

**GLASTONBURY BOARD OF FINANCE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2023**

The Glastonbury Board of Finance, along with Finance Director, Keri Rowley, and Town Manager, Richard J. Johnson, held a special meeting at 11:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers of Town Hall at 2155 Main Street with an 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
Mr. Jared Soper, Vice Chairman {exited at 12:17 p.m.}
Mr. James Zeller
Mr. Robert Lynn {participated via Zoom video conferencing}
Ms. Susan Karp
Mr. Kevin Graff

1. **Public Comment Session:** Comments pertaining to the call *None*

2. **Budget Reviews**

Education Operating Budget

Dr. Doug Foyle, BOE Chairman, explained that the proposed 3.24% budget increase reflects less than half the national inflation rate. The BOE unanimously approved every item in the budget. This unanimity has not occurred since 2018. Dr. Alan Bookman, Superintendent, stated that their budget increase comes in at the lowest (apart from one other district) in the Hartford area. The budget is very lean. They did not add any programs this year.

Ms. Karp asked to point out the BOE’s adjustments to the Superintendent's budget. Dr. Foyle stated that they made reductions to three items:

- Supplies at elementary schools: They hope to make up the difference by gains on operation, either this fiscal year or next year.
- Self-insurance reserve: The reserve is about \$10 million, but they would like it to be \$6 million. The reserve is being reduced in a responsible way to not create a cliff in the budget. He clarified that by reducing the contribution to the reserve, they are not reducing anybody’s health care; this is simply the funding of it.
- Equipment budget: Because of a reduction in the overall equipment budget, they decided to make do without replacing anything this year.

Dr. Foyle elaborated that the reserve used to be around \$6 million and then jumped to \$12 million during the height of the pandemic. This was a one-time jump that they are trying to draw down responsibly. Ms. Karp noted that more education employees are choosing not to take health insurance. She asked whether this is a trend. Dr. Bookman explained that part of that is because various recent hires were already on a health insurance plan, so they chose not to change it. Ms. Karp asked about staffing, noting the large increase in paraprofessionals. Dr. Bookman explained that the increase in special education staff has been dramatic. Last year, there were not enough substitute teachers to cover classes. This year, they hired several full-time paraprofessionals who can be substitute teachers. Absences (both among staff and students) this year have been dramatically higher, but they are better equipped with substitutes than last year.

Mr. Soper commented that the comprehensive financial report for town operations helps him analyze potential future budgets and current budgets. He asked if the BOE has any equivalent of the town's report, which has a lot of information not in the budget. Dr. Foyle explained that the BOE does three revisions during the year (in April, October, and a final year close-out in August), but there is no budget updated to close out the year. Mr. Zeller stated that it has been the BOF's request for the BOE to put in two columns in their budget: one showing what was approved and another showing what was spent. Even if the BOF does not see that information, the BOE should know because it will help them track how well the BOE or Superintendent have estimated what they are going to need based on their track record. Dr. Foyle stated that there is a way to see all that information, just not in one place.

Ms. Karp asked about changes in staffing. Dr. Bookman stated that Student Support Centers were created from the budget, but social workers are provided by YFS. Their hours at the elementary schools have not been enough, so they have been increasing staff in all the elementary schools. They have also hired additional staff in special education. Ms. Karp noted that a resident expressed concern about the reduction of three teachers at the high school. Dr. Bookman does not expect a change in the teaching curriculum at all. There are simply 55 fewer students, which translates to three teachers.

Mr. Zeller asked about staffing trends with declining enrollment. Dr. Foyle stated that they do not compile the number of staff reductions over an x period of time, but his recollection is that they are around 30 teaching positions down over a period of 5-7 years. Dr. Bookman explained that the number of births last year in Glastonbury was the largest they have seen in 20 years. It has yet to be determined whether that is a one-time occurrence or will become a trend. At this point in time, they do not have faith in the reliability of projecting much larger enrollments based on one big kindergarten class in FY26/27. Dr. Foyle added that there is a lot of instability in those numbers in the early years, so they are waiting to see if it stabilizes. Mr. Soper asked how many teachers the BOE is budgeting for the current year, and how it compares to the FY19-20 number. Dr. Bookman does not know but will provide it.

Mr. Graff asked if there were any initiatives for this year that had to be cut. Dr. Bookman stated that they did have to say no to some activities. Mr. Graff asked if there was anything that the BOE added to the Superintendent's proposal. Dr. Foyle replied, no. However, they did add two elementary library media specialists, whose positions were vacant for two years. This will ensure that there is a library specialist for each building, as currently there are only three specialists for five elementary schools.

