

**TOWN OF GLASTONBURY
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES (AMENDED)
TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2024**

The Town of Glastonbury held its Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday, January 23, 2024 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. Town Manager, Jonathan Luiz, Superintendent, Dr. Alan Bookman, Town Council Chairman, Thomas Gullotta, and Board of Education Chairman, Douglas Foyle, were in attendance. Also in attendance were Town Council Members, Board of Finance Members, Board of Education Members, Department Heads, Board of Education Administration.

1. Town Council Chair to call Town Meeting to order (per Town Charter Section 702 Council Chair in Town Clerk's absence).

Mr. Gullotta called the meeting to order, in the Town Clerk's absence.

2. Pledge of Allegiance. *Led by Tom Gullotta*

Mr. Gullotta welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting of Glastonbury.

3. Election of Acting Clerk.

Nomination by: Ms. Carroll *Seconded by:* Mr. Niland

Lilly Torosyan for Acting Clerk

Mr. Gullotta called for other nominations, but hearing none, he closed the nominations and called for a vote.

Result: Lilly Torosyan was elected acting clerk by a unanimous vote with no nay votes voiced.

4. Election of Moderator of Town Meeting.

Nomination By: Ms. Carroll *Seconded By:* Ms. LaChance

Larry Niland as Moderator.

Mr. Gullotta called for other nominations, but hearing none, he closed the nominations and called for a vote.

Result: Larry Niland was elected moderator by a unanimous vote, with no nay votes voiced.

Mr. Niland explained the budget process, which formally begins tonight, and will end in March. He noted that this is Mr. Luiz's first budget season and thanked all involved in the process. He stated that this will not be an easy budget, due to inflation, modest growth in the grand list, and the loss of the motor vehicle revenue from the State.

5. Opening remarks by Town Council Chair, Thomas Gullotta.

Mr. Gullotta stated that the Town is in very good financial shape but echoed that this will be a difficult budget year, which will take a lot of compromising to get to the final number.

6. Presentation on Budgets:

a. Town Operating and Debt & Transfer Budget and Capital Improvement Program Budget. (Town Manager)

Mr. Luiz explained that the proposed Town Operating budget is a 3.19% increase from last year, which is about average for the last five budget years. A major component of this increase is wages, which accounts for 2.5 points of the increase. He reviewed the hire increases over the last two budget seasons; no full-time staffing is proposed in FY25, but several part-time positions are requested in various departments, as well as funds to restructure the Town's volunteer firefighter program.

Mr. Luiz then reviewed the 7 other budget components, explaining that insurance, pension, and data processing and technology account for modest increases. The latter is partly due to new software and standard increases across the board for existing software. He noted that contractual services and utilities and fleet are almost flat; capital outlay will see only a \$15,000 increase, because they were able to dip into special revenue funds. Mr. Luiz stated that he eliminated \$25,000 of contingency funding from the Town Manager's budget. In 23 out of 40 line items in the operating budget, this led to a savings of \$76,929, which accounts for -0.2% of the overall budget increase.

Mr. Luiz noted that Debt Service is going down (a 25.7% change), while the Capital Reserve is increasing (a 31.1% change). He noted that this is a good opportunity to allocate more resources to the Capital Reserve Fund. He explained that Revenues and Transfers will see an increase of 3.43%. In addition, intergovernmental revenue will decrease significantly because the Town will no longer be eligible to receive funding from the State of Connecticut's motor vehicle tax cap reimbursement program, resulting in a \$2.25 million revenue loss. The reason the Town will not be eligible for the grant funding is due to the fact that the Town's mill rate in FY24 dropped as a result of property revaluation.

Mr. Luiz explained that investment income will increase by \$600,000 in the next fiscal year, with interest on investments projected at 4%. The Use of the Fund Balance is projected to be \$775,000. While they had hoped to step it down after it was raised a few years ago, following the introduction of the new mortality tables in FY21, he does not think that FY25 is the year to do it,

given the loss of intergovernmental revenues. Mr. Luiz believes that the Town can afford to use the Unassigned Fund Balance in the way in which they have. He then reviewed the Capital Budget, where 31 projects are proposed to receive new or additional funding, at an estimated cost of \$11.17 million. After grants, ARPA funds, and re-programmed funds, the remaining \$7.67 million cost will be transferred from the General Fund.

