

Board of Finance Special Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2021 at 6pm
Meeting held remotely due to COVID 19

1. **Call to order:** Board of Finance Chair Steve Ezzes called the meeting to order at 6pm. Also in attendance were Board of Finance members Allan Gauberd, Amy Gare, Rone Baldwin and Jeff Farr, Board of Education members Tony Pesco, Gina Albert, Taffy Miller, Ruby Hedge, Hillary Koyner, Melissa Walker and Victor Escandon, Superintendent Dr. Bill McKersie, WPS Finance Director Phillip Cross, Town Administrator Jonathan Luiz, and Town residents participating.
2. **Announcements:**
 - a. Mr. Greg Murphy has resigned from Board of Finance effective Monday, March 8, 2021
 - b. Mr. Dick Bochinski was unable to attend
 - c. Mr. Ezzes noted that there will be an Annual Town Budget Meeting (ATBM) this year and that First Selectman Spaulding is working on the final details. It will be held on a Saturday at the Football Field at Weston High School. Voting will take place at Town Hall.
3. **Discussion/ Decision concerning the Board of Education's proposed budget for FY 2021- 2022:** Schools Finance Director Phil Cross provided updates on the status of the current fiscal year saying that they are projected to have a surplus of \$299,702 and that to date they have not drawn from the non-lapsing account. Questions were asked regarding the allocations from the cares act, operating costs for the current fiscal year as they compare to the projected costs for next.

Board of Education Chair Tony Pesco made opening remarks saying that the Board of Education has proposed a budget increase of 2.6%. He said they were sensitive to financial constraints but the budget includes everything the district needs given the uncertainties in enrollment and social emotional support, all of which this difficult to predict.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the technology budget and the details around leasing versus purchasing new laptops for teachers. Mr. Daniel DiVito commented highlighting the age of the laptops, current climate with remote learning, as well as a leasing plan that is reflected in the budget. Mr. Farr asked to see the six year plan.

Mr. Gauberd asked about a large increase in the academic assistance line. Mr. Pesco attributed this to an increase in special needs assistance.

Health Insurance costs were discussed with questions heard on alternate options to the state plan. Mr. Pesco commented that all districts were facing similar issues. Mr. Cross said they did receive guidance from the state partnership plan and that the increase was not significant.

Mr. Gauberd questioned an increase in transportation costs; Mr. Cross explained this was due to reporting now including salaries and benefits for all transportation employees.

Questions were heard from the Board of Finance members on an increase in special education (SPED) numbers, out of district tuition, and transportation costs. Comments were heard from Ms. Tracey Edwards on an increase in Special Ed needs district wide, taking into account current trends and an increase in social emotional needs for students; saying that Special Ed is becoming more complex.

A discussion was had about an increase in legal expenses, the lack of an HR Director, an increase in FMLA and medical leave, and the Connecticut Municipal Employee Retirement System (CMERS) pension plan.

Mr. Grauberd asked about where a significant reduction in the budget could be made. A discussion ensued on an increase in classroom size, Ms. Laura Kaddis, strongly advised against this saying it would have a detrimental effect at the early elementary level and that class size was the number one question she received from people looking to move to Weston.

Mr. Baldwin questioned a 4% increase in bus transportation; Mr. Cross commented that this was a contractual increase with First Student.

Mr. Baldwin asked about the addition of an administrative position for the SPED program. Ms. Edwards explained the need for additional support saying specific technical knowledge was needed for this role.

Mr. Farr asked about out of district tuition costs; Mr. Cross commented that there were a small number of students paying nonresident tuition .Mr. Ezzes asked if there was excess capacity, Mr. Pesco said this depended on the grade with Ms. Wolak saying that these were mostly high school students. Mr. Farr also asked about the Open Choice Program and costs associated. Mr. Cross commented that any cost in addition to Weston's per pupil cost is charged back to the pupil's home district.

A discussion ensued on capital projects like HVAC repairs, Window Sill repairs at WIS and the Air Handler units at the High School Old Gym all of which were deemed necessary.

Mr. Farr asked about electrical costs. Mr. Michael Del Mastro commented on this saying that there was an uptick in energy used due to COVID CDC requirements with fresh air circulation. Mr. Farr asked if this would be the case for the upcoming year, Mr. Del Mastro said that it was too early to make that call.

Mr. Baldwin mentioned his confusion over the outer district tuition increase and asked for more clarification on this. Mr. Grauberd asked for a detailed follow up on the rising teaching assistant costs over the past 5 years. Ms. Gare asked for a salary and benefit comparison with the numbers from 2019 in order to better understand an increase from last year.

Mr. Ezzes thanked everyone for an informative meeting, saying that the follow up meeting on March 9th would not be necessary.

4. Adjournment: Mr. Ezzes adjourned the meeting at 9.20pm.

Minutes submitted by: Sara Beer, Executive Administrative Assistant