

**RTM Meeting  
May 3, 2022**

**The Call**

1. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the estimate and recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town of Westport for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.
2. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town Railroad Parking Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.
3. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Town Sewer Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.
4. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance, to adopt a budget for the Wakeman Town Farm Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.
5. To take such action as the meeting may determine, to require that property taxes for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, shall be due and payable in four quarterly installments, and to designate the dates of the first days of July, October, January, and April as the dates upon which such installments shall be due and payable, and that all taxes in an amount of \$100 or less shall be due and payable in a single installment on the first day of July.
6. To take such action as the meeting may determine to require that the motor vehicle tax shall be due and payable in a single installment.

***The following items will also be considered as time permits as follows on Monday, May 2; Tuesday, May 3, and/or Wednesday, May 4:***

7. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Public Works Director, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$400,000.00 from Westport's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for planning, design, and permitting of the redevelopment of Parker Harding Plaza, Jesup Green, and the Imperial Lot.
8. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Director of Public Works, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$232,000.00 along with bond and note authorization to the Municipal Improvement Fund Account for the design and permitting of the replacement of the Hillandale Road Bridge over Muddy Brook.

9. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by Director of Public Works, to approve a Special Appropriation in the amount of \$852,000.00 along with bond and note authorization to the Municipal Improvement Fund Account for asphalt paving projects at Bedford Middle School and Staples High School.

10. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Board of Education, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$439,000.00 from Westport's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, for Middle School Project.

11. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Superintendent of Schools, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$148,656.00 for Coleytown Elementary School Modular Classroom Funding.

12. To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Westport Historic District Commission, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$30,000.00 to the Historic District Fees & Services Account for the purpose of accepting funding in the amount of \$30,000.00 from the State Historic Preservation Office. The funds will be used to hire an Architectural Historian to update Inventory Forms.

**The meeting**

Moderator Jeff Wieser:

Good evening. This meeting of Westport's Representative Town Meeting is now called to order and we welcome those who are joining us this evening. My name is Jeff Wieser and I am the RTM Moderator. The acting Secretary tonight once again will be our Town Clerk Jeff Dunkerton. We send our best wishes to Jackie Fuchs and hope that she is well soon.

A notice about procedures for this electronic meeting: Pursuant to Connecticut House Bill 5269, there is not a physical location for this meeting. This meeting is being held electronically and live streamed on [westportct.gov](http://westportct.gov) and shown on Optimum Government Access Channel 79 and Frontier Channel 6020. Meeting materials are available at [westportct.gov](http://westportct.gov) along with the meeting notice posted on the Meeting List & Calendar page. Members of the Westport electorate attending the meeting by telephone or video may comment on any agenda item. Comments will be limited to three minutes. Emails may be sent to [RTMmailinglist@westportct.gov](mailto:RTMmailinglist@westportct.gov), which goes to all RTM members. These emails will not be read aloud during the meeting but you can be sure that we will all receive them if they have not already been sent.

Tonight's invocation will be given by our own Jessica Bram. Welcome Jessica and we look forward to hearing from you.

Invocation, Jessica Bram, district 6:

