



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND  
INCORPORATED 1786

# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

MICHAEL J. PURCARO  
Chairman

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DAVID J. OLENDER  
Vice Chairmen

## BOARD OF FINANCE

PEGGY A. BUSSE  
JAMES F. FAY  
DOUGLAS B. HARDING  
BARRY C. PINTO

## **Budget Hearing – Board of Education FY 23-24 March 8, 2023**

### MINUTES

**Members Present:** Michael Purcaro -Chair, David Olender, Peggy Busse, James Fay via zoom, Douglas Harding, Barry Pinto.

**Others Present:** Brian Greenleaf – Director of Finance and Operations, Jennifer Dzen – BOE Chair, Angela Moser – Ellington High School Liaison, Dr. Scott Nicol – Ellington Schools Superintendent, Miriam Underwood - Crystal Lake School Liaison/CREC Liaison, Steve Veins – Windermere School Liaison, Tiffany Pignataro – Finance Officer/Treasurer via zoom.

#### **Call to order**

Chairman Michael Purcaro called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

#### **Pledge of Allegiance**

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#### **Citizen's Forum**

None came forward.

#### **Budget Hearing – Board of Education**

Mr. Purcaro welcomed all to the meeting and stated he looks forward to working with the board as we get into the 2023-2024 budget. Mrs. Dzen thanked the BOE and BOF board members for coming out in support of the budget. She stated without the Board of Finance's support the Windermere project or the school's HVAC project would not be in the works. They are looking at a 4.89% budget increase in FY23-24. She stated there are things they can control in the budget and things they cannot. The budget process starts in October with the teachers going over what supplies they will need, etc. From there it goes to principals/program managers to justify to the superintendent. They received an increase of

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\$234k in the Governor's Budget, decreasing the net BOE increase to 4.35%. The department moved to self-insured health care in 2021 and started a dependent audit to help with cost savings. The board has a BASES Program which offers support to Ellington children, allowing us to keep more students in our district and not have to outsource. Mrs. Dzen stated they have looked at restructuring EHS electives to help with cost savings. The board was hit with a \$65k increase to CMERS which is about \$53,000 more than the board expected. She stated their goal is to maintain programming for the students while making cuts where they can. She said the board is always open to suggestions and collaborations from other boards and the public.

Dr. Nicol stated since 2015 there is 267 education mandates either updated or new. The department works from a zero-based budgeting process. Every year they develop budgets from the bottom up. He stated staffing models are examined, self-insurance, and the IT shared services have helped with cost savings. In 2021- 2022 Ellington had the third lowest per pupil (lowest staffing model). The town is about \$11 million from the per pupil median. The state funding (town revenue) for the year 2023-2024 is \$234,318 which is an increase from the previous year. He shared a revenue streams graph showing the departments have around two million of revenue coming in. From the 2017-2018 to 2022-2023 budgets, the overall change on accounts outside of salaries, benefits, and transportation was a reeducation of \$141,609 (-2.95%). For the last two few years, they have had to put in multiple hard and soft freezes on the budget so they stay within the budget the town is providing them.

Mr. Greenleaf reviewed areas of particular focus including utilities, benefits/retirement, and maintenance/custodial supplies. With inflationary pressures, electricity has increased by 15%, and natural gas by 40.56%. He stated these are things the board cannot control. Looking at maintenance and custodial supplies, they are up \$106.5k in total including HVAC projects, aging infrastructure, and state mandates on custodial supplies – approximately a \$20k increase. Mr. Greenleaf stated retirement is up \$146k (16.79%) with three primary drivers, normal salary increases, CMERS rate increase, and under budgets in the current fiscal year 22-23. The total special education tuition increased by \$193k. Major driver's comparison to FY23 includes instructional, tuition, operations & technology. He stated the next steps, are to continue working on the whole budget and find where they can make cost savings.

Mr. Purcaro asked if there may be movement on the magnet school outplacements in the upcoming year. Dr. Nicol stated they are trying to get better with residency verification, if they come across a student who has moved, they will hold on paying the bills. Mr. Purcaro recommends the board reviews the geography of the bus routes and see if there are cuts that can be made. Mr. Greenleaf stated they try to keep the ride to an hour, the pre-k number is very large and they are required to transport them and have had to increase transportation due to this. He asked why we see a pre-k student increase but the revenue staying flat. Mr. Greenleaf stated there are multiple streams in this department.

Mr. Olender asked if the solar projects cost the town any money to install. He asked if in the future if they are going to get on the ZREC program. Mrs. Pignataro stated they are in discussion. He asked if the Crystal Lake School floor has been repaired. Mr. Greenleaf stated with the capital budget they were looking to repair it in 2025. Mr. Olender stated we should ask the contractor to repair what is not right. Dr. Nicol stated this project overall was successful, aside from the floor. At a point in the budget, the floor will be getting redone.

Mrs. Busse stated she appreciates when the board goes over funds, they find a way to balance them out. She asked if they go back to previous budgets and see what they can and cannot cut out. Mr. Greenleaf stated they were trimming back in areas because of covid. They are now having to cut back on items that will help students be more engaged and better learn. Dr. Nicol stated the board has been significantly underfunded since he has been with the town. He is concerned about our technology wearing out and needing to be upgraded. Mr. Purcaro asked if they are putting freezes in place then they should be using their saving for purchasing items they need. Mr. Greenleaf stated there won't be a lot of leftovers.

Mrs. Busse asked if replacement teachers are being replaced on the high, medium, or low end. Mr. Greenleaf stated if a high-step teacher goes out, they have a budget to replace those spots. Dr. Nicol stated it depends on the pool of talent and what they want. Mrs. Dzen stated the board has talked about going back to the pool of applicants and looking for lower replacements.

Mr. Harding asked how many open-choice students Ellington has declared for next year. Mr. Greenleaf stated we have forty-eight open seats declared. Mr. Harding asked if the school still works with Asnuntuk to give the students college programs along with the ECE programs. Dr. Nicol stated the high school is still working with ECE programs, which allows them to get college credit.

Mr. Fay asked when it comes to supplies are we trying to do things with other towns to get the right prices? Mr. Greenleaf stated yes, they have expanded amazon out to some of the schools where items have been found less inexpensive.

Mr. Purcaro asked if we have any reimbursements pending. Mr. Greenleaf stated not on the education side and Mrs. Pignataro stated nothing is pending on the town side.

Mrs. Dzen stated it is a process and the board members are continuing to produce ideas and collaborate where they may have missed something the first time. She stated they are open to hearing other ideas from board members and the public.

Mrs. Busse asked if the BOE does an audit similar to the towns. Mr. Greenleaf stated the integration of the town and board of ed finance systems has helped with this. They are now on the same system and they are reconciling and auditing at the end of each year.

## **Adjournment**

**MOVED HARDING SECONDED OLENDER AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:03 PM.**

Respectfully submitted:



Elizabeth Phelps, Recording Secretary