



Received For Record At Plainfield CT

On 4-11-2023 @ 9:10am

Attest: [Signature]

Town Clerk

**TOWN OF PLAINFIELD
Board of Finance
Meeting Minutes for 5 April, 2023**

Dean Gorman called to order the Board of Finance meeting at 6:31 pm.

Members present were Dean Gorman, Adrian Ferrari, Donald Kivela, Thomas Sinkewicz, Linda Fedor (Alternate) with members absent Gary Stalaboin, Theodore W. Dumaine, and Keith Sheeley (Alternate).

Minutes *Don motioned to accept the minutes from the previous meeting of 29 March, 2023 with corrections. Adrian seconded. Tom abstained. All in favor. Motion passed.*

Old Business **None**

New Business

The following is a presentation from the Plainfield Board of Education for 2023-2024 Budget. Paul Brenton, Superintendent, explained the slides he assembled regarding the questions that have been presented to him.

Implementation of Mandated New Curriculum. Wonders for reading- a waiver does not need to be applied for as the cost is built into the budget. IM 6-8 Math, C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards, Studysync.

Commitment to the development of and implementation of engaging academic programming. Next Generation Science Standards and RULER. Many families are choosing a Magnet School over the public school. These programs are being requested by families in the community. PHS has more computer science rooms than most high schools this size. Makerspace gets immense support from the community as well as a donation from WestMinster Tool.

Commitment to Safety and Security. RAPTOR. Security personnel have been added to the budget per request of the community. The RAPTOR system is in every school building. All individuals must supply their drivers license or ID to be scanned against a background check and a badge is printed out. This ensures that anyone entering the buildings is safe to be around the children. Cyber insurance has been added to the budget as well.

Commitment to student Activities. Maintaining sport, clubs and partnerships.

Commitment to parent engagement. Movie nights in Moosup and Halloween and Student Portal Login.

Commitment to the Community. Food bank.

The BOE is presenting a 3.62% budget increase which would make the budget \$37,694,009.00. At this time the BOE has made five different sets of cuts. The starting point for this year was \$2,315,000.00 over last year. This was largely made up of fixed charges. \$986,000.00 would have been the negotiated contracts if all positions were maintained next year. Out-of-district tuition increased to over \$400,000.00. Transportation increase is at \$366,000.00 with an anticipated fuel increase of \$115,000.00. Adjustments were made with the insurance carrier. 7 positions will not be filled next year that are currently filled due to cuts, ie. 2 full time educators were ARP ESSER funded, 2 full time positions would remain unfilled in the 2024 budget, 3 other positions are no longer in the local budget in order to avoid a budget cliff, and 1 staff position has been reduced for the 2024-2025 budget. \$250,000.00 in fuel has been offset by grants by ARP ESSER. Plainfield is in year 2 of a 5-year transportation contract with DATTCO. This has a minimum number of buses and a pre negotiated increase, fixed cost for the BOE. The largest cost increase in next year is tuition and transportation. Transportation makes up 9% of the budget and tuition makes up 7%. Salaries and benefits make up almost 75%. Purchase services and supplies make up 8% with 3% in utilities.

The current budget of 3.62% is one of the lowest compared to the surrounding towns. Most towns have approved around 4.9%-10.98%. There is an increase of 7.5% for software and 5% increase for tuition for next year. These are fixed costs that have been set.

Efficiency of Operations. These numbers are from the Connecticut State Department Measure which is an NCE number. Throughout all of CT, Plainfield has one of the lowest per pupil expenditures. A comparison of a few towns near Plainfield, for cost per pupil, do not have a highschool or award winning programs in theater.

Community Profile. This year is yet another year where poverty has increased in Plainfield. The free and reduced lunch program number has risen from 26.5% in 2009 to 58.01% in 2023. The reason this number has jumped so high is because in the last 2 years, all students have received free lunch. Therefore, not all families needing the free lunch program have submitted their information. The free lunch program is set to end at the end of this school year unless the legislators vote otherwise.