I moved to Westport over 24 years ago. I came here as a single mother, where I didn't know a soul – and raised three sons who now have successful lives because they went through our extraordinary Westport Public Schools – that school system that we are here to talk about tonight. (Incidentally, I will mention that one of my sons— he went to Bedford, she Coleytown— married his Staples High School girlfriend, and they just had their second child.) When Coleytown Middle School was shut down, I remember saying – because our school system is so critical in this town—that this was the single worst thing that ever happened to Westport in my 24 year memory. To lose an entire middle school, to be forced to cram one entire school population in with another—Remember what a crisis that was? The worst that could ever happen. Then came COVID. And instead of being upset because our kids were in crowded classrooms due to Coleytown being crammed in with Bedford (remember we were upset because our kids had to have lunch so early?) now there was COVID. And now all our kids stay had to stay home from school. Our whole town changed. Businesses failed, people lost jobs, restaurants shut down. Perhaps worst of all, couldn't be together. Two years later, here we are, at our RTM, still on Zoom. Yes, we disagree on so many things. We all have opinions here (as you know I have opinions on everything, you've all heard them). But let's think about what our differences are about, and the values that they reflect. We argued about using ARPA funds for beach repair. But wasn't that about protecting the environment? Being responsible stewards of our shoreline, our Town's greatest asset? Yes, we fight about gas powered blowers. But isn't that because each of us wants to hold so tightly on to the Westport that we all came here for, the homes and lives we built for our families, regardless of whether that's quiet afternoons or beautiful lawns? Yes, we have argued for and against offering public transportation. But didn't we all receive a gift from that conflict? That gift of having received over 100 heartfelt emails—each one different, each expressive, none of them boiler plate. I learned so much that I didn't know about ... what it's like to have an infant at home and only one car... what it's like to be a worn-out commuter. Because of that conflict we got to know so much about our neighbors' lives, in personal, truthful ways. We argue vehemently about P&Z issues such as affordable housing, and about 840-G, and the zoning problems that that legislation causes. But although we may vehemently disagree about zoning issues, we *do* respect our Town bodies that allow our disagreements to be spoken aloud and acted on in orderly, non-combative ways. One thing I do know is that regardless of how we feel about 840-G, we *all* care about, and have compassion for families, either struggling or wealthy families, who all want to have safe, affordable homes where we can raise our children. And don't we all support our organizations such as *Homes with Hope*, that are working so hard to end homelessness -- whether we offer that support philanthropically, or by cooking and serving lasagna in our ramshackle Gillespie Center? Let me point out that we are, after all, a Town that has a youth center, and homeless shelter, a block away from a Tiffany's. All of which say something about what we care about – not just the homeless shelter, but Tiffany's too, because it does speak of the lives we unapologetically want for our children. Yes, some of us cling furiously to our causes and our pet issues and our political affiliations. Yes, we may disagree on so many things. Yes, our RTM meetings can at times stretch agonizingly long through the night. But let's remember who we are. With all our disagreements, in all those exhausting, contentious, boring RTM meetings that stretch late into the night, that what

we want is just to make things right. Let's think about the values and principles that we share at the heart of it all – our families, our first responders, our overworked teachers. And yes, even our noisy neighbors. Let's remind ourselves – and applaud ourselves for — living in a town not of things and real estate, but of *principles*. That what we're here for – especially those of us on the RTM — are principles of honesty and fairness — and what's really important in our troubled world. Because that's Who. We. Are. And know that in the end, we care for, respect, and yes, even a little bit, love each other. So, let's get on with it tonight and thanks.

Mr. Wieser:

Often, in this situation, I invite the person giving the invocation to stay for the meeting and they almost never accept. I am counting on you to accept the invitation to stay for the rest of the meeting.

Miss Bram: You got me.

Mr. Wieser:

Good, good, good. Thank you. We will now have the Montage of the Pledge of Allegiance. I am hoping we will have it in person someday soon.

Thank you Mr. Mandell and Mr. Dunkerton.

Assuming that the business of this meeting is completed tonight and we get through the two appropriations, we will be able to not have a meeting tomorrow night and our next scheduled RTM meeting will be Tuesday, June 7.

### **RTM announcements**

Matthew Mandell, District 1:

Well, I wouldn't be repeating what I said last night unless there were some new people here and there are. There are three announcements. Same ones as last night so I will run through them not too quickly so people get it. This Saturday is Supper and Soul. It returns after two years hiatus from COVID. We're giving it a shot. If you love music and love this town and want to go out and have a wonderful date night you can go to 11 different restaurants, choose one of 11 different restaurants, and then go see a concert at the library. Chris Jacobs is there, a wonderful rocker... Soul, Blues, great artist. He was at the Blues, Views, and Barbecue in 2018 and now he is back in Westport. Supper and Soul. You can be part of a great happening in downtown Westport Saturday night. Supper and Soul. Go and buy your tickets. They are still available.

One week later, the Dog Festival is on Sunday May 15<sup>th</sup>: 3000 people, 1,000 dogs out on Winslow Park. The obstacle course is back, demonstrations, police K-9 presentation, food trucks, it's a great day for the whole family Including people so come on out to the Dog Festival.

