

**GLASTONBURY TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2023**

The Glastonbury Town Council with Town Manager, Richard J. Johnson, in attendance, held a Special Meeting at 6:00 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.

1. Roll Call.

Council Members

Mr. Thomas P. Gullotta, Chairman

Mr. Lawrence Niland, Vice Chairman

Ms. Deborah A. Carroll

Mr. Kurt P. Cavanaugh

Mr. John Cavanna

Ms. Mary LaChance

Mr. Jacob McChesney {participated via Zoom video conferencing}

Mr. Whit Osgood

Ms. Jennifer Wang

a. Pledge of Allegiance. *Led by Doug Foyle*

2. Public Communication and Petitions pertaining to the Call.

Jim Miselis of 413 Woodhaven Road, is opposed to the installation of new turf fields but is trying to keep an open mind. He urged the Council to not rush into a decision this year. A cost analysis must be done to review the pros and cons. He suggested setting up a committee to investigate it further.

Ms. Carroll read the written comments received, as listed on the Town website:

Patrice Ehrhardt of 143 Barrington Way, objects to town funds being spent on installing a turf field, on the basis that it provides no educational benefit and only benefits a select few students. Funds should be spent instead on improving opportunities for all students. Turf fields are harmful for the environment and expose athletes to toxic chemicals. They are also more likely to cause injuries for athletes than grass fields.

Paula Bacolini of 11 Garland Drive, opposes the use of artificial turf on all playgrounds and sporting fields in town because they contain dangerous chemicals, which is contrary to Glastonbury's sustainability policy. It is also fiscally irresponsible to spend \$1.5 million dollars per field, which will release toxins into the air and water. Natural grass fields have been used for centuries. She supports continuing that.

Kristen Wolf of 249 Woodfield Crossing, supports the development of the multi-sport fields, which would provide a safer environment for children to play, while also creating a somewhat unified system for parents to bring their children to one location rather than two.

Brenda Sullivan of 49 Thompson Street, opposes installing artificial turf on school athletic fields because they contain potentially hazardous chemicals and materials, such as recycled rubber tires and phthalates. Natural grass helps reduce air pollution by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. It also helps reduce water usage by requiring less irrigation than an artificial field would need.

3. Special Business as contained in the Call.

a. Budget reviews for Fiscal Year 2023-2024:

- **Presentation and discussion concerning proposed Board of Education 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 his original budget increase was proposed at 3.5%, but the BOE recommended it down to 3.25%. This budget increase comes in at the second lowest in the Hartford area, so it is very lean. They did not add any programs this year. There were no unbudgeted revenues, but they did receive a \$1.6 million grant dedicated to the STEAM labs. Dr. Foyle explained that the \$1.6 million in the 1% Fund is a one-time savings. The BOE has purposely set aside that money for one-time expenditures, out of the operating budget, to avoid a hole in next year's budget.

Ms. LaChance asked why the weight room was moved out of Eastbury into a place that they had to pay for. Dr. Bookman stated that the main reason was because they needed the room. The savings in the LINKS program brings in more students from other towns, so it makes it worthwhile to do that. Ms. LaChance asked what percentage of students are the children of teachers. Dr. Bookman stated that it started off about 50-50, but the number of staff members has grown to about 75% of the program today. The other 25% are all Glastonbury residents. Mr. Osgood does not recall the 1% Fund being limited to just roofs and chillers. Dr. Bookman explained that their goal has been those two projects since the very beginning.

Mr. Cavanaugh asked when, in the future, the roof at Eastbury school will need to be replaced. Dr. Bookman stated that it could last another five or more years. To save taxpayers money now instead of later, Dr. Foyle suggested setting aside \$150,000 into the 1% Fund instead of \$300,000, and then moving that to offset out of district special education placements. This would allow a \$100,000 reduction to the Education Operating Budget. He is confident that he has the requisite votes from the BOE to do that, should the Council move forward on that.