Mr. Zeller explained that the BOE has strategically pursued higher contributions for the pension plan, which worked while the stock market was doing well, but it is becoming clearer that it will not hold up much longer. Regarding the allocation of the ADC by group, BOE employees are costing \$13,179 each, which is almost double the cost of hybrid employees. He asked how many unions education has and when their contracts will expire. Dr. Bookman stated that they have six unions and five of them have pensions. Collective bargaining will not occur for another 3-4 years.

Mr. Zeller believes that this would be a good time to think about moving their employees to the hybrid plan. Dr. Foyle stated that it will be the subject of negotiation. Ms. Karp noted that when the BOF met with the actuary, she pointed out that there are different ways to achieve the same goal, and that it is difficult to compare amongst employee groups because they are very different. Dr. Bookman noted that the BOE has also spoken with Milliman and did not see the gain in changing their plan.

Mr. Zeller does not believe that showing year-over-year change in the budget is as reflective or worthwhile for education as it is for the town. The DRG data has not been updated by the state, probably because it does not make sense to compare Glastonbury to Greenwich, which has a very low mill rate. He hopes that there would be more evaluation of the budget on a per pupil basis rather than year-over-year increases. Dr. Foyle stated that he always refers to their Central Connecticut peers: Avon, Farmington, and Simsbury. Their per pupil costs are just about the same as theirs, and those costs are going up as needs increase. Dr. Bookman noted that the purpose of using the DRG data to compare is to give some ideas to the Board about where they are. The real interesting number is 3.24%, which shows what the budget was last year and what they are adding on. Ms. Karp stated that it is not only the 3.24%, but what is consistently delivered. Mr. Zeller countered that, internally, the unit cost is very important.

Education Capital Projects

Mr. Soper stated that in FY24/25, the CIP is looking at a shortfall of over \$8 million, and the following year, over \$5 million. The Town needs to look out over the next 2-3 years about how to fund their priorities because continuing to maintain a \$6 million CIP addition will not suffice.

They must either bond some projects or make reductions, such as not funding a weight training facility. Dr. Foyle added that a third option is to increase the CIP budget. Mr. Soper does not disagree, but over the next three years, they would need to increase it to \$9-10 million a year. That may be the right answer, but he wants to review all options.

Dr. Foyle explained that the BOE's main priorities are the weight room on campus and the turf field projects. Dr. Bookman stated that they have been doing studies of these projects. They currently lease the space for the weight room at \$50,000 per year. However, that space will not be available after next year. In looking at other spaces, they are not finding anything cheaper than a \$100,000 per year lease. Therefore, it makes sense for the high school to have its own weight room. The proposal is for \$1.2 million. Mr. Graff asked the BOE to provide a vision of how this facility will be used, above and beyond for the sports teams. Dr. Bookman stated that there is no reason not to have it operating full time. Dr. Foyle added that schools will probably use the facility from 7:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. There is no off season, as teams train in the summer.

Mr. Graff asked if the \$1.2 million includes existing equipment. Dr. Bookman clarified that they have all the equipment for the room. Mr. Graff asked about maintenance costs. Dr. Bookman does not anticipate any maintenance costs. Mr. Graff asked how they would manage the overflow of parking. Dr. Bookman stated that they will have to see how the weight room will be used and will assess from that point. Ms. Karp asked about the time frame. Dr. Bookman explained that funding would have to be in place by July 1, to avoid a lapse in no facility for student athletes. He also noted that they conducted testing in the area where the facility is proposed and found no issues in the soil. Mr. Zeller asked if there will be an additional expense to hold graduation. Dr. Bookman replied no, a different field would be used for graduation.

Dr. Bookman explained that there has been a lot of talk about the turf fields. Some of the studies cited by those against the project were done by groups with a vested interest in natural grass fields. Currently, the high school has only one turf field and everyone wants to be on it, so the need for another one is great. Mr. Zeller pointed out that, when accounting for maintenance and installation costs, there is no discernible cost difference between natural and artificial turf fields. Mr. Bookman stated that is correct. Mr. Zeller asked if this project is subject to grants for school facilities. Dr. Bookman explained that the boilers are not, but the roofs are. Mr. Zeller remarked that the roofs and turf fields may need a longer timeline, so they would be suitable for bonding. Mr. Johnson noted that he will present a few scenarios at the BOF's meeting on the General Fund.

Questions & Discussion regarding Education Operations & Budget Proposal *see above*

Questions & Discussion regarding other Items concerning FY 2023-2024 Town Manager Proposed Budget

Mr. Zeller asked if the BOF could see the CPI on a fiscal year basis for the last five years, as opposed to on a calendar year. Mr. Johnson will put something together.

3. Adjournment

Motion by: Mr. Zeller

Seconded by: Ms. Karp

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Board of Finance moves to adjourn their meeting of February 10, 2023, at 1:15 p.m.

Result: Motion passes unanimously {5-0-0}.

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; click on Public Broadcast Video On Demand, and an audio recording is available in the Finance and Administrative Services Office.