Our next meeting is June 7th. I can talk about Gilberti's 100th anniversary party on

Saturday June 4<sup>th</sup>. One hundred years of business. It doesn't usually happen that often and there will be a giant party on their property, food trucks, scavenger hunt, vendors and a free concert with Mystic Bowie. He will be there along with Kale Wale who will be opening up for him. Come on out and celebrate 100 years in business for Gilberti's on June 4<sup>th</sup>. I think that was quicker than last night. I'm probably more concise. So, come on out. Westport is a wonderful community. All right. These are only three of the wonderful things that are happening in this community but they are three things that you should attend.

There were 31 members present. Absent: Meiers Schatz, Gold, Cohn, Newman, Schneeman.

Mr. Wieser:

Getting on with the business of the agenda, I'd like to emphasize, as I did last night, that although it may seem like we are progressing rather quickly through a large budget, you should know that the RTM Education and Finance Committees, as well as other RTM members, have been meeting about this budget and discussing it with the Board of Education since January and so tonight's meeting is a culmination of all of their hard work.

I'd like to thank the School Administration, the Board of Education, the Board of Finance and all RTM committees for all of their hard work in connection with this budget tonight and last night. Tonight, we will be addressing the remaining resolutions of agenda item #1, which will include the Board of Education budget and the Town budget as a whole. We then have appropriations to discuss, if we have time.

Just a reminder that, in accordance with RTM rules, no new agenda items can be addressed after 11:30 p.m. unless a 2/3 majority of RTM members present agree to continue past that time.

We will first hear tonight from the Board of Education, and then have committee reports from the Education and Finance Committees. Following these reports we will turn to the public for comments. As custom, members of the public will have three minutes to speak and express their views.

Following any public comments, the RTM will address the issue at hand with our the comments limited to 10 minutes. If there is a motion with respect to the Budget, I will open the floor back up to the public to comment on that specific item.

A reminder about voting: The RTM may approve or decrease the entire Board of Education budget by simple majority vote. With the Board of Education budget, we can only reduce the total number and we do not have any budget items to restore tonight, and we cannot increase any budget item beyond the amount of the request to the Board of Finance. At the end of the review, Finance Director Gary Conrad will confirm our total budget approval and we will approve the total town budget.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone of the conflict of interest provision as stated in last night's meeting, but I am not aware of anyone who is planning to recuse themselves from any of the votes tonight.

**The secretary read item #1 of the call – To adopt a budget for the Town of Westport for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, and to make such specific appropriations as appear advisable.**

**Presentation**

Lee Goldstein, Chair, Board of Education:

On behalf of Westport Public Schools and the Board of Education, we are very pleased to present this budget. Following up to what Jeff said, we have been out this for a long time. I think between the presentations to the Board of Finance, to RTM committees, most of you have heard a lot of this presentation so we are all going to abbreviate our remarks tonight. You have the packets and you have the committee report. Then we can take all the questions that you have.

I want to kick off by saying for those who have been following along, we are so happy to say we have reached agreement with all seven of our bargaining units on the Healthcare to leave the State partnership and go into a private high-deductible plan. John Bayers will take you through that but what I want to say, because he won't, is it is hard to overstate the gratitude we have to John, the whole team, Elio and Jessica, our attorney, and the employees, particularly their Union leadership but it is really hard to comprehend the work that had to go into to getting six units after the teachers to approve. They are not in contract negotiations. They did not have to look at their health care. For John to have gotten this done was a really big deal. So people understand, it's not just, it feels like the work is sitting down with the contracts but it is the work all year building trust and relationships which makes that happen so we are very grateful to that. It's a lot of money.