Ms. Carroll asked about tuition for the early learning center. Dr. Bookman stated that they charge the same for both teachers and non-teachers, which is about \$12,000 per child. This is below the Glastonbury market rate. They are considering raising the rate next year. Ms. Carroll asked about

staff retention. Dr. Bookman stated that it is good compared to most other places. He also noted that the preschool at Eastbury has its own program. Mr. Gullotta asked about the health insurance reserve fund. Dr. Bookman explained that the BOE decided that the amount in the reserve was too large, so over two years, they made two reductions below what was recommended. The reserve is about \$10 million right now, but they would like it to be \$6 million. However, this could create a concern in future years. The intention is to reduce the reserve in a responsible way to not create a cliff in the budget.

Mr. Gullotta asked about the health insurance funds that the BOE reduced. Dr. Foyle explained that money in the health insurance reserve fund can only go towards actual medical expenses. The health insurance line is the amount of money that the BOE sets aside on a yearly basis to cover their piece of the contribution to the fund. That number is in their operating budget, which they adjust. The BOE wondered whether the number set aside for the reserve is too large. He asked if there is support from the Council to reduce the contribution to the reserve faster than they are doing. Mr. Gullotta noted that they are simply gathering information at this time.

Mr. Osgood asked if the \$10 million, which will be affected by inflation, will be invested. Dr. Bookman stated that it goes to the Town. Mr. Osgood asked, if the Education budget is cut by \$600,000, would it come out of the payment to the health insurance reserve. Dr. Bookman explained that if any of that money comes out, the 14% hole will become even bigger. Dr. Foyle added that the BOE will have to make that decision. There are differing perspectives on how much risk they want to run. Ms. LaChance noted that, during the pandemic, they allowed children of out-of-town teachers to attend Glastonbury schools, at \$1000 per student per year. She asked if that is ongoing, and if so, how many students remain. Dr. Bookman explained that the BOE decided not to charge those teachers, to keep them working in town. There are about six people left in that program. Dr. Foyle added that it will be ongoing. The cost is very small, and the benefit is very large. Dr. Bookman noted that it does not include special education costs.

Ms. Wang asked about waste. Dr. Bookman stated that they do not have a separate contract from the Town. Ms. Wang explained that there is a looming waste situation in town. She has heard interest from families and students about waste reduction. She asked what efforts are being made to reduce waste through all streams at the schools. Dr. Bookman explained that they are making lots of efforts in food waste reduction, such as recycling in the classrooms and cafeteria. Ms. Wang also noted the value of farm-to-table initiatives in schools. There are grant opportunities to pursue this partnership. Dr. Bookman noted that a lot of their produce is purchased from Glastonbury farms. This is a good topic for a BOE meeting. Dr. Foyle added that sustainability is on the BOE's five-year plan, so they will look at these topics holistically. Mr. Gullotta asked if the tonnage out of the school system is tracked. Mr. Johnson does not think so. Mr. Gullotta suggested adding a new colored bin at the elementary schools to kickstart the habit of recycling.

- **Discussion concerning questions or unfinished business regarding Town Operations, Debt & Transfer, Revenues & Transfers, Capital Reserve Fund, Capital Improvement Program, and other budget related topics (as applicable).**

Dr. Foyle provided an update on the Naubuc project. Last week, the project architects updated

their price estimate, at \$3.19 million, which is slightly below last year's estimate of \$3.2 million. He then reviewed the on-campus weight room facility, which is the Board's main priority. This will allow every student to take advantage of the facility and will resolve access inequity issues. They anticipate a return on investment in 10 years and a lifetime use of 50 years. The BOE unanimously approved the project for Council consideration. Dr. Bookman added that weight training facilities have become an integral part of all sports programs today. The current lease for the offsite facility will not be available after next year and alternative locations look like they will cost about two to three times more than the current lease, which is \$48,000 per year. The architects are confident in the price estimate for the proposed on-campus facility.

