

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2gjq9q9M0E>

*****FINAL*****

**BOARD OF FINANCE BUDGET HEARING
MEETING MINUTES
April 15, 2020**

The Virtual Board of Finance Budget Hearing was held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, April 15, 2020.

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE Edward Bateson, Jim Brown-Chair, Lori Charlton, Christopher DeWitt-Vice Chair, Mary LeClerc-Secretary, Sheila Marmion, John Mitola, Jack Testani, James Walsh

ALSO PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE Town Attorney James Baldwin, Interim CFO Caitlin Bosse, CAO Thomas Bremer, First Selectwoman Brenda Kupchick, BOE Chair Christine Vitale, BOE Vice Chairman Nick Aysseh, BOE Executive Director of Operations Angelus Papageorge, BOE Director of Finance & Business Services Doreen Munsell, BOE Director of Special Education & Student Services Robert Mancusi, BOE Superintendent Michael Cummings, BOE member and BOF liaison Jeff Petersen, Colleen Deasy, FairTV

Mr. Brown thanked the teachers and administrators who had to act quickly to ensure students could continue with the school year which is not an easy task noting all, including students and parents, had to adjust quickly. He said it looks like schools will be closed through May 20 and most likely the rest of the year. He then went on to explain the virtual budget hearing process.

1. Call to Order – Chairman Brown called the meeting to order at 7:43 p.m.
2. Pledge of Allegiance – Mr. Brown led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Brown reminded everyone that there will be no live public comment. The public is encouraged to email comments before or after the meeting to bof@fairfieldct.org.

3. Discussion on the Following Budgets:

CARES Act Summary and Frequently Asked Questions

Mr. Cummings highlighted a few slides from his previously submitted power point presentation. He read the five goal and said he wanted to assure the BOF the BOE recognizes things have changed in the last few months since the BOE had put together its budget. He said there are not a lot of new initiatives, that increases are mostly due to building maintenance. He said the misunderstanding about benefits was because the BOE anticipated a benefit increase based on rates it was given at the time. Mr. Cummings said that after the BOE approved the budget, it received revised rates; it operated under a different assumption when the BOE initially put together the budget. He noted that Slide 13 of his Power Point referred to 80% of budget is in the classroom, going to direct instruction to the students.

He said that regarding Slide 20, the BOE worked to reduce technology capital; however now it is looking at that number given how social distancing may continue into the fall. He said BOE has to seriously consider the number of chrome books issued, especially for Grades 3, 4 and 5.

Mr. Cummings summarized answers to questions the BOF had previously submitted. Funding was analyzed in page 12 of the proposed budget book. He said he doesn't have a timeline from the State on when Fairfield will receive funds. There was a continued discussion on expectations of reimbursement, timing, education relief funds and use of funds under Governor's emergency declaration.

Board of Finance Questions (1-25) Regarding the BOE Proposed Budget dated April 14, 2020:

Questions 5: Ms. Munsell referred to 2019-2020 Projections YTD and identified projections and changes. Line items were reviewed; personnel services, fixed charges, pupil personnel expenses, school expenses, support expenses, maintenance/operations/transportation and capital outlay. Ms. Munsell explained how vacancies are managed. Mr. Brown noted the potential savings due to COVID-19 school closures is about \$2.9 million.

Mr. DeWitt questioned why maintenance projects are deferred since schools are empty. Mr. Papageorge said some projects are being performed, but materials are being delayed from supply houses and the BOE can't get workers so there is a delay in work. Mr. DeWitt asked if this will be reflected in next year's budget because of the deferment to which Mr. Papageorge replied yes.

Mr. Cummings said there is a struggle assessing students. He said the traditional way clearly can't be done and there are now discussions on developing other means. He said it needs to be determined the net effect of distance learning to establish if students are ready for the next grade level or if the BOE is going to have to modify the grade level.

