

Town of Easton
Board of Finance – Special Meeting Minutes

Date/Time: Tuesday, March 29, 2022 – 7:00 pm

Location: Easton Senior Center, 650 Morehouse Road, Easton, CT

Virtual meeting using the Zoom app.

A recording of this meeting is located at:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/easton-board-of-finance>

Attendees: Members: Art Laske-Chair, Jackie Kaufman-Clerk, Andy Kachele, Ira Kaplan, Michael Kot, Paul Skritch; Alternates Present on Zoom, but not seated: Michael Gutowski, Gregg Saunders, Maureen Williams

Absentee(s): --

Guest(s): Christine Calvert-Finance Director/Treasurer; Kristi Sogofsky, Second Selectman

Call to Order: Meeting called to order 7:05 pm by: Art Laske
at:

I. Appointment of Alternates

NONE.

II. The Board of Finance will make revisions and prepare final recommendations for the budget document to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting on April 25, 2022 to include any and all departments with specific attention to the following:

A. Board of Education

Dr. Jason McKinnon, ER9 Superintendent and John Stinson, Chair of the Board of Education appear on behalf of the Board of Education to answer questions presented by the Board of Finance. No changes or amendments to the proposed budget document were presented. The following items were discussed:

- *Facilities Manager:* Discussion about the need and budget presented by the Board of Education for a proposed facilities manager to assist Public Works and custodians in maintaining school facilities. Dr. McKinnon explained that this would be a new position, not a transfer of a person already employed by the Town or by ER9. Associated costs reported: \$93,000 for Joel Barlow(now \$87,000+, benefits for all three); \$17,400 for Easton (and other half for Redding). Benefits are situated in Region 9. Balance to Region 9. Not a union position. Facilities Manager would report to Dr. McKinnon and not central office; and would work in

collaboration with Public Works personnel. The Board of Finance concluded that a facilities manager would result in more communication between the Board of Education and Public Works, which was ideal and that more accountability for education facilities was also a beneficial goal, but that the proposal should be further vetted before financing a new position.

- *Health Benefits:* Discussion about the Board of Education health coverage proposal, inclusive of 10 year claims, covid averages and adjustments; HSA plans and extent of personnel covered; monthly claims; added protection/self funding.
- *Enrollment & Staffing Projections:* Discussion regarding enrollment and staffing projections to support confirmed and projected increase in elementary enrollment sections and associated staffing. Mr. Stinson articulated the Board of Education has made fiscally responsible decisions and proposals based on demonstrated student need, with an emphasis on meeting adjusted needs and expectations post covid to ensure academic excellence and student achievement. Further discussion ensued regarding salaries and medical insurance for new hires; the justification for para professionals and “special” teachers to serve the increased enrollment; special programming; how the Board of Education would manage a prospective budget cut; comparison of Easton staffing and class size ratios to other communities; covid impacts on education and benefits of small group instruction and professional development and quality of staff and training; long term strategic plan to address same.

First Action/Motion: J. Kaufman made a motion to approve the Board of Education Budget as proposed (\$18,049,343.23).

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by I. Kaplan.

Discussion: 2.78% increase from last year.

Vote/Result: In Favor: I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman, A. Laske; Opposed: A. Kachele, M. Kot, P. Skrtich. Motion Failed.

Second Action/Motion: P. Skrtich made a motion to appropriate \$17,900,000 to the Board of Education budget.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by A. Kachele

Discussion: This motion represents a \$149,344 cut of the proposed Board of Education Budget. This number would influence class sizes; but that decision is at the discretion of the Board of Education.

Vote/Result: In Favor: A. Kachele, M. Kot, P. Skrtich; Opposed: I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman, A. Laske. Motion Failed.

Third Action/Motion: A. Kachele made a motion to appropriate \$17,949,343 to the Board of Education budget.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by M. Kot

Discussion: This motion represents a \$100,000 cut of the proposed Board of Education Budget. Discussion ensued among the Board regarding approaches to addressing the Board of Education budget request and cuts to same.

