

**BOLTON BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING
APRIL 25, 2023
HYBRID MEETING VIA ZOOM WEBSITE PLATFORM &
TOWN OF BOLTON, 222 BOLTON CENTER RD, BOLTON
MINUTES**

Board of Finance Members Present: Ross Lally – Chair, Ashley Phelan, Amanda Gordon, Mather Clarke, and Charles Danna Jr.

Board of Education Members Present: Rhea Klein, Susan Pike, and Benjamin Davies.

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Pam Sawyer – First Selectman and Robert Morra

Staff Present: Ashleigh Johnson – Board Clerk, Jim Rupert – Town Administrator, Jill Collins – Chief Financial Officer, and Kristin Heckt – Superintendent

1) Call to Order: R. Lally called this meeting to order at 7:16 PM.

2) Public Hearing for the Town of Bolton Fiscal Year July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024 Budget:

R. Lally began this hearing with a presentation on the budget. He summarized the slides while being sure to highlight on key points. The amount being presented to bring to referendum is \$24,826,779 with a mill rate of 44.05 and a motor vehicle capped mill rate of 32.46. The taxpayer ask is \$19,688,372.

Someone asked how many students we have enrolled. K. Heckt said we have 736 students at all grade levels as of 04/01.

Leah Maroney, of 122 Hebron Rd, says she is in support of the BOE budget. She thinks we need to look for ways to save money. She mentioned that it seems like we can't afford to keep the High School going with only 241 students there. Saying it is a large building and could be taken over by the Town Hall or Police Station or other services. She stated in the past there were conversations about combining our high school with Coventry's, just something to consider.

Denay Johnston, of 11 Volpi Rd, is in support of the BOE and BOS budget as put forward and hopes it the least that is put through. She expressed thanks to the BOE, BOS, and BOF for their work on the budget.

Anna Spencer, of Vernon Rd, is concerned about cuts in the school system. She asked about bringing in commercial properties in order to lower the burden on homeowners. R. Morra said

they entered an agreement with a gas company several years ago and this has allowed a number of businesses to expand. He mentioned there has been expansions of an electronic production company in town also. He explained that they are also making big efforts in the building office. BOS has looked into working with Manchester Water Company to bring public water through RT 6. Our Grand List for commercial properties has improved and we are working on improving it.

Ron Alleman, of 21 Hebron Rd, expressed his concern about inflation and being a senior. He would like a tax break for seniors and people that don't work anymore and are retired. C. Danna explained that the town does everything that the State allows right now and recommends for Mr. Alleman to apply. He stated that the Town should've had a higher mill rate in previous years and maybe it would've been less painful compared to what's been happening in the rest of the world. R. Lally explained the severity of the Town Building's conditions and the struggle of keeping the school budget and keeping the Town upkeep along with making everyone happy with budget numbers. A. Gordon wants people to recognize this is not only an increase in expenditures, but a decrease in revenue stating that our other revenue sources decreased by 8%. She stated we need people to advocate on the State level due to municipalities not getting enough funds needed for Special Education.

Chris Duffy, of 8 Stonehedge Ln, doesn't think taking from our kids is the answer. He explained that people will move away and it will prevent people from coming here if we cut from the school. He stated we need a plan for more businesses to come here in order to get more revenue in. He explained he supports the budget so the kids don't take the hit.

Jessica Perkins, of 15 Laurwood Dr, wondered what the enrollment of Columbia students is in Bolton and stated that if we don't upkeep our schools kids won't want to come here. K. Heckt said Columbia has had declining enrollment in our schools and its own schools have also had declining enrollment with EO Smith being a choice. She stated that the Commissioner of Education mandated that every school allow magnet and vo-ag schools come and make presentations to the 8th graders.

Someone asked if we can afford to have a school system. They believe everyone did a great job on the budget, but if we have to cut extracurricular activities and teachers what will happen next year if those things are already cut. They stated they want people to have the conversation about whether we can afford the schools. They asked BOE to consider cutting administrator

positions first before extracurricular activities, possibly sharing one with another town to save money.

Chris Davey, of 21 Mt Sumner Dr, clarified that the BOE budget doesn't currently include any cuts. It is just showing what would possibly be cut if not approved in the referendum and needs reductions. He explained we have a lot of good things/amenities in town and says we can't have a high level of amenities and low taxes unless you're willing to trade the low density.

R. Lally explained that we cannot pick line items to cut whether that's dividing the cut between BOE and BOS or all from one and we cannot advocate for what gets cut, that's up to those Boards if or when the budget doesn't get approved.

Deanna Lloyd, of 20 Shoddy Mill Rd, supports the BOE budget.

C. Danna explained that he has never seen this much public participation and wants people to become more involved BEFORE budget time to express their opinions to each Board.

3) Adjournment: R. Lally adjourned this meeting at 8:51 PM.

Next Meetings:

May 4, 2023 – Special Meeting (if necessary)

May 18, 2023 – Regular Meeting

Other Important Dates:

May 10, 2023 – Must adopt budget on or before this date

May 23, 2023 – Budget Referendum

Respectfully submitted by Ashleigh N. Johnson, Board Clerk

Ashleigh N. Johnson

PLEASE SEE THE MINUTES OF SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS FOR THE APPROVAL OF THESE MINUTES AND ANY CORRECTIONS HERETO.

SEE ATTACHMENTS UNDER SEPARATE COVER.