

THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE BOARD OF FINANCE

The Board of Finance held a public hearing, Thursday, February 14, 2019 in the Council Chamber in the Municipal Building, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT. Chairman Gaston called the meeting to order at 7:07pm.

Present: Jim Gaston, Mark Boland, Keith Alexander, Ned Simpson

Absent: Sandy Roussas, Steve Hinden

Also Present: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal, Ron Bienkowski, Michelle Embree Ku, Rebekah Harriman Sites, Dr. Rodrigue, 5 members of the public and 2 members of the press.

Public Comment on the 2019-2020 Town of Newtown Budget and Newtown Board of Education Budget

Steve Rosenblatt, 50 Watkins Drive – Submitted a letter to the editor in the Newtown Bee from former Board of Finance member Joe Kearney (Attachment A). Hopefully what it says will make an impression. It deals with the decline in population of the school system and also deals with the spending that has and continues to occur.

Rudy Magnan, 60 Watkins Drive – Expressed concerned regarding declining enrollment while expenditures keep going up. The BOE and some of the committee's should be willing to initiate a conversation with seniors. Why does this conversation not to take place.

Rebecca Kearns, 150 Hanover Road – She graduated from Newtown and also has children in the school system. Knows the budget will increase to account for union steps and is in favor of it. Teachers are an investment to the schools and the community. She believes the Director of Teaching and Learning is redundant to the current Assistant Superintendent position. It is a large salary and that isn't what our schools need. They also need to cut back on testing. The Library Media specialist in the middle school was held by a lower paid person and now they are bringing a higher step person. It is a waste of money. Bring in lower paid teachers and give them a chance.

J. Gaston announced that there will be meeting on the 2/21, 2/25 and 2/27. There is an opportunity for public participation at the beginning and end of each meeting.

Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:25PM

Respectfully submitted,
Arlene Miles, Clerk

Attachment A

To the Editor:

In the 2006-2007 budget, our school system spent \$62.8 million for education with a population of 5,668 students. The proposed budget for this year is \$78.1 million, but with 1,483 fewer students than in 2006-2007. That's not a misprint. To place that into perspective, 1,483 exceeds the student population of all four of our elementary schools by 147, is greater than the Reed and Middle Schools combined by 115, and only 29 less than the entire high school student population. We are headed in the wrong direction. We are now on our 13th straight year of student population declines, yet continue to act as though our schools will magically fill up despite the stagnant state economy and the tsunami of taxes yet to come from the state. Instead of taking advantage of the exceptions to the minimum budget requirements (MBR), which allows for a reduction of school budgets with declining enrollments, we continue to add even more cost, ensuring that future budgets will begin at this year's inflated budget. You would think that with 1,483 less students there would be less school system employees. You'd be wrong. In 2006-2007 with 5,668 students, we had 730 full-time equivalents. Incredibly, with 1,483 less students, we now need 741 full-time equivalents!

Some other facts comparing 2006-2007 to the proposed 2019-2020 education budget:

1. We are spending 29.3 percent more (\$15.3 million)
2. There are 26 percent fewer students (5,668 vs 4,185)
3. The per pupil expenditure is a whopping 75 percent higher (\$10,654 vs \$18,664) and 2.3 times the average rate of inflation (1.94 percent to 4.51 percent). How many people have seen a 75 percent increase in salaries since 2007?

Everyone wants a quality yet affordable education, but our elected officials either don't follow the economics of the state very well or simply don't care. They should. Here's why:

The state legislature will consider, and the governor may sign laws that will:

1. Enable a state-wide property tax on homes and perhaps cars.
2. Establish tolls on our highways for every vehicle, not just trucks.
3. Expand the sales tax to include previously exempt items like groceries and medicine.
4. Reduce the ECS grants for education for towns like ours.

Other potential possibilities include charging towns for state-obligated pensions and forced regionalization of schools. The latter will fall especially hard on school districts with falling enrollments and excess capacity, such as Newtown. That we refuse to consolidate by closing the Middle School makes Newtown extremely vulnerable. Unfortunately, we can expect the current Board of Finance to rubber stamp the school budget and forward it to the Legislative Council, which will also vote in the affirmative, sending this massive \$2.1 million budget increase to the voters.

One can only hope that this year becomes the line in the sand for the voters whose homes have lost value, whose salaries are stagnant, and whose children could never afford to live here. This budget is

wholly unaffordable and should be soundly defeated.

Sincerely,

Joe Kearney

9 Daniels Hill Road, Newtown January 30, 2019