So, the budget we are presenting is a 3.1 percent increase. That is what the Board of Finance approved and we are good to go with that. We've learned, just in the past couple of weeks, the State raised the rates 10½ percent. So, that would have been a big hit to our budget. The benefits this year, instead of going up like they usually do, they are going down. That was a strategic decision we made to exit the State partnership. It attenuates our risk. But I also wanted to say, and this is repeating stuff we have said in committees, we were able to choose to achieve that in large part because of our successful partnership with our unions, with the Board of Finance, but also with people on the RTM. We want to thank Candace Banks who helped us negotiate with the teachers. Seth Braunstein helped us. We called it work shopping, provided some informal counsel as we were talking through some of our health care options. Donald O'Day helped me go through the budget and also all of you who have called and asked us questions privately and in committees that really helped us get to this budget which is fiscally sound and also serves the needs of Westport students and families.

The last thing I wanted to say because it comes up a lot is a big number that way exceeds inflation, unlike our budget which over the past 10 years keeps very consistent with inflation, is our transportation costs. We are in the process right now of undertaking a transportation study. We are looking for Tech based real-time solutions to our ridership issues. We get the question that buses have a lot of empty seats and are there ways to solve that and we are looking for sustainable options. So that study, we are going to hire a consultant, undertake the study in the fall and the budget will reflect that, we hope, next year. With that, I would like to turn it over to our Superintendent Tom Scarice.

Superintendent Tom Scarice:

Thank you Lee. I would like to just echo these comments of the work of John Bayers and the team. It's a lot of work that gets done in the background and John is not someone who likes to get attention for his work but I think he should be recognized publicly, his leadership and how delicate the relationships can be the seven different bargaining units in the course of a year. I work closely with John and he does amazing work. I want to thank you, Lee, for raising that. If I did my math correctly, about two-thirds of the RTM have been through the process via committee and I will certainly keep the comments abbreviated. There were a couple of changes to the slide deck that we made just to streamline it. Mr. Longo, Mr. Bayers, Mr. Rizzo, Dr. Buono and myself go through the slides over the next few minutes and open it up for questions.

[New slide] We have sighted and talked about the recognitions. They are scattered and splattered all over the screen. I got something hot off the presses just about an hour ago with Connecticut History Day results, a student competition for middle and high school and I haven't even had a chance to inform the Board yet. That came in about 5:30. On a regular basis, our staff, our faculty and students are recognized in remarkable ways. I have been in education for over 25 years and you can always draw a direct through line for the level of commitment and support from the community through funding, through programs and overall, various different boards and so forth.

[New slide: Strategic Accomplishments] We have been through this a few times with the committees. I will highlight just a couple of these. Among the accomplishments that we really want to highlight from a financial perspective is, obviously, the support we got during the pandemic was incredible from the town. We met that challenge and really delivered for our kids. Our faculty, our staff, really delivered for our kids. There were two programs, in particular, that were just a win-win. They were a cost container but also much, much better for kids. Our ESS Program at the high school which we talked about at the committee level and our Westport Connections Program, Both of those programs serve special-needs kids and the Special Education program and they go a long way in containing costs and servicing kids in our schools in their home school and meeting their needs. We are about almost a year under way with the ESS Program and the Connections Program. Full Board reports were done publicly and, so far, just a great success there. We talked about our facility plan as well. We just continued our report on our equity study, gave that report at not last board meeting oh, the April 29th or 25th Board meeting and a series of other instructional initiatives you see here on the slide.

[New slide: Priorities] From a priority perspective, we are always looking to maintain the premier status. I just had a PTA meeting at Greens Farms today. I did a presentation and, afterwards, I talked with a few parents offline and one of them pulled me aside and made it abundantly clear that her family left New York City during the pandemic, like many others, and they chose Westport for the schools. They love the town. I hear that story time and time again and it is our reputation that we are obligated and really feel responsible to maintain. Maintaining our services, obviously, doing it fiscally responsibly, safety and security is always a top priority for us. We have a facilities plan that we have underway. We have been fine-tuned and have brought to a whole new level this year. I don't think any industry has more regulations and mandates than public education in the State and Federal level. And this budget, in particular, we wanted to make sure that we maintained our mental health positions and supports and positions in the instructional core, particularly, those are closest to students teachers and support staff working with students, our special needs students, our regular educational programming. That follows that second bullet which is maintaining that broad core selection opportunity at the high school. We saw a little contracting of that. We wanted to make sure we did not experience that again this year and keep our options broad for our kids. The last priority for this budget, really, is the fact that, operationally, strategically, we made a decision last year to use federal funds to offset and supplant technology budget priorities. When we supplanted that, we had to come into our replacement cycle this year to rectify. So you will see increases in our tech budget and that is really a result of the supplanting that happened last year we are really in the same obsolescence replacement cycle.

