

**GLASTONBURY BOARD OF FINANCE  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2022**

The Glastonbury Board of Finance, along with Finance Director, Julie Twilley, and Town Manager, Richard J. Johnson, held a special meeting at 3:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of Town Hall at 2155 Main Street with the option for Zoom video conferencing. The video was broadcast in real time and via a live video stream.

**Roll Call**

***Members***

Mr. Constantine “Gus” Constantine, Chairman

Ms. Jennifer Sanford, Vice Chairman {participated via video conferencing}

Mr. James McIntosh

Ms. Susan Karp

Mr. Robert Lynn {participated via video conferencing}

Mr. James Zeller

**1. Public Comment Session:** Comments pertaining to the call.

Ms. Karp expressed that she participates in fundraising from residents and businesses for the STEAM lab, but she is not involved in any of the funding decisions by the BOE. The Board did not find any conflict that would impede her participation in the meeting.

**2. Education Budget Reviews:**

BOE Chairman Doug Foyle explained that their budget increase of 3.25% is less than half of the annualized inflation rate of 7%. Superintendent Alan Bookman reviewed the 6 drivers impacting the budget this year: three new clinicians for the Student Support Centers, which support students’ mental health; 18 new paraprofessionals for special education accounts; rising heat and fuel rates for utilities; increased costs in technology software and online applications; salary increases; and rising inflation. Dr. Bookman explained that this is the biggest budget reduction he has seen from the BOE, who cut his proposed increase of 3.8% to the current 3.25%.

Ms. Karp asked about the BOE’s approach to the reduction. Dr. Foyle stated that there were two nights of workshops and one night of making reductions. They wanted to give students what they need to succeed next year. By April, they hope to be able to put some of the funds back into the supply accounts and reduce the Self Insurance Reserve Fund draw. Ms. Karp asked if the current assumption is that the reserve will stay at the same level or is there a built-in planned reduction. Dr. Foyle stated that there is a built-in planned reduction. Next year, there should be a reduction of \$900,000 in the reserve fund. He asked if the BOF would like them to be more aggressive on that. Their target is to draw it down from \$12 million to \$6 million without creating a hole in the budget. Dr. Bookman noted that there will be a budget workshop on this soon.

Ms. Karp asked to go through the activity in the 1% fund. Dr. Bookman explained that federal money was used to construct the STEAM lab. However, the remaining \$450,000 to complete the project will be paid out of the 1% fund. The fund will also cover the asbestos removal project at Naubuc School and the technology/security costs for the GHS field house. The clinicians for the student support centers, the special education paraprofessionals, and the special education teacher at Hopewell School will all be funded from the 1% fund this year. This is because they did not have enough funds in the current budget to transfer in for all the new hires. Next year, funding will come out of the budget itself, not the 1% fund.

Mr. Zeller expressed concern about the new hires showing up in the 1% fund, instead of the operational budget. Dr. Foyle stated that those people will be accounted for in the final operational budget in August. Mr. Zeller asked which accounts they reduced before going to the 1% fund. Dr. Bookman explained that they did not reduce any accounts. They paid for it out of the operating budget and then the 1% fund will reimburse that. Mr. Zeller is worried that they are creating a budget cliff. Dr. Bookman stated that they are paying for it now and are budgeting for it next year. Dr. Foyle added that these are exceptional expenditures based on the pandemic. It is not how they are going to operate the 1% fund going forward.

Ms. Sanford asked why the federal dollars received for COVID-19 funding were not used for this. Dr. Foyle explained that the only discretionary item was the STEAM lab, which the BOE felt was the best use for those funds. It would have otherwise been a CIP item, so they relieved the Town's budget by using federal monies. Ms. Sanford asked about the context of the savings which were transferred into the 1% fund. Dr. Bookman explained that, prior to the pandemic, some of the money not spent throughout the year would be made available in the 1% fund to address projects such as sidewalk maintenance. Ms. Sanford asked how there could have been savings when operations in FY 2021 were \$800,000 over budget. Dr. Foyle explained that, since the pandemic, they spend a lot more to operate schools. Ms. Sanford asked where the federal money is listed. Dr. Foyle stated that all revenues are booked on page 13.