Result: In Favor: A. Kachele, M. Kot, P. Skrtich; Opposed: I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman, A. Laske Motion Failed.

Fourth Action/Motion: J. Kaufman made a motion to appropriate \$18,024,344 to the Board of Education budget.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by I. Kaplan.

Discussion: J. Kaufman articulated the motion represents a \$25,000 cut that could be justified as removing the expense for the proposed Facilities Manager position, which the Board observed was a worthy, but premature expenditure, and would not impact the curriculum. P. Skrtich articulated this was not enough of a cut.

Result: In Favor: I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman, A. Laske; Opposed: A. Kachele, M. Kot, P. Skrtich. Motion Failed.

Fifth Action/Motion: I. Kaplan made a motion to appropriate \$17,970,941 to the Board of Education budget.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by J. Kaufman.

Discussion: This represents a \$78,402 cut of the proposed Board of Education budget (the equivalent of one teacher's salary). Discussion ensued among Board members regarding impact of budget cut on staffing and specials programming.

Result: In Favor: I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman. Opposed: A. Kachele, M. Kot, P. Skrtich. Abstentions: A. Laske. Motion Fails.

Sixth Action/Motion: M. Kot made a motion to appropriate \$17,960,142 to the Board of Education budget.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by I. Kaplan.

Discussion: This motion represents a cut of \$89,201 of the proposed Board of Education Budget. This would result in a 2.2% Board of Education budget increase.

Result: In Favor: A. Laske, I. Kaplan, J. Kaufman, M. Kot; Opposed, A. Kachele;
Abstentions: P. Skrtich. Motion Carries.

B. Fringe Benefits

- Ms. Calvert reported that we have not heard back from the State on the health insurance figures to inform further discussion at this time.
- The insurance is currently listed at \$756,750 and there is no further information available to predict if this figure will increase or decrease.
- The revised total budget after current adjustments (inclusive of Region 9) is reported as \$46,721,617. A. Kachele advised the Board it can adopt this figure tonight and, if the numbers come back differently later, the Board can reconsider and change it, as necessary.

First Action/Motion: P. Skrtich made a motion to recommend to a Town Meeting a Town Budget in the amount of \$46,721,617 for the 2022-23 fiscal year, consisting of line items as agreed upon in the Master Budget as of March 29, 2022.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by I. Kaplan.

Discussion: The budget modification proposal is based on the adjusted appropriations made to the Board of Education, Senior Center, Signs, Town Clerk notification system; and potential change to the Fringe Benefits/Health Insurance figure which is yet unknown and may come in after budget season. The total budget increase is 1.02%.

Result: All in favor; Abstentions: P. Skrtich

III. Revenue Update

Ms. Calvert presented a revenue & expense update and answered questions from the Board.

- Town Clerk is \$12,000 over budget; expectation of approximately \$60,000 return by year end.
- Tax Collector has collected over \$150,000 and anticipates another \$60,000 before year end.
- Building Department is \$62,000 over budget (permit fees), possibly as much as \$100,000 by year end.

- On expense side, the Town budgeted full salary for First Selectman and Treasurer, but First Selectman takes a 50% pay cut and Treasurer is taking a 33% paycut (representing funds coming back); there are budgeted positions in Human Resources and Public Works that remain unfilled, which could amount to a return of up to \$100,000 to the Town. Additional small returns to the Town could be made.
- Current Unassigned Balance is \$7,133,839.
- Discussion regarding projected changes to line item inquiries; insurance settlement; interest rate and fees; tax collection projections; adjusting the Undesignated Fund Balance.
- The Grand List increased by 14% (before BAA).
- Ms. Calvert to prepare an updated and reflective spreadsheet for Board's review.

IV. Adjournment

Action/Motion: M. Kot made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:35 p.m.

Motion (Second): Motion Seconded by A. Kachele

Result: Unanimous approval to adjourn.

Submitted by,



Jacqueline O. Kaufman – Clerk