[New slide: Recommended FY23 budget] In brief, this is kind of where we started off. What is probably different from this year's budget from last year's budget and my two that I have experienced here, right off the bat, I did not take the Administrator and Central Office budget and just propose that to the Board of Ed. We did what I call some pretty heavy lifting and we reduced over \$2 million worth of requests that we had in the budget and proposed to the Board of Education a 3.78 percent budget. Now, the Board of Education also made some modifications and then, with the savings in healthcare, brought it down to the 3.1 number that Lee had mentioned. Bear in mind, that 10 ½ percent increase was a significant avoidance as Lee had mentioned earlier. I just want to be clear, that is measured in millions what we avoided in costs there. So that was a really, really big opportunity for us that we have taken advantage of. It is also a long-term benefit for the district.

[New slide: Budget basics] Some of the basics here, the Board of Education adopted from my budget, you can see some changes there, changes to enrollment which we'll talk about was really significant. We had to absorb a number of positions again this year that were unplanned for because of move-ins to the district especially over the summer. We have carry-over of unfunded staff positions from the previous year and also from new move-ins; we had to rectify the technology budget and our Special Education programming needed some right size sizing in some of the staffing ratios so you saw some corrections there. Those three drivers actually contribute 1.36 of the overall 3.1 percent increase; 1.36 percent of that comes from those three drivers.

[New slide: Key Budget Drivers] The drivers are maintaining our programming, still responding to the pandemic impact, not just academically but socially and emotionally.



Salaries account for about half of our budget. Again, we had to supplant the budget last year and we had to rectify that technology this year. Special Education has been a driver as you will see in a subsequent slide. Our rates continue to increase and that is in line with what we are seeing across the State. The enrollment numbers at the high school have dropped slightly but what we are seeing is an increase and a leveling off. This year alone, in September of 2021, we had about 30 students show up at Saugatuck who were unplanned for at the start of the year. We knew they were coming over the summer, obviously, but from our budget enrollment projections to the first day of school, 36 students in Saugatuck and then 40 in Long Lots. That is a big impact in staffing when that happens. We did put a request in to offset some of the one-time costs in this budget largely in facilities for the Board of Ed's carryover account.

[New slide: Health Insurance] Health insurance column, I covered this at length. I don't want to spend a lot of time here. John, is this still accurate with the \$800,000 estimate of savings? I know that with a 10½ percent numbers that we got, it certainly is a different view now but can you speak to the health insurance for me?

John Bayers, Assistant Superintendent for HR and General Administration:

Sure. I am actually going to ask Elio to help confirm with the numbers piece and also I think it is important that we do talk about where we would have gone had we stayed in the State Partnership Plan. Elio, can you chime in on that just a bit?

Elio Longo, Schools Chief Financial Officer:

The first bullet on the current slide is the estimated Savings of \$800,000. The closest the gap between the Board of Education request of 3.75 percent and the Board of Finance approved budget of 3.11 percent, we settled on a savings of \$800,000. In terms of true cost avoidance, of not remaining on the State Partnership Plan, it amounts to approximately 2.3 million dollars. Had we stayed on the State Partnership Plan for the upcoming fiscal year, today we would find our budget short approximately \$2.3 million.

Mr. Bayers:

Thank you Elio. I just want to point out the final bullet on the screen from our presentation a few weeks ago. To Lee's point, we have come to an agreement with all of our bargaining units.