Additional Budget Drivers. Reduction in health insurance, pur. pupil services, rentals, textbooks. Top 10 highest increases but fixed: certified salaries, tuition, non-cert. employee salary, pur. student transportation, gas/heat, utilities, pur. instruct services, workers' compensation and athletic salaries. Certified salaries and tuition are based on contracts. Paul has used the ARP ESSER funds very sparingly, they are running out soon, so that Plainfield will not have a budget cliff to deal with.

Students Accessing Outside Programs. This has an increase of over \$400,000.00. The average out of district tuition has increased 5%. The reason for out of district enrollment is because of the programs they offer.

Utilities, gas and fuel. There is an increase of \$115,000.00 for fuel. There is an estimated 8% increase in usage. The 2023-2024 budget is assuming a 20% increase on electrical cost and 9% decrease in natural gas. Solar loans for SHE will be paid off in July, not in next year's budget, and Moosup has 9 months beyond the SHE cost. BOE is assuming there will be around \$30,000.00 savings.

Transportation. There is an increase in transportation costs reflected in Eastconn transportation, additional DATTCO rates and summer programming costs. \$250,000.00 has been reduced through the ESSER Grants. In light of covid, the bus companies contracts were fixed and now there is a minimum cost and minimum number of runs.

Capital Improvement. Many projects have been moved to the FY2025-2026 to save money. The bond on the High School is coming off. RFP Study has been requested to look at all school buildings. The needs are a Facilities Study regarding enrollment and Program design, HVAC Bond Plan Team and Vehicle Replacement Cycle. Plainfield 2020 is a group that has met once and will continue to meet to look at the results of the facility studies. Mr. Richards is looking into the Vehicle Replacement Cycle. A new vehicle is not being purchased due to the finances.

Questions and comments from the BOF. Adrian asked about the budgets from surrounding towns and if they have passed. Paul stated that several have passed. Adrian asked how full the school buildings are and if there is more room for students. Paul stated that the State looks at the rooms differently than the BOF because they understand the space issues. He has been asked to close buildings and move students to cut costs but that is not reasonable. Spaces need to be identified that can be used as classrooms. This is the reason for needing the RFP study. Paul speculates that the State would say that all of our facilities are under capacity. There is a designated special ed self contained room which has 6 students. The State says there should be 20 students in this room. There would be a large cost involved. The highschool was built for a capacity of around 800 and that number is not being met.

Dean asked about the Regional Cost Comparison with Plainfield slated at daily membership of 2009.48 and what is included. Paul stated that the State pulls those numbers. ASPEN gives the number of active student enrollment. These numbers are based on the membership. Dean asked about the enrollment number. Paul stated that the enrollment number is different because of the lack of teachers and space for Pre-K students. There are more teachers being added for the 2023-2024 school year.

Tom asked about the school's pension contribution and if there was an increase this year. Paul stated that there was an increase last year but there is not an increase for this year. Dean asked about the open positions where the salary rate is different and there is an increase from previous years. Paul stated that in previous years, the universities were graduating a large number of young teachers and he was able to hire them straight out of school. In the past, they used Masters 3 in contracts as the number for an open position. As of now, there are no Masters 3 candidates applying and they are getting higher rates in other districts. Plainfield has moved their rate to Masters 6. The positions open are a very competitive market. Many positions are not being filled, even though the teachers like the program and school, since the salary is not as high as some other schools.

There are 3 elements that are the cause of the increase: Summer School at around \$65,000.00, Frontline contract at \$25,873.00 and Health ins., based on a new Para contract using HDHP at around \$35,000.00.

Dean asked about PCMS Instructional Purchase Professional Services increase from last year of \$54,000.00 and is split between Studysync and textbook materials. Paul stated that Studysync is the program used for ELA and is an annual purchase. Algebra I is being brought back for the school as the 8th graders are more capable of tackling this level of math. Scott stated that this cost is just for the consumable books for the students and the cost will go down in future years as the teacher keys will not need to be purchased.

