

**GLASTONBURY BOARD OF FINANCE  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2020**

The Glastonbury Board of Finance with Finance Director, Julie Twilley, and Town Manager, Richard J. Johnson, in attendance, held a special meeting at 3:00 p.m. in Town Council Chambers, 2155 Main Street, Glastonbury, Connecticut. Also present were members of the Board of Education.

**Roll Call**

*Members*

Mr. Constantine “Gus” Constantine, Chairman  
Ms. Jennifer Sanford, Vice Chairman  
Mr. Robert Lynn  
Mr. James McIntosh  
Mr. James Zeller  
Mr. Walter Cusson

**1. Communication: Education Operating Budget**

Dr. Alan Bookman, Superintendent, opened by explaining that the BOE reduced the budget from the Superintendent’s 3.6% proposed increase to 3.2%. However, the effects of the pension came late, so \$263k was not budgeted for. He noted that the pension increase based on the new mortality tables is much greater for the Town than the BOE because teachers and administrators are part of the state retirement fund, not the Town’s pension fund.

Mr. Zeller explained that, last year, they had an issue with per pupil expenditure, which was not resolved. Sometimes, the Department of Education changes the way they calculate this figure. Dr. Bookman stated that it has only changed once, two years ago. Mr. Zeller asked if any of the other towns of DRG have the equivalent of Glastonbury’s LINKS program. Dr. Bookman stated that he does not know, but there are towns with similar programs. Mr. Zeller asked how close the enrollment projections have been to the actuals. BOE Chairman, Mr. Doug Foyle, stated that they are planning to get more information on the accuracy of their past projections, but that is not a near-term priority with the BOE. Mr. Zeller asked which years was Pay to Play imposed for sports. Mr. Foyle replied, it is not a part of their budget, but the BOE had a concern with making access to sports cost-prohibitive. He explained that two years ago, the BOF recommended it and they thought it was a bad educational idea, so it did not go any further.

Mr. Zeller explained the Town’s hybrid plan and asked about the BOE’s plan. Dr. Bookman stated that the BOE does not have a hybrid plan. They met with their actuaries, who told them that they would not save money, and in fact, could potentially lose money by going to a different plan. Mr. Zeller asked if there have been any updated healthcare estimates for their premium equivalent since they put together their budget. Dr. Bookman stated that they are going for 5% next year, though it potentially could be lower. Mr. Foyle added that the budgeted number for healthcare is just their best estimate of what it is going to be in June. Once they lock in employee

contributions, it cannot be changed.

Mr. Zeller asked about the BOE guidelines on class sizes. Dr. Bookman stated that their official guidelines have not changed but their practice has changed slightly. He noted that the official contracted numbers are far too high (around 28 pupils per teacher), so their number (closer to 20 students per teacher) is a way to ensure that they never go above the threshold, which functions more as a ceiling rather than a target. Mr. Zeller countered that there is a cost for these smaller classes and the public never had a chance to weigh in on that. Every year, there is an assumption that class size affects performance but not much analysis is provided from the BOE to prove that point.

Mr. Cusson brought up the “non-traditional opportunities” referenced in the BOE budget, asking if there is communication to the children about these opportunities and how to take advantage of them. Dr. Bookman stated that they are trying to modernize through initiatives like STEAM and computer-operated machines. They are looking to raise funds to motivate students to go into these fields. Mr. Foyle added that they have a lot of robotics and tech-oriented clubs at the younger levels, which stress college and career readiness.

Mr. Cusson then pointed out that the BOE recommends a budget increase of 3.32%, which is not a “low” increase when compared to considerably smaller increases they have seen in previous years. Dr. Bookman clarified that this year’s proposed increase has not yet been reduced by the Town Council, so it reflects a higher number than what the final increase will end up being. Mr. Foyle added that they had budget freezes during those years of the 1.9% / low 2% increases, and though the lower numbers make it look like it was manageable, it was a very difficult process getting through. Mr. Foyle stated that, ideally, in order to maintain the high quality of education and services that they provide for their students, while accounting for fixed costs such as salaries, as well as inflation, their budget increase every year would have to be somewhere in the high 2% / low 3% range.

