

**GLASTONBURY TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024**

The Glastonbury Town Council with Town Manager, Jonathan Luiz, 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
Ms. Jennifer Wang, Vice Chairman
Ms. Deborah A. Carroll
Mr. Kurt P. Cavanaugh
Mr. John Cavanna
Mr. Larry Niland
Ms. Mary LaChance
Mr. Jacob McChesney
Mr. Whit Osgood

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

2. Public Communication and Petitions pertaining to the Call. *None.*

3. Budget reviews for Fiscal Year 2024-2025:

- **Presentation and discussion concerning proposed Board of Education Budget.**

Superintendent of Schools Alan Bookman stated that when the budget was initially presented to him, it was for a 7% increase. He brought it down to 4.81%, and the BOE reduced the increase further to 3.89%. He explained that there is now a budget freeze at the schools, and any further reductions will result in reducing equipment and supplies, as well as delaying some services until next year, such as hiring fewer custodians.

Ms. Wang asked about composting at the schools. Dr. Bookman explained that composting began at Eastbury school 1.5 months ago, and has been very successful thus far. He stated that the BOE intends to expand the program to all the elementary schools next year. However, he noted that the program does not save them any money. Rather, it costs money, with \$500 spent on supplies in the first month alone. He explained that that money comes out of Food Service, not the operating budget. Mr. Gullotta clarified that the question was actually what they paid for refuse removal last year. Dr. Bookman will report back with that information. Ms. Carroll asked if the BOE is opposed to coordinating this composting effort with the Town. Dr. Bookman will ask the BOE.

Mr. McChesney has heard talks about changes in anticipated state funding. Dr. Bookman explained that, last year, the legislature passed a two-year budget which included coverage for magnet schools. However, the governor did not include that \$400,000 in his budget, so the Town has to cover it. Dr. Bookman stated that he did not have complete faith in the legislature, so he accounted for \$250,000 rather than \$400,000. Additionally, he is concerned about reductions to the Excess Cost grant. Mr. Osgood asked about the education cost sharing (ECS) grant. Dr. Bookman stated that they are awaiting updates on that. Ms. LaChance asked why two custodians are proposed but only one maintainer. Dr. Bookman stated that the maintainer will conduct preventative work, which they hope will save money in the long-run. The request for additional custodians is to ensure that they have floaters who can cover when people are out sick or on vacation.

Mr. Osgood asked why there is a need for more custodians. Dr. Bookman pointed out that their custodians have always covered the maximum square feet, per the standards. He believes that the floaters would allow for more flexibility in scheduling, since custodians cannot take off time in the summer. Mr. Niland suggested adding one custodian instead of two, and monitoring how that goes. Mr. Cavanaugh also shares concerns about this. BOE Chairman Doug Foyle stated that if the BOE were forced to cut personnel, he would rather it be a custodian than a teacher. However, the maintainer role is a budgetary savings because of increasing contracted services.

Mr. Niland asked how many teachers will be retiring this year. Dr. Bookman stated that it is a smaller number than in prior years, which is great because finding new teachers is tough. Mr. Niland asked why the Hebron Avenue school parking lot needs to be repaved now. He visited the site recently and does not believe that it needs that work at this time. Dr. Bookman explained that it was on the schedule for Mr. Luiz to determine the appropriateness of when to conduct that project. Ms. Carroll asked why the cost for test scoring and testing supplies have experienced wild fluctuations over the years. Dr. Bookman explained that this is state-required and the costs have gone up. He will send more specific answers to Mr. Luiz. Ms. Carroll asked about the increasing legal fees for special education. Dr. Bookman stated that this is a requirement that must be offered and paid for, but it is an unknown amount every year.

Mr. Gullotta asked about the self-insurance reserve fund. Dr. Foyle stated that it is presently at \$8 million. The Town's policy for a minimum reserve is \$4 million. The BOE's advisors told them that \$3 million was adequate, so the BOE decided to keep double that, \$6 million, for their recommended minimum reserve. After the pandemic, the reserve was \$12 million. He stated that they have been responsibly drawing down the reserve. The BOE found it imprudent to do an insurance holiday because they have underfunded the reserve on a yearly basis, creating a \$1.5 million hole in the health insurance payment this year. If all goes well, the \$8.2 million in the reserve at the end of this fiscal year will become \$6.7 million at the end of the next fiscal year.

