

Board of Education Special Meeting

July 17, 2018 7:00 PM

PPMS Library

1. Call to Order

Sean Nugent; BOE Chair, called the meeting to order at 7pm. Other members present: Deborah Burke-Grabarek, Cindy Luty, Ed Gauthier, and Tom Turner. Dan Harris and Charles Raymond were absent. Also present: John Spang; Director of Finance and Gloria Homiski; Recording Secretary.

2. Public Comment

Sean stated that the purpose of this meeting was not to provide a detailed budget analysis, but rather to respond to the BOF request for the BOE to hold a Public Forum.

Andy Bilodeau: He believed the agenda to be open ended. He thought the BOF request should have been attached.

Jill Keith: Her personal opinion is that CT is currently in debt and that the BOE should maintain for FY19, not grow. Families are sacrificing and so should the BOE. The BOF should not be afraid to make strong cuts after the community spoke through two failed referendums. (Sean asked that Jill's statement be attached to the minutes. The statement was not provided).

John Foley: The Town received less money from the state than was expected in FY18. Therefore we should look at saving money in FY19 not spending more.

Rob Berube: He recommended that the BOE remove any new items from the FY19 budget. He suggested maintaining the FY18 budget.

Bridget Park: She reviewed a public school site that listed per pupil annual costs. She found Preston to be higher than surrounding communities. She also stated that our testing results are average. She believes we can make reductions that won't affect students. The Town's surplus is dwindling and can't be overused.

Amanda Phelps: She also looked up data regarding per pupil costs and found Preston to be right in the middle of all NFA feeder districts at \$16,739.00/pupil. According to The CT Mirror, Preston's test results are also right in the middle, as compared to feeder districts. Brooklyn's and Franklin's scores are up, but all the others are down.

Steve Colli: Remove anything new from the FY19 budget. Review mandated programs and use a sliding scale.

Jack Smallwood: He wants to see Preston working in a forward manner today to save for tomorrow. He believes that by doing so we can reduce the budget over time. He would like to see teachers have less free time thereby giving students more play/reading time.

Michelle Bilodeau: She stated that she understands tonight is a special meeting to discuss the BOF forum request; and yet, voters voted down the budget because they don't want their taxes to go up. She is insulted by

the suggestion of a forum. Voters know why they voted no.

Andy Depta: He spent a good deal of time at the transfer station trying to inform people about the budget process. He said that the BOE and BOF must have better communication with the public. Most people he talked to don't know when meetings or referendums are being held. He believes they do want to be informed though. He did his own breakdown from the BOE budget that is on the school website. He believes that staffing can be reduced. (Sean asked that Andy's statement be attached to the minutes. See attached).

Amanda Phelps: She asked if salaries are broken down on the website - certified vs. non-certified, admin., etc.

Bridget Park: The "vote today" sign was not out for the July 10th Referendum. She hopes we put it out again for the next referendum.

Zane Hornsby: He asked what the projected enrollment is from last year to next year.

Nick Vegliante: He stated that a forum is a great idea, but asked how we get anyone other than the "usual suspects" to attend the forum.

Jack Smallwood: He stated that the BOE always spends less than they budget for. Voters want to know why.

Andy Bilodeau: He asked that if and when student population data is provided, the BOE be sure to compare apples to apples from one year to the next.

3. BOF Forum Request

Sean stated that although Dr. Seitsinger is away on vacation, and two other board members were unable to attend, the Board still felt the urgency to hold a special meeting. Sean explained that he has been in contact with Dr. Seitsinger and that Roy welcomes a Public Hearing.

Sean then read the request from the BOF (see attached).

Sean then shared a draft letter he composed in response to the BOF request. He asked that the BOE members share their thoughts.

Ed Gauthier: He believes the BOE fulfilled all duties. He believes the BOF should set the Public Hearing not the BOE.

Tom Turner and Cindy Luty: They believe that the BOE owes the taxpayers a better explanation and more clarification.

Deborah Burke-Grabarek: She asked who will actually make the cuts.

Sean Nugent stated that it is his suggestion that the BOE hold a special meeting on July 30th (Dr. Seitsinger will be back in district) to review possible cuts etc. He also noted that the Public Hearing could then be held on July 31st. Sean then reviewed a list of questions and concerns that he compiled from community members, etc.

Concerns include the following:

PT vs. FT Superintendent
Misconception that the Superintendent will receive an 8% raise in FY19
Staff members vs. enrollment
Special Education savings
Stipends/Contracts
Retirement Incentive Plan monies
Secondary education selections
Line item budget history

Moved, to accept the letter as drafted and present it to the BOF.
Gauthier/Luty. Unanimous. Motion Carries.

4. Public Comment

Jack Smallwood: He stated that tonight's meeting was a waste of community members' time.