Mr. Longo:

[New slide: Personnel] As Superintendent Scarice mentioned, between the Superintendent's proposed budget and the Board of Education's recommended budget, there is close to \$2.4 million of total reductions on the personnel and on the operating side. In terms of personnel, the second column on the current slide lists all the requested positions requests made by Administration and Central Office. In all, 15.5 FTE's. As we move right, we account for all the additions and reductions at the Board of Education level and the final recommended positions that were made part of the fiscal '23 budget. As you can see, the first line item in terms of Administrators is to add a .5 Assistant Principal position at Greens Farms School. This request did not make the final cut. We move on to 102's where we account for teachers assignments. We have a request for 1.0 science teacher at Staples High School. That also did not make the final

cut. #103, Special Area Teachers a combined request of 1.5 positions, 1.0 arts teacher at Staples High School and .5 elementary. We did maintain or hold on to the .5 elementary Special Areas Teachers request. In #104, the Teacher Support Positions they combined 1 1/2 positions, the 1.5 was reduced or cut from the final budget. The #105, Teachers Curriculum and Instructional, a 1.0 for the Teacher and Learning Center, did not make the final cut. The #109 teachers of Special Education requested 2.6 district-wide. We retain 2.4 of the 2.6 FTE request, reduced by 8.2. The #110, Psychologist, the request for a .5 at long Lots Elementary School which was made part of the final budget. #114 is Speech & Hearing Therapist. We had a positive .3 at CES and a minus .1 at Kings Highway School with a net increase of .2 district-wide. In terms of support staff, 121, secretaries, in total, 1.5 FTE's make up of .5 at Greens Farms School, .5 at Staples High School, and .5 at the Payroll Department located at Town Hall, 1.5 was cut from the administrators' request. In #122, Regular Education for Professionals, combined 2.2. Of the 2.2, we are carrying forward a .2 position. And #123, Paraprofessionals for Special Education, 3.0 districtwide, a part of the final budget recommendation. So, in total, a request of 15.5. Superintendent Scarice, working with his administration, reduced 8.7 from the original request settling at 6.8 percent. That was a cost avoidance of approximately \$820,000 for a recommended increase of \$532,000.

Superintendent Scarice:

I can take it from here. So the Staff Leadership Positions was something that I had felt was incredibly important to include in the negotiations of the new teacher's contract. It's been a bit of a void. I brought a vision for a democratic localized control of schools when it comes to leadership and really having teachers and faculty members involved in local leadership teams. So we had that as a priority but when it came down to choosing that versus some of the positions we needed in the classrooms, we made a hard decision to remove that. As far as the total requests here, you also see some movement of para-Professionals the Board of Education had taken action on which was a reduction of four paraprofessionals overall. There was the restoration of the GLA position at the high school and the middle school Library Paraprofessional by the Board of Education which I had reduced originally in the Superintendent's budget and then a reduction of a paraprofessional in the main office at Staples High School but, overall, you can see the numbers at the bottom of the screen of 1.6 requested came down to 1.3 and then the 4.8 FTE.

[New slide: Non-personnel accounts] I can summarize the non-personnel accounts here. As you can see, we've been through this presentation a few times already but the overall request in the non-personnel accounts was over \$4.6 million. The reductions brought it to \$1.1 million. I really want to put your attention to the bottom of the screen because this was something that if we really try to come up with every strategy that we could, to mitigate the increase year-over-year, we looked at accounts that had a one-time expenditure so we would not be supplanting the budget at all. Accessing about \$675,000 of the carryover account which is really for the prudent management of the budget that Elio Longo has done here over a year: Looking at the building projects, preventing any overage of Special education; Transportation with \$300,000 and then

some non-instructional equipment as well. That overall would take away from the hits from to the operating budget from the Board of Ed carryover account.

[New slide: Unfunded positions] Unfunded positions that we are rolling into FY '23, we had 7, the year prior. This year, slightly over 6. Regular Ed teachers, again, big impact as the enrollment at the elementary level and there were some programmatic additions we needed for Special Education, for five paraprofessionals across the entire District, a total of 11.2 between certified and support staff. That total amount was a .72 increase in the total budget.

[New slide: ESSER Grant] This is the technology supplanting that I had mentioned earlier. We had the ESSER Grant last year. We used that. That came down the pike in the eleventh hour when we were in the budget hearings. As that budget was very tight and difficult to pass, we did supplant some of our instructional technology request last year to keep us on our appropriate obsolescence replacement cycle but that does cause a bit of an issue the following year because we have to make up for that. We can see the increase of .59 percent total of that 3.1 per cent increase.

