

**BOLTON BOARD OF FINANCE
SPECIAL MEETING
March 24, 2015**

Minutes

Attendance: Members Morris Silverstein, James Bruner, Chairman Robert Munroe, Judy Wilson, Robert DePietro, and Barry Stearns were present. Also present were Interim Finance Director Linda Savitsky, Superintendent Kristin Heckt, Board of Education Chair Karen Bergin, and members of the public.

- 1. Call to order:** Chairman Robert Munroe called the meeting to order at 7:22.
- 2. Public Participation:** Christina Morra-Tiu commented that every year the budget is slashed before it is presented for a vote, and suggested that voting be allowed before much cutting. J. Bruner asked whether she referred to the BoS or BoF budget, to which she answered both. Christopher Davey was also in favor of the opportunity to vote on the budget proposal as sent to the Boards of Selectmen and Finance. J. Bruner asked if C. Davey knew how much the budget was, which he did not.
- 3. Board of Education Proposed Budget Presentation:**

Karen Bergin introduced the BoE budget. She said the majority of it was in salaries. The negative in benefits was due to moving all bargaining units to a high deductible health plan. Regular instruction has been flat funded the last few years, and the BoE is concerned Bolton will not attract people if it continues. She said the operations budget is larger than usual because it was previously underfunded.

Superintendent Heckt emphasized maintenance needs, especially in the older BCS building. J. Bruner asked about the roof and funding its repair. K. Heckt said warranty has been extended until the full roof needs replacing (2022), at which time replacement costs will qualify for state reimbursement. She said the 82% in salaries, wages, and benefits is comparable to other districts statewide. She also explained the dishwasher in capital proposals is to replace the household style one used by BHS due to budget cuts during construction. K. Heckt clarified that one time grants are not included in budget breakdown.

K. Heckt reported that enrollment in Bolton has been flat, while declining in surrounding districts. The Columbia enrollment estimate is conservative, given the low enrollment this year. She also informed the Board and audience that Columbia is having difficulty with sustainability of its school system, especially its middle school. She has contacted them about possibly involving Bolton in a solution if Columbia is interested. J. Bruner asked what was causing enrollment decline. K. Heckt said it was due to population decline, saying Columbia is seeing class sizes as low as 10 students. She said it is a region-wide issue, according to a study by the New England School Development Council, and Bolton's flat enrollment is an anomaly. K. Heckt concluded with a list of BPS accolades in testing, competitions, community service, and sports. She attributed them to BPS staff, but said at this point they need more support.

4. Discussion Regarding the FY 16 Budget

B. Stearns asked about the math budget increase. K. Heckt said it was to update materials. He asked if Renaissance Star was new, which K. Heckt said it is. B. Stearns also asked about an enrollment projection like the one given last year, taking magnet school choices into account. K. Heckt said that last year's projection was a guess at best. Since this year even more students are identifying magnets as a potential choice, information is too inconclusive at this stage for an estimate. B. Stearns raised the statewide situation of charter schools getting increased funding without providing the promised performance reports. K. Heckt affirmed that no data is forthcoming, and has contacted a state legislator with a negative view on the issue. Discussion followed on charter and magnet schools' development and range.

Robert DePietro was concerned that BPS achievements seemed skewed towards humanities, while science and technology are increasingly in social demand. K. Heckt clarified which accolades were science-related. She said a STEM or STEAM program would be ideal but required greater enrollment.

Judy Wilson asked for the reason behind the 7% decrease in special education funding. K. Heckt said low figures are unexpectedly being seen statewide, possibly due to missed filing dates which would affect data. She said the 7% is expected to go down. J. Wilson asked if there was a way to pull together a full summary of projected salaries and so on. K. Heckt said it would be a projection only, but it was possible. J. Wilson said it would aid BoF planning. K. Heckt will work to put together the summary for the BoF.

Chairman asked about the Student Support Excess Cost grant decrease from 294,388 to 177,681. K. Heckt said a returning student resulted in some lost funding, but the overall offset is greater. R. Munroe asked if the decrease in fuel and oil in the town budget was reflected in the BoE budget, which it was.

J. Bruner inquired as to a special education reimbursement issue discussed at the December meeting with BoE. K. Heckt said the bill was sent to Hartford and the state has said Bolton is within its legal rights to do so. Discussion followed on the funding structure of the choice program. J. Bruner asked if choice money could be put towards covering town debt. Per the state regulations' statutory language, it would not be allowed. Choice funds must supplement rather than supplant. M. Silverstein wondered if the BoS could write different standards into Bolton's charter, as some towns have successfully contested state regulations through their charters. First Selectman Robert Morra pointed out that, regardless of the charter, the state would retain the ability to pull funding. It was deemed not worth the risk.

J. Bruner asked, given the position the BoF is in, what the Superintendent believed to be a fair cost per student to taxpayers in order to provide according to taxpayers' expectations. K. Heckt would not give an amount, but stressed the importance of investing in education due to it being a major draw of the town. M. Silverstein inquired, since the 82% figure was comparable statewide, if the Superintendent could report any dialogue among peer professionals on what other towns and Bolton can do to support it. K. Heckt said competitive salaries are necessary to get the job done, and held that the figure is appropriate. She said her solution would be to bring business to Bolton to offset the cost of education, and that the practice is consistent throughout the state.

Chairman Munroe asked about choice program changes. K. Heckt said currently the loss sits at 3 students. Twelve seats have been opened but the result remains to be seen. R. Munroe also asked about retirements occurring at a higher salary. K. Heckt said retirements are already considered in the budget.

5. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Benitez
Recording Secretary

Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for the approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.