Jill Keith: She asked Sean why he asked for her hard copy statement and that of Andy Depta, but not of everyone else. She considered the request manipulative and disrespectful. She had hoped tonight's meeting would bring the community together with open communication. She is upset that the BOF did not make cuts. She is upset that the BOE did not supply answers. She also took offense to the comment made about "usual suspects" attending meetings.

Sean Nugent stated that he asked for their statements so that their information could be captured accurately.

Nick Vegliante: He apologized for previously using the term "usual suspects." It was not meant as a negative comment. He also stated that he believed tonight's meeting was helpful.

Mary Foley: In the past, the community was told not to tell the BOE how to spend their money. The community could only say the amount they thought should be cut. That being said, she does not believe the meeting on July 31st will do much good.

Jill Keith and Sean Nugent stated that changes with regard to line item spending would require Board Policy and State Legislative change.

Andy Depta: He stated that we have a communication problem in our community. He applauded the BOE on the presentation of their budget despite his disagreement with some of it. More people need to attend meetings and gather material from our website. He worries the Public Hearing will be a waste of time.

Bridget Park: She asked if there is a financial cost to hold a Public Hearing. Sean answered that there is a cost to post such a meeting in the newspaper which is a requirement.

Andy Bilodeau: He does not believe another Public Hearing will improve the dialogue with the Public. He thanked the BOE members for their service and stated that they are in a tough position. He asked that the BOE address reoccurring absences among members. He suggested that questions be added on the referendum ballot for a better understanding of public opinion. He believes the BOE needs to make a sizable decrease in order for the budget

to pass. He wants the BOE to share publicly which programs may be cut. Meetings and referendums cost money. Using surplus is costly too.

Amanda Phelps: She does not wish to draw out the process but wants to correct the misinformation that is out there. Minutes will be available for community members to read if they are unable to attend the meeting.

Andy Depta: He stated that the voices of social media are being heard louder than those of the 600 people who voted.

Rob Berube: Reiterated his initial comment - scratch anything new and move on.

Amanda Phelps: She worries that the community is hearing the social media voices louder than they are hearing the voices of their elected officials.

Mary Foley: How can taxpayers make suggestions to the Board? Children and education should not suffer, but spending must be managed.

Sean Nugent: He did not mean to imply that the Town can't ask questions. They simply can't make changes to line items. People must come to meetings to be informed. The BOE held at least 8 BOE and Finance Committee Meetings regarding the budget. The BOE then presented their budget to the BOF, and at Public Hearing and Town Meetings. Once a referendum date is set, the BOE can no longer make recommendations about the budget. He also stated that he is against Facebook discussion as there is no personal connection.

Jack Smallwood: He asked about an \$800,000 special education grant that is no longer needed and asked who applies for such grants. Sean said that this would be addressed.

Jill Keith: She stated that she made the statement about the \$811,000 grant. She asked why Sean did not simply say that. She had hoped this meeting would be a forum for respect and politeness.

5. Adjournment

Moved, to adjourn the meeting at 8:25pm. Burke-Grabarek/Nugent. Unanimous. Motion Carries.



TOWN OF PRESTON
BOARD OF FINANCE

389 ROUTE 2
PRESTON, CONNECTICUT 06365-8830

July 11, 2018

Dear Dr. Seitsinger, John Spang, Dr. Nugent, and the Board of Education,

The Board of Finance met last evening to discuss the results of the referendum. With the Board of Education budget failing by 91 votes (291 to 382), the Board of Finance made the following recommendation:

The Board of Finance recommends the Board of Education hold a Public Hearing to present the Board of Education budget and scenarios of additional cuts of \$50,000; \$75,000; \$100,000; and a flat budget (based on the budget voted upon on July 10, 2018) with the impact to services explained.

The Board of Finance will meet on Wednesday, July 18, 2018 at 7 p.m. for its regular meeting and would like a response by that meeting as to whether the Board of Education will accept this recommendation and, if accepted, a date for the Public Hearing.

If you have any questions regarding this recommendation, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa M. Lennon".

Melissa Lennon
Preston Board of Finance Chair

PRESTON BOARD OF EDUCATION 2018-2019 BUDGET DATA

Personal Opinion and Compiled by Andy R. Depta, 6 Young Court dated July 17, 2018

Complied from BOF budget data – provided at BOE meeting July 17, 2018

- Total budget 2017-2018 = \$11,690,887
- Total budget 2018-2019 = \$12,046,800
 - Delta = \$355,911
- Total cost for teachers = \$2,964,295
- Total cost for Non-teachers = \$2,438,622
- Total cost for Pre-K = \$194,430
- Total cost for Special Ed = \$2,124,659
- Total cost for Services = \$6,643,883
 - Services are: supplies, workbooks, health, tuition, legal, maintenance, transportation, fuel, staff development, etc., etc.

- Total budget line items = 139
- Total line item w/no changes in the budget = \$457,176
- Number of line item with increases = 68
- Number of line item with decreases = 29
- Number of line item with no change = 16
- Number of line item with zero = 26
- Number of line item with high % increases = 33 (personal opinion on percentages)