[New slide: Enrollment] Once again in the spotlight, as you can see in enrollment, we have at the elementary level overall, we are increasing across the system. These are modest numbers across the system up and down. Overall the numbers are going to take the system to a slight decrease over the next few years, leveling out and then a slight increase. The elementary level is pretty close to where we were before the original decline and they are feeling that in the buildings now as well. So you are feeling more big kids in there. If we have open space in schools, we find a way to use it. So, we are realizing spaces that we kind of took over are now being needed for instructional reasons, for classrooms. So we did a demonstration for the Board of Education demonstrating the need across the five schools the various degrees that we need to have our specials delivered in the classrooms, even to have a specials classroom. Each school is impacted a little differently every year. But you also notice that we are requesting a modular unit at Coleytown Elementary School. That is the result of the enrollment swing back that we have experienced at the elementary level. It is almost negligible at the middle school, maybe five kids, a decent number at the high school. We spread that out over four grades and the plethora of courses that we offer, it is not a huge impact. We have also we have already been reducing teachers at the high school over the last couple of years and we have seen a material impact of that. We have had the contraction of staff, even with less kids, we have had to close out some sections and students have not gotten all the courses that they have wanted so we have tried to find ways to mitigate that going forward. Step one would be to not cut any more staff at Staples.

[New slide] Interesting charts here as you can see over the 13/14 to the current year, You have the dotted line representing the number of students and the straight line, the solid line, representing the faculty and staff. The FTE for regular education, you can see a very, very even slope all the way to 2020 when the pandemic hit. That is when we really experienced a change because we had more kids at the elementary level and it is incredibly sensitive to the numbers in elementary. It only takes a few kids in a grade level to tip a section to need another section which requires another teacher, and specials areas to increase their load as well. At the same time, we were losing kids in middle school and high school. You can see that second chart to the right illustrate that.

We had this response at the elementary level, how sensitive that is. When you tie in regular education and specials areas, on that bottom chart there, you can see the same thing. We need to have that staffing to respond. It is very sensitive at the elementary level.

[New slide: Students with disabilities] Mike, I'm going to pass it off to you to give a brief and general overview of the Special Education slides.

Mike Rizzo, Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Services:

As Tom mentioned earlier, our Special Education population here over here is growing in the district and that is consistent with what we are seeing across the State. This graph contains about seven years of data. If you go back even to 2000, you see the same trend continuing at the State level since that time. I would add, not only are we seeing more of the students, but increasing levels of complexities within the needs, students with multiple disabilities and comorbidities existing as well as some pretty serious mental health conditions and issues. This budget will continue to meet those needs.

[New slide: Special Education teachers] One of the ways we are doing that, as Tom mentioned earlier, is making sure that we have the proper amount of Special Education teacher staffing to manage the case lots of students. The blue line here represents our FTE's for our Special Education teachers and the dotted red line is the number of Special Education students that we have year to year. As you can see, as the number of students has increased, our staffing has increased, appropriately so, to be able to meet the individual needs of the students.

[New slide: Special Education paraprofessionals] In addition to our teaching staff, we have paraprofessionals as well and this slide is included because we have done a significant amount for as a District looking at our paraprofessional numbers, making sure they are appropriate. As you can see here, as the number of students increases, the number of staff is increasing, as well. It is a need that our students have and we need to make sure that we have the people in place to do that. Westport Public Schools has a long history of successfully meeting the needs of students with disabilities. I think the Westport community as a whole does a wonderful job including people with disabilities in the work that they do. As I said, I believe this budget puts us in a position to continue that good work as a school system and contribute to the community as well.

