social workers can help children learn ways of adapting to stressful situations before maladaptive coping skills are established. It has been shown that children with healthy adaptive coping skills to stress have higher attendance rates, decreased drop-out rates, higher test scores and higher self-esteem. School social workers are the one discipline in a school system that proactively addresses academic barriers within the child’s home, school and community. School social workers serve as a catalyst to bring people together to create an environment conducive to learning.

According to the National Mental Health Association, less than 1 in 5 of the 12.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive them. Many of these children will not achieve academic success due to social, emotional and behavioral problems affecting school performance. School social workers can help these students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. School social workers address issues of bullying, crisis intervention, drug use, counseling, conflict resolution, issues of self-esteem, child neglect and abuse, working to connect students with needed services, now isolation from friends, and the list goes on. These are services that benefit the student, the student’s family, teachers, and administrators. However services once dismantled are not easily gained back and school systems that have reduced or eliminated school social workers quickly find that they need the social workers and ultimately have the expense of rehiring social work staff. Six years ago,
Avon Public Schools replaced their social workers with school psychologists. Three years later (2017-18 school year) Avon Public Schools brought back school social workers as they realized that school psychologists complemented but did not fulfill the roles of a school social worker. Other public schools systems that eliminated school social work positions had the same experience and found they needed to go through a rehiring process.

Focusing on students is a key aspect of school social work practice however it is just one of several important parts played by school social workers. Social workers are pro-actively involved in working with parents to enhance parent involvement, assuring families have information and access to community services, and collaborating with outside agencies such as the Department of Children and Families all are part of a school social workers typical day. Teachers and school administrators also benefit, in multiple ways, from having available school social workers as a resource, including helping to explain how family dynamics are affecting academic performance, coordinating services, and assisting in developing individual educational goals and the means to help the student attain those goals.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door, in-person or virtually, they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of trauma, fears of being bullied, and in this economy where so many families are struggling to get by those concerns press on the student’s mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom, be it a physical classroom or home “classroom”. School social workers break through these barriers by providing students with the coping skills and support necessary to allow learning to take place.

At a time when school safety and security is on all of our minds please know that school social workers are part of the answer to secure schools. School social workers pro-actively identify children with mental health and social development needs and when school social workers are in the elementary schools such identification and referral to treatment can be made early on when intervention is most successful.

The Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission and the Keep the Promise Coalition all have endorsed expansion of school social work services to address the mental health needs of school children. It would be most unfortunate if the Preston Public Schools move in reverse of these well-founded recommendations.

Often (as reported by students) when middle school and high school students are told they need to see the school’s mental health staff there is resistance to seeing as school psychologist but not so for a school social worker. Perceptions matter and can become a deterrent to the student seeking help when most needed. Having a school social worker is of great value and benefit to your student body and staff.
As public officials I know that you have a deep commitment to the betterment of Preston’s residents. One way to maintain a supportive government is to offer Preston students the services of a school social worker.

NASW/CT respectfully requests that Finance Board resist any move to eliminate the one part-time school social worker for Preston’s Public Schools. Thank you for consideration of this most important matter. If I may be of further resource to you please do not hesitate to contact at skarp.naswct@socialworkers.org or 860-212-4054.

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW
Executive Director