Dean asked about the AED machines. When a survey was completed of all buildings, it was found that the minimum standard was not being met. As of now, there is an AED machine on every floor of every building. The cost of upkeep for these machines is the battery, only lasts 3-5 years, inspection or swapped out.

Adrian motioned to accept the Plainfield Board of Education 2023-2024 budget. Adrian seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Citizens Participation: Sean Peterson of Plainfield asked about the Alliance district. What does it benefit us besides ECS funding? What needs to happen to utilize the funds for buildings in the future? What are the additional costs for the Town and are extra programs expected? Paul Brenton stated the Alliance designation was set in 2012. 33 districts, over a set size, were identified as districts being the most in need and would have a high school. The original 33 districts were granted money in one of two forms: money in the form of the ECS grant or money granted to the district in 4 different categories. In 2017, the equation was revamped and Plainfield was awarded the Alliance status in 2021. The equation is based on the 2017 numbers. For building funds to be available in one of the budget bills, they would have to designate funds that would be set for Alliance districts. At this time, no funds are available for building for Alliance districts. In several Bills slated to impact 2024-2025, Bill 5003, there are potential funds. Sean asked if we are required to supply any extra programs. Paul stated there is an Alliance rep who meets with the BOE and looks over the plans and programming. They also provide access to additional professional development.

Art Gagne of Plainfield asked about page 16 for the PHS and the increase of elevator inspections in the amount of over \$2,000.00. 5 other schools had no increase. Paul stated that the elevator's age and the cost for inspections increased. Art asked about a social worker and if they worked in 2 schools. Paul stated that he could not speak regarding a specific teacher but that some teachers are in multiple schools. Art asked about page 3 pupal instruct services and an increase of TOD/HH of \$27,000.00 and the Specialized therapy below that for \$4,200.00. Scott stated that TOD stands for Teacher of Deaf. Some services require a TOD and are contracted. Specialized therapy for homebound services, children bound to a wheelchair, have a cochlear implant who require different services. Art inquired about page 9 and Pupil Personal, Eastconn has a 3% rate increase and equates to a 20% rate increase. Scott stated that even though the number of students is the same, the required services for a few students are different and are much greater.

Matt Radank (sp?) of Moosup acknowledged the factors that the Town is facing are fixed costs that are looming. One of them being the contracts. There are things that are creating poor feedback for the town. The increase in budget spending on Town and school rate, poverty rate, enrollment and population decrease and inflation. The flat line from the state is from the ECS funds. He believes that the decrease in funds is due to the enrollment decrease. This is not a favorable picture of the budget. It does not seem like there will be a decrease in spending next year, based on previous years. It looks like an uptick in poverty and downtick in the general population. There is an acceleration of the trend

lines in directions we don't want them to go. He thinks that it would behoove the budget process to draft something that was drafted in the past during tenuous State funding years entering the budget season with a red list of possible cuts in the event of a shortfall and the economy continues to decline, there should be a contingency plan in place where the cuts can be identified or go to the Fund Balance. It does not look like the economy will be any better over the course of the year but does not look like it.

Krystal Ferrari of Plainfield asked about the gas and buses. Are there any other vehicles available to transport students so that a bus does not need to be used if there are only a few students needing to be taken home. Can this be avoided or are we at the minimum with our contracts? Paul stated that many buses run at a higher rate, but some buses do not and are most likely a special contract vehicle. Some of the buses are traveling to different districts and the children will get on a different bus to finish the trip to their school. The districts will then split the cost of those buses. Some would have very early pick up times. Another reason is homeless students and or students with a DCF placement.

Other Discussion: None

Adjournment: Tom motioned to adjourn at 8:08 pm. Don seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted by,



Krystal Ferrari, Recording Secretary