Questions 1, 2, 3 & 4 were discussed collectively. Mr. Walsh asked why the number in Line 2 is negative \$53,700 when he said not a lot of teachers are calling in sick and the number of substitutes is less. He asked if it was negative before COVID-19. Mr. Cummings said he will get numbers pre- and post-COVID-19.

There was a discussion on some reluctance to do live video instruction. Mr. Mancusi said he will continue to work with staff and families who are uncomfortable with the technology. Mr. Walsh said constituents are complaining that there is program inconsistency. Mr. Cummings said there are privacy issues that are being worked through and staff is working really hard to make it work. He said that if parents are concerned with the level of instruction, they should inform the Building Principal who will bring it to Central Office to address. He said social workers and counselors are working with families of students who are not checking in.

Mr. Testani asked about the SPED pupil expenses. Mr. Mancusi said the number is pre-COVID-19. Mr. Mancusi said the school district is required to meet the mental health behavioral needs of students and four nurses were hired for students with medically fragile needs.

Answers to questions 5, 6 & 7 were reviewed.

Mr. Brown Skipped to Question 19. Mr. Mancusi said he is anticipating running a longer summer program during July and August without any gaps between the closing of the school year and the beginning of the school year. He said he anticipates more students than there has been in the past. Anticipated additional costs were then examined. Ms. Marmion asked about lawsuits, compensatory or lost services. Mr. Mancusi said he believes Central Office is in compliance with the distance learning plan and because the school district was not neglectful with the direction taken looking to summer school programs to provide a robust extended school year.

Questions 11: Mr. Cummings said he has asked the collective bargaining units to have discussions with their team and then come back together to provide suggestions. He said both sides are open to the needs. He said the collective bargaining units would have the expectation they wouldn't be the only one and to request other unions participate in givebacks and potentially get something back down the road.

Mr. Walsh motioned to engage the First Selectwoman to encourage the Town Administration to enter into the bargaining units of the Town to request potential givebacks for Budget 20/21. Mr. Mitola seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 9-0.

Question 12 was answered in the 19-20 projections document. Ms. Vitale expressed her dissatisfaction pertaining to Question 13. Regarding Question 14, Ms. Munsell furnished clarification for Ms. Charlton. Regarding Questions 15 & 16, Ms. Munsell explained the CARE ACT funding impact. She said it is a provision that the State has to commit to the funding in order to receive the Federal funding. Regarding Question 17, Mr. Cummings said some families didn't have home computers. He said the school district would have to supply Chrome Books for Grades 3-5 if it didn't depend on family computers, if distant learning is continued and whether students are in school or out to expand their learning. Mr. Cummings said that depending on the answer, there may be a realignment in his budget. Regarding Question 20, Ms. Munsell reviewed the health care savings. Regarding Question 23, see response to Question 19. Regarding Question 24, see response to Question 12. Regarding Question 25, Mr. Mancusi explained the para-professionals roles and expenses. Mr. Walsh requested additional information on balance in math classes from Mr. Cummings.

Mr. Brown said Mr. Cummings forwarded the Board a document from the Director of Government Affairs regarding the non-lapsing account. Mr. Cummings explained how the account is used and funded and he will keep the Board updated. Mr. DeWitt requested the Town Attorney get involved tomorrow regarding this. Mr. Brown will bring it to his attention. Ms. Charlton agrees this needs to be discussed further. Mr. Brown suggested Ms. Vitale add this and COVID-19 projection costs to a BOE agenda.

Board of Education

8010 Board of Education Budget

There were no questions on income. The previously submitted executive summary reviewed the 11 major budget drivers. Mr. Papageorge explained security services.

11030 Health and Welfare Services

Mr. Mancusi reported a 1% increase over last year. He said he will forward information on the exact number of students they serve.

2531 Private School Bus Transportation

Ms. Munsell said the number is based on a new bid and the unused fuel may have an impact. She said the BOS reduced this budget. Ms. Munsell will find out about a 40% increase.

4. Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Board, Mr. Mitola moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:04 p.m. Ms. Charlton seconded the motion which carried unanimously, 9-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheila Tesei
Recording Secretary