Mr. Cavanaugh asked about substitutes in the classrooms. Dr. Bookman explained that, before 2021, there were not enough substitutes for the daily rate, so they hired full-time subs in each of the buildings, which he believes has been a good decision. Mr. Cavanaugh countered that some of those full-time hires could end up costing more because of health insurance. Dr. Bookman stated that most have chosen to forgo health benefits, but agreed that it is something to monitor. Mr. Cavanaugh asked where the money that was initially slated for the 1% fund will go. Dr. Foyle explained that when they converted Eastbury into a special education LINKS program,

they set aside money from out-of-town students to pay for maintenance, and the cost to replace the boiler and the roof. The cost estimate was about \$1.1 million to replace each of those items. The BOE reached the conclusion that there was enough money to take care of the boiler, so they deployed \$200,000 to offset the out-of-district tuition, in an effort to realize savings for current taxpayers. Mr. Osgood asked what was transferred into the 1% fund at the end of last year. Dr. Bookman replied, \$11,000, excluding Eastbury School, but he will double check. Mr. Cavanaugh asked how much is in the fund right now. Dr. Bookman replied, \$2.295 million, but it could be about \$200,000 by the end of the year.

Mr. Cavanaugh stated that, at the BOE's last meeting, there was a discussion about a \$75,000 study for buildings. He asked what that encumbers. Dr. Foyle explained that the BOE adopts a ten-year plan for enrollment and facilities management. Currently, they are in year six. As part of their facilities plan, they evaluate what they need to renovate or increase to meet their capacity. There has been a question about Gideon Welles and whether or not it could be converted to a K-5 school and, if so, what that would cost. He was of the opinion that they might be able to find \$75,000 in the 1% fund to fund a study to conduct such an assessment of their facilities. Dr. Bookman added that the BOE will then look at projected enrollment, and what the needs will be for new space. Right now, they do not know what they need.

Mr. Gullotta would like to see some other permutation on the table, rather than just a K-5 model, because if the BOE is stating that it will explore all options, then it should include all options. Dr. Foyle clarified that the BOE did a deep dive on enrollment and saw that the current model of K-6 was ideal. What they would like to evaluate is all options that maintain the current model. Mr. Cavanaugh has a report from the Fire Marshal listing 293 code violations, some going back to 2014. He asked when they would be corrected. Dr. Bookman clarified that some of those items are repeats, but they work on addressing them through their maintenance department. He will look into that and let the Town Manager know that these issues are being taken care of.

Mr. Niland has no faith in the BOE's consultants and their enrollment projects, post-Eastbury. Dr. Bookman stated that this housing market has had a major impact on the numbers, and right now, it is much flatter. Dr. Foyle added that when the decision was made to close Eastbury, it was based on projections. They had control over the facilities, but the redistricting was problematic. He stressed that they will not ask the taxpayers to pay unless it is a known problem. Mr. Niland understands the luxury of running their own transportation system while other districts contract out. He asked to provide a comparison of previous years versus the projections. Dr. Bookman agreed that costs have gone up, but their per pupil cost for buses is no more expensive than what companies charge, and unlike other school districts that contract out, Glastonbury does not face a bus driver shortage.

Ms. LaChance asked about the LINKS program cost differential. Dr. Bookman explained that the cost increase from last year is phenomenal. He explained that while they may charge \$60,000 for services, they may be taking closer to \$85,000 per child. Ms. Wang asked how long the schools' contract is with Blue Earth Composting. Dr. Bookman will report back. Ms. Wang stated that the cost of waste disposal is increasing throughout Connecticut, so she would like to see composting at the schools, not just for environmental reasons, but also as a cost-saving measure.

Ms. Wang suggested that a member of the council or town staff serve as ex-officio on the BOE's Facilities Committee. That way, there could be ongoing communication, to avoid future misunderstandings between the Town and the BOE. Dr. Foyle thinks that is a great suggestion, and will take it back to the BOE. Mr. Cavanna asked if the BOE is still hiring a police officer at their meetings. Dr. Bookman stated that, in the interest of safety for both BOE members as well as the public, the BOE likes having a uniformed police officer at their meetings. He will report back on the cost.

Mr. Osgood asked if any discussion has been made about moving the BOE out of the legacy pension plan and over to the Town's hybrid plan. Dr. Bookman stated that they have not had any recent conversations about it, but about eight years ago, Milliman informed them that there would be no savings for the BOE to move to the hybrid plan. Mr. Osgood thinks that it would be a good idea for Milliman to review the matter again. Dr. Foyle remarked that they would have to negotiate it with collective bargaining, and labor would probably consider that to be a concession, so they would want something in return.

Mr. Gullotta stated that his patience on the composting and recycling issue has been exhausted, and the only control he has is in setting a budgetary amount. Going forward, he asked the BOE to be aware that something seriously has to happen. Dr. Bookman suspects that all the elementary schools will have composting bins next year.

4. Adjournment.

Motion by: Ms. Carroll

Seconded by: Mr. Cavanna

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Glastonbury Town Council hereby adjourns the Town Council meeting of February 28, 2024 at 7:45 p.m.

Result: Motion passed unanimously {9-0-0}.

Respectfully submitted,

Lilly Torosyan

**Lilly Torosyan
Recording Clerk**

**Thomas Gullotta
Chairman**