Ms. Karp remarked that both the LINKS program and the Early Learning Center are self-sustaining and income-generating, which is something to be proud of. She asked if the 1% fund for Eastbury School will address the water issues there. Dr. Bookman replied no, none of the money is targeted for that purpose. The water situation is not a safety issue, and it affects the entire neighborhood, not just the school. The 1% fund is set aside for boilers and roofs at Eastbury. They have also set aside \$50,000 for maintenance from the LINKS funding. Mr. Zeller asked for a preliminary estimate for repairing the water issue. Dr. Bookman noted that Mr. Johnson will provide that information when he knows it. It was clarified that bottled water is provided for use at Eastbury School.

Ms. Karp asked about enrollment projections. Dr. Bookman stated that it is exactly as expected.

Bucking the trend of the last few years, now the lower grades are trending up while the upper grades trend down. There will be no effects on teachers at the middle school. Ms. Karp asked how the student support centers are set up within the schools and how they work with Youth and Family Services. Dr. Bookman stated that the support center clinician in the high school previously worked for Youth and Family Services, so there is great coordination. Even once the pandemic ends, this mental health support for the students will not go away. Ms. Karp asked about the elementary level. Dr. Bookman stated that the greater need in the elementary schools has been the paraprofessionals. Dr. Foyle added that the BOE has communicated to the administration that if there is a need in the elementary schools, they can extend the service there.

Ms. Karp asked if the software is a one-time cost or an annual cost. Dr. Bookman replied, it is an annual cost. Ms. Sanford asked what percentage of the increase is due to apps. Dr. Bookman stated that it is a combination of the software and the iPads. Ms. Sanford asked if they have data on the metrics for the technologies purchased. Dr. Bookman stated yes, they can provide that information. Ms. Sanford asked how much has been raised privately for the STEAM lab. Ms. Karp stated that, to date, they have raised about \$76,000. Ms. Sanford asked for a full account of what has been expended on the STEAM project since inception. Mr. Zeller calculated it to be just shy of \$3.6 million. Dr. Bookman stated that that calculation is about \$300,000 too high. Ms. Sanford is uncomfortable with pursuing these projects outside of the budget process. Dr. Foyle believes that this is not a choice between pursuing the STEAM lab or the mental health centers. The Town can and should do both.

Mr. Zeller remarked that the STEAM lab was initially presented as an \$800,000 project which has now become \$3.6 million. He is concerned about the way in which the project was vetted. He believes that all the boards would have supported it through the CIP, which would have been a more measured process. Mr. Zeller then spoke to the per pupil expenditure. He finds the comparison of Gold Coast towns with Hartford area towns to be problematic and unrealistic. He asked that, next year, it be narrowed down to just towns in the Hartford area. Dr. Foyle explained that Glastonbury falls right in the middle of their peers: West Hartford, Avon, Farmington, and Simsbury. Among the 21 schools in the list, Glastonbury is in the middle third.

Dr. Bookman stated that it has been a very unusual time for food services. The federal government provided funding during the pandemic to cover free meals for students. However, he does not believe that they will continue to do so next year. Ms. Sanford asked if there are transfers out when there are surpluses. Dr. Bookman explained that they support the health costs for food services personnel. By law, they could carry over a three-month operating balance of up to \$600,000. Mr. Zeller asked when they last raised prices on meals. Dr. Bookman stated that their school food prices are among the highest of the districts in the area, so they did not want to raise them further.