Mr. Luiz stated that the Grand List will be set soon by the assessor, but it is estimated that the Grand List will grow 0.26%, which is significantly smaller than the growth experienced in past years. The reasons are twofold. First, the State has imposed a different way for municipalities to calculate the value of motor vehicles. Second, there has been little commercial development in the past year. The mill rate will increase 4.64% next year, which is significant. He noted that, without the loss of the motor vehicle grant, that increase would have been 3.32%. Mr. Luiz thanked Director of Finance Keri Rowley and other Town Staff for assisting in putting together this budget, and concluded that this is just the beginning of their two-month budget journey.

b. Education Operating Budget. (Board of Education Chairman and Superintendent of Schools)

Board of Education Chairman Doug Foyle explained that this year's theme for Glastonbury Public School's budget is 'The Changing Times.' He stated that school districts face a number of budget pressures, but Glastonbury has risen to the occasion. He provided an overview of the BOE's five-year strategic plan, which was launched last year. Its goals are to promote active learning and high expectations for all students; to provide safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments; and to prioritize the health and well-being of students and staff.

Superintendent of Schools Alan Bookman stated that public schools across the country face dire staffing shortages, but Glastonbury started the year with a certified teacher in each classroom. This current school year, they found it necessary to hire a number of unbudgeted staff to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Next year's budget proposes reducing one high school teaching position and adding two elementary teaching positions, two custodians, and one maintainer. Employee salaries represent a 2.47% increase to the budget, which is one of the highest increases they have seen. He noted that utilities account for 0.19% of the budget increase, while inflation represents 0.45% of the total increase. This Education budget is a 3.89% increase from last year's budget.

Dr. Foyle added that, in a seven-year comparison of the approved budget increases, this year's is the highest; however, adjusting for inflation, there has been an \$850 decrease of purchasing power per student since 2020. He also noted that this year's budget increase is below the state average, and their per pupil expenditure is 8% lower than the state's average. He explained that the BOE reduced \$1.1 million from the Superintendent's proposed budget, but he believes that additional reductions will have a negative effect on students' learning and well-being. He pointed out budget fluctuations will be watched closely by the BOE and school administrators. He then reviewed the accolades that GPS received this year, which include the 2024 Niche Rankings and six awards from CABE. Dr. Foyle concluded that this budget responds to the changing times and

provides an excellent education to every student. He thanked his colleagues on the BOE, school administrators, and the central office team for their assistance in preparing this budget.

7.

a. Public Comments.

Mr. Niland asked all residents present to express their opinion on the proposed budget, which provides guidance to the Town Council in their deliberations.

Tom Gorman of 424 Ash Swamp Road, shared data which shows that the BOE's per-pupil expense has increased as school enrollment has decreased over the past ten years. He challenged all to look at redundancies, such as human resources, payroll and procurement, and accounting departments, which exist for both the BOE and the Town. Optimizing these opportunities should have zero impact on operations, he concluded.

Patty Matthews of 85 Douglas Road, is president of the Friends of Welles Turner Memorial Library. She loves the library and would like to see it used to its full potential. She asked to increase library staffing in order to utilize the new Maker Space at an optimal level.

Nick Korns of 73 Shagbark Road, finds the increasing trend for the GPS budget to be unsustainable and will cause people to move away from town. He suggested cutting the EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) program, which has cost \$1 million since its inception in 2020. He believes that the program has brought little to no value, and he does not support its ideology. He hopes that the BOF will recommend a significant reduction in the budget and eliminate the EDI program, which he finds divisive.

Harlow Ton-That of 169 Knollwood Drive, is part of a Glastonbury middle and high school robotics team called Armored Artemises. She has spent time at the Maker Space in East Hartford and would like for their team to utilize their skills in Glastonbury. To this end, she supports more staffing in the budget for the library department.

Anya Srivastava of 51 Windwood Drive, is also part of Armored Artemises. The Maker Space in Hartford has had a huge impact on her. She would like everyone to be able to experience the wonders of STEAM. She also urged Town funding for additional staffing at the library.

Isabella Objero of 938 Manchester Road, is also a member of the Armored Artemises robotics team. She supports additional funding for the Maker Space at the library, which will lay the foundation for the next generation of scientists, engineers, and innovators.

Ananya Lingamallu of 58 Glenn Place, stated that a well-staffed maker space would allow her robotics team to share fabrication space with others, while building a community. She supports more staffing in the library's new Maker Space as an investment for personal and professional growth.

b. Public vote to express an opinion on the proposed budget for the guidance of the Town Council. (Section 703 of the Town Charter).

Mr. Niland asked all residents to vote on whether or not they accept the proposed budget.

Motion By: Mr. Gullotta

Seconded By: Ms. Carroll

Result: Motion passed, with the yay votes outnumbering the nay votes (22:6).

8. Adjournment.

Motion By: Ms. Carroll

Seconded By: Mr. Niland

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Town Council hereby adjourns their Annual Town Meeting of January 23, 2024, at 7:11 pm.

Result: Motion passes unanimously {8-0-0}.

Respectfully submitted,

Lilly Torosyan

Lilly Torosyan
Recording Clerk

Thomas Gullotta
Chairman