Mr. Lynn remarked that there is an extra \$300k listed in teachers’ salary. Dr. Bookman explained that that is due to teacher contracts. He noted that the last two levels in the 12-point teacher salary scale are the biggest jumps (e.g. level 10 to 11 and 11 to 12). Mr. Lynn noted that 37 students go out of the district. He asked if the LINKS program has helped with that. Dr. Bookman said yes, it has. Fewer students leave to attend other districts, and in fact, other districts send their students here, so from a revenue standpoint, as well as an educational one, it has yielded positive results.

Ms. Sanford stated that, in regard to the per pupil expenditure, she does not see the comparisons with other schools as apples to oranges, as the BOE claims, because the math is there. She asked if there are other schools in DRG, or in that PPE comparison, that have other programs that are dampening their expenditures. Dr. Bookman stated that every school district does something. Glastonbury is able to keep their special education costs down because of the LINKS program, but other districts have their own ideas. Mr. Foyle thanked Ms. Sanford for highlighting the big-picture issue of affordability and cost, and then pointed out that page 94 of their budget lists the “bottom line per pupil cost.” He also explained that the Town’s public school rankings are nationally-recognized and provided for at a per pupil cost that is less than the median of their

peers in Connecticut. Mr. Lynn asked if Niche, which they referenced, is the standard educational ranking system. Mr. Foyle explained that there is no one standard ranking system. Niche, which ranked Glastonbury super highly, is used by realtors and people moving into town, so it matters to the consumer. Being the #1 school district in Central Connecticut, #3 in the state, #130 in the country means a lot.

Mr. Zeller explained that he contacted the State Department of Education, who told him that is their official policy that DRGs are no longer used for comparative purposes. He also noted that even if they take into consideration the DRG B towns, suddenly, they are not as competitive, ranking #3 out of 7. Mr. Constantine asked if there are any classes with fewer than 10 pupils. Dr. Bookman stated that there are very few classes in the single levels, but the exception is foreign language upper levels. Mr. Foyle elaborated, noting that there are about 12 classes at the high school in that number range, of which half are foreign languages. Dr. Bookman stated that much of the money for foreign language classes comes from the Title 3 grants. They will spend \$193k on tutors to help students learn English, though it may end up being more than that.

Mr. McIntosh contended that the systems that get the worst outcomes spend the most. He suggested that they keep that in mind when discussing dollars spent and educational outcomes. Mr. McIntosh found it troubling that there are numbers in this budget that are not supported in the document itself. Each year, they receive less and less detail while being asked for more money. The Town has provided twice the amount of detail while asking for less than half the money. He acknowledged that once the budget is allocated, the BOE has discretion to spend it as it wishes. Dr. Bookman pointed out that most of their budget (about 85%) is spent on staff and benefits. Ms. Sanford expressed that she would like to see more cuts in paper use. Dr. Bookman stated that their goal is to be electronic only and they are making moves in that direction. Possibly next year, they will see that reflected in their budget.

Mr. McIntosh asked, other than STEAM, what innovations does the BOE propose in this budget? Dr. Bookman referenced the social-emotional learning program, which provides students with the ability to cope with adversity, including suicide prevention. Mr. Foyle added that though this is not a big and flashy innovation, it is crucial for the learning and safety of students. Mr. McIntosh asked if any innovations have been reduced. Mr. Foyle stated that the innovations are about cost-avoidance; LINKS is an example of that.

Mr. McIntosh asked where they stand with STEAM. Dr. Bookman explained that they are currently conducting a feasibility study, but they want to ensure that the lab would be operational from day one, so they will spend the \$300k upfront to hire an architect and purchase new equipment. Ms. Sanford asked if it will be fully funded or will they seek out some private donations. Dr. Bookman explained that they have community fundraising initiatives and the Education Foundation will put in some money, but they would love to fundraise the rest of the cost. Mr. Zeller noted that they ran into problems with private funding for the GHS lights, so they should all be mindful of the possible infeasibility of fundraising for STEAM.