Mr. McIntosh believes that this BOE lacks the expertise, resources, staff, and time to do their job as outlined by the Town Charter. He suggested that all goals be spelled out summarily, not just the strategic goals listed on page 1, because it is difficult to measure performance without knowing what the goals are. He stated that the Town Charter requires the BOE to submit a budget for their receipts and expenditures, not just the budget to be funded by the town. He finds it concerning that budget expenditures total \$120 million while public perception is that it is only \$117 million. Dr. Bookman explained that they have heeded Mr. McIntosh's comments from prior years to include the full expenditure number in the budget. However, they do not want the public to mistakenly think that the BOE is asking for \$120 million from taxpayers.

Mr. McIntosh inquired about the exorbitant increases in the cost for high school graduation. Dr. Foyle clarified that the \$22,000 expenditure in 2020 was inordinately low because there was no in-person graduation. Last year, the cost was over \$78,000 because graduation was in-person, with enhanced social distancing measures put in place to safeguard against COVID-19. Mr. McIntosh noted that Hopewell School seems to have too many students while Buttonball Lane has too few students, even though the districts abut each other. He asked if any consideration has been made to change the district lines to balance that out. Dr. Foyle stated yes. However, due to the structure of the school, Buttonball Lane cannot hold too many students.

Mr. McIntosh thinks that government in all its functions is a form of monopoly enterprise. The BOE's budgets lack quantifiable goals and get increasingly layered each year. Once objective standards are met, the BOE seldomly, if ever, removes the expenditures which are no longer needed. He believes that this is not a failure of the BOE or staff, but of structure. State and local governments have built a system whereby the BOE, the BOF, and the Town Council cannot effectively regulate proposed expenditures. He worries that they will continue to fail to regulate as education continues to be the highest increasing cost in the community.

Dr. Foyle agreed that it is hard to quantify the output of an educated student. However, Glastonbury schools produce successful students. The market informs them that they are doing a good job because many choose to live in Glastonbury for its educational system. Ms. Karp has viewed the budget process from every angle: as a council member, as a BOE member, and now as a member of the BOF. While she acknowledged that there are opportunities to innovate and increase efficiency, she finds the process to be fair and thorough. Perhaps the best metric or measure for the success of the process is the success of Glastonbury.

Dr. Foyle then reviewed the capital budget. The BOE's top priority CIP item is the Naubuc School project to redesign the second floor, which consists of an open classroom design that was constructed in 1969. Across the country, it was decided that the open classroom system is inefficient for education. The project has been a priority for the BOE since 2009. Design specification was approved by the BOE at the end of the summer, and they are comfortable with

the \$3.2 million estimate, with a \$100,000 contingency set aside. Should the project end up costing more than \$3.2 million, the BOE will not return to the Council to ask for more funding. Mr. Zeller has concerns that the bids might run higher than the \$3.2 million estimate because of the current state of inflation. If that happens, he asked where the BOE will find the extra money, especially since the 1% fund is now empty. Dr. Foyle stated that they trust the experts who gave them the estimate. He does not know where they will find the additional funds, but he assured that the BOE will figure it out. Mr. Zeller asked if the school's first floor also shares the same open space layout. Dr. Bookman stated yes, except the first floor is more manageable, with far fewer classrooms combined together than on the second floor.

Mr. McIntosh finds it appropriate to question the estimates. He asked whether there has been a discernible difference in the quality of education in graduates of Naubuc School when they get to Gideon Welles. Dr. Foyle explained that it is not so much that the output is different as they have to devote more resources to get the same result. It is also more challenging for students with special needs. Dr. Bookman added that the distractions are too great, which he thinks negatively influences student learning. Lots of variables come into play, so it is hard to measure quantifiably. Should there be a cost overrun, Mr. Constantine expressed that he is open to allocating additional money to the BOE to ensure that the project gets completed.

### **3. Adjournment**

**Motion by:** Mr. McIntosh

**Seconded by:** Ms. Karp

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Board of Finance moves to adjourn their meeting of February 2, 2022, at 6:30 p.m.

**Result:** Motion passes unanimously {6-0-0}.

**Respectfully submitted,**

*Lilly Torosyan*

Lilly Torosyan

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..*