Mr. Cavanaugh asked if the weight room must be staffed. Dr. Bookman stated yes, for safety. Ms. Carroll questioned how non-athlete students would be able to use the facility, outside of PE class, if 600 student athletes are lined up to use it. Dr. Bookman explained that there will be a sign-up sheet and opportunities to use it, year-round. Dr. Gullotta is looking for a guarantee that access will be equitable. Dr. Bookman stated that athletes in-season will likely use the facility less than during the off-season. Ms. Wang asked to speak on the existing space. Dr. Bookman explained that there is no space inside the high school for a weight room. It is more expensive to put in an addition instead of constructing a new building, which will be located next to the track. The facility could also be available to the community when it is not being used by the students.

Mr. Cavanaugh asked if there is any proof that an auxiliary gym would be more expensive. Dr. Bookman stated no, they have not investigated that since 2000. Mr. McChesney finds it strange that it is cheaper to build it out where no other building is currently located. Dr. Bookman pointed out that the utilities at that location, close to the locker room facility, are very cheap to run. Mr. McChesney would like to know what the alternative cost for the auxiliary gym would be. He also expressed concern about a lot of major, expensive education projects lately skewed towards sports programs. He wants to ensure that projects benefit all their student population. Dr. Foyle stated that the athletic experience is about being able to get through high school successfully, not to become professional athletes. These were the least important needs, which is why they are showing up now, after having completed other, higher-priority projects.

Dr. Foyle stated that the turf field project was on the five-year plan. Dr. Bookman explained that, currently, the high school has only one turf field and everyone wants to be on it, so the need for another one is great. Natural grass fields are just not operable for good parts of the season. The request is for one turf field, but eventually, they will seek to have two turf fields. Some of the studies cited by those against the project were done by groups with a vested interest in natural grass fields. He has sent council members a document from unbiased sources, disputing many of those claims. There are no real disadvantages for turf fields, compared to grass fields, according to these sources. Virgin rubber is used on the turf fields, not ground-up tires. Additionally, no PFAS has been shown to come off the fields.

Mr. Gullotta asked if the field has been picked yet. Dr. Bookman stated yes, and it is irrigated. Mr. Gullotta asked if the artificial turf has been selected. Dr. Bookman replied, no. Mr. Gullotta asked if there is a non-irrigated field that could be considered for this project. Mr. Johnson could think of any non-irrigated fields at the high school, but he will double-check. Mr. Gullotta believes that a non-biased assessment needs to be done to diffuse an increasingly polarized

situation in town. Mr. Niland asked how the cost of replacing the turf field in 2017 compares to placing in a new one and inquired whether a special fund has been allocated for the replacement cost. Mr. Johnson explained that the first field lasted about 10 years and the replacement cost about \$550,000. Estimates right now range from about \$500,000-\$600,000, with a life expectancy closer to 12 years. A replacement fund is a reasonable idea for discussion.

Mr. Cavanaugh stated that there are some big-ticket items coming up. He asked if the roof at GHS could be done in phases. Dr. Bookman clarified that the roof project is already phased in. Dr. Foyle noted that everything listed on the pro forma for FY 24 has been vetted and approved by the BOE. Everything after that has not been deemed an absolute by the BOE. At the Council's next meeting, Mr. Johnson will provide an updated pro forma that has budgeted the grant reimbursements, such as the 33% reimbursement for the roofs. Mr. Osgood finds the comment of a new weight training facility to be a higher priority than replacing a boiler or air conditioning system to be odd. His focus is on projects that absolutely must be done. Mr. Gullotta pointed out that if either the weight room or turf field projects were to be approved, the budget would need to be increased or money would need to be found elsewhere. Mr. Osgood asked to see what the 1% Fund was in the years prior to COVID-19. Mr. Johnson agreed to provide it.

4. Adjournment.

Motion by: Ms. Carroll

Seconded by: Mr. Cavanaugh

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Town Council hereby adjourns their meeting at 8:25 P.M.

Result: Motion was approved unanimously {9-0-0}.

Respectfully submitted,

Lilly Torosyan

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Recording Clerk

Thomas Gullotta

Chairman