Mr. Foyle stated that he liked the way the BOF approached the budget last year, by considering affordability. Mr. McIntosh remarked that their responsibility is not determined just by what the Town can afford, but it is about fiscal responsibility. He asked why, for example, utilities have

increased in the budget for oil and gas by 9% at a time of global warming. Dr. Bookman stated that they underbudgeted utilities this year but making budget revisions on heat before the winter has even arrived makes no sense. Mr. Foyle answered that the number of units this year is not yet known but it will be a fixed number. He clarified that climate change is different than weather, which can vastly vary from year to year. The budgeting for utilities is just setting aside the expense for what it will be. Mr. McIntosh asked what will happen if they overbudget the number. Mr. Foyle stated that they will spend it elsewhere because there will be other items in their budget that will be underbudgeted.

Mr. McIntosh asked why it is necessary to have a medical adviser for transportation. Mr. Foyle explained that some students on their buses have anaphylactic allergies, so bus drivers need to be trained by a medical adviser, in order to be able to administer the EpiPen. Mr. McIntosh inquired about the tuition for Special Education Program 2700. Dr. Bookman stated that 37 students are covered by that program, so it runs about \$124,000 per student. For the future, Mr. McIntosh requested that the BOE provide information on what happens to students when they finish the program. He then asked why there is an additional teacher for Program 2700. Dr. Bookman explained that the hire is in the LINKS program, but there is an overall net reduction of one teacher in the whole educational system.

## **2. Communication: Education Capital Projects**

Mr. Johnson explained that he had covered this at an earlier meeting, so the Board elected to skip this item.

## **3. Communication: Discussion regarding FY 2020-2021 Operating, Capital and Revenue Budget Proposals**

Mr. Johnson stated that he received good news on the grand list. He clarified that there are two different numbers listed in the grand list, but they both have the same outcome, so the Board should not be alarmed or confused. Mr. Cusson stated that he read an article in today's paper from a nearby town, whose grand list increased by over 10%. He asked how that could be. Mr. Johnson said that he has not seen the article, but it sounds like they might have done property revaluation.

## **4. Action: \$1.45m Appropriation and Transfer for Fisher Hill Bridge**

Mr. Johnson explained that the budget includes \$1.45 million, but the contractor would like to execute the contracts when weather permits, this summer. The recommendation is to approve the appropriation now, so that they can execute the contracts. The capital program, effective July 1, will be reduced by \$1.45 million, so it is a wash.

**Motion by:** Mr. Cusson

**Seconded by:** Mr. Zeller

MOVED, that the Glastonbury Board of Finance recommends to the Town Council the transfer of \$1.45 million from the Capital Reserve Fund - Unassigned Fund Balance to the Capital Projects - Bridge Replacement/Rehabilitation.

**Result:** Motion passed unanimously (6-0-0).

**Motion by:** Mr. Zeller

**Seconded by:** Mr. Cusson

MOVED, that the Glastonbury Board of Finance adjourns for a brief recess at 5:47 P.M.

**Result:** Motion passed unanimously (6-0-0).

## **5. Public Hearing – 6:00 p.m.**

Receiving no comments or questions from the public, Chairman Constantine closed the public hearing.

## **6. Adjournment**

**Motion by:** Mr. Cusson

**Seconded by:** Mr. Lynn

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Board of Finance moves to adjourn their meeting of February 5, 2020, at 6:00 p.m.

**Result:** Motion passed unanimously (6-0-0).

**Respectfully submitted,**

*Lilly Torosyan*

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Recording Clerk

*For anyone seeking more information about this meeting, a video on demand is available at [www.glastonbury-ct.gov/video](http://www.glastonbury-ct.gov/video); click on Public Broadcast Video On Demand, and an audio recording is available in the Finance and Administrative Services Office.*