Mr. Scarice:

[New slide: budget comparisons] One of the ways we like to look at comparisons across the region, the most common is to look at it as per-pupil expenditure. It can be very, very misleading for per pupil. The reason being is that the funding practice practices in different towns vary significantly. For example, one of the district's on this chart here, one of our local districts that we are compared to quite often actually had one time special appropriations or has one time special appropriations put into the health insurance funds, sometimes as much as \$1 million or more. What that does is really skew the per-pupil because it artificially deflates the true cost of the budget. When you look at comparisons across districts, it makes it very, very challenging. That is just one example. There are other things and local budgets that are not in others which, in the aggregate, also has an impact. We looked at the compound annual growth rate from the

years 2013/14 to the present year. We picked 2013/14 because that was the farthest back we could go where we got really good data. We did eight years and we looked at the budget over that time period. And the Delta when it came to the compound annual growth rate. As you can see, Westport falls right in the middle of the DURG. It really is no surprise to us that, with the exception of the outlier of Wilton, and a slight outlier of Ridgefield, you can see most districts are in that 2.4/ 2.5 range. The primary driver of that is because the artificial economy of public school education budgets is driven by collective bargaining, it's driven by arbitrated settlements, which rely on each other's numbers. Even with the negotiations that happen, we are still looking at our peer's numbers and settlements so we all kind of travel as a herd when it comes to increases that average out over a long-term period as we measure it here with a compound annual growth rate. At the bottom you can see here of our budget, you can see here total certified salaries really account for 50 percent of our budget. It goes to show We are a human services profession delivering educational services to students, very human resource driven and when you add in benefits, it is about 80 percent of our budget.

[New slide: Efficiencies] Another efficiencies and cost avoidance practices that we put in place and savings, we have been asked a lot about this. Some of the newer programs I mentioned was the Effective School Solutions Program. Just this year, we avoided \$280,000 in costs coming from our Special Education program. The best part about this it is serving kids in the homeschool in a very, very effective way. Health insurance move to the high-deductible plan we've touched on. We looked at alternatives and are moving to alternatives from the smartboards to a different interactive brand, the whiteboards, and that was a 40 percent reduction in cost. Over the past couple of years, we have reduced the number of buses that we need and we are looking further and more fine-tuned way with the transportation study coming up this summer. Homebound instruction, it is a small number but we are doing our best to take advantage of State programs for kids who need homebound instructions for a variety of reasons. Ongoing efficiencies: our rate lock saved \$280,000, the solar, the virtual net metering, saved about \$218,000 and we continue to have our intensive resource program for autism and spectrum disorder students and we keep them in the home district and serve them well. That's a cost container. We also do a great job across the district which comes at a programming cost perhaps, maybe even a professional culture cost of sharing staff across buildings but it does come along with a financial efficiency. We also partner with the town. Paving is something we have now agreed that Peter Ratkiewich and his department, we rely on him already for the paving plans so, we have handed that over and we just will make accommodations for the paving schedule. Utilities, snow removal and so forth are all partnership efficiencies that we have and we talked about the transportation study that will kick off late this spring. Elio this is all you.

Mr. Longo:

[New slide: FYE balances] The current slide captures the fiscal year end balances of funds to be returned to the town of Westport. These are not funds that were deposited but actual surplus funds that were returned to the town of Westport. In 2017, we returned \$390,000, in '18, \$151,000 and 2019, \$43,000. In 2020, resulted from COVID-19 savings, \$617,000, and in fiscal year 2021, the Board of Education approved the

release of the then carry over account fund balance approximately 50 percent or \$675,000. So, over the course of five fiscal years, we have returned \$1.8 million to the town of Westport of surplus funds. This, in large part, has resulted from the agreement between the Board of Finance and the Board of Education in establishing the carryover account. I have been in this business now for 20 years and I have seen many districts in many years where there is a rush at the end of the fiscal year to spend funds. One of the best State statutes, in my opinion, that was passed was to allow the towns and the Boards of Education to enter into such an agreement establishing carryover accounts. That being said there were additional efficiencies established over these five years and we returned \$1.8 million.

[New slide: Tuition Receipts] This slide is the tuition receipts that are transferred to the town. We do allow our employees to enroll their students in the Westport Public Schools if there is a seat available and If the seat does not trigger additional or incremental costs where we would have to add an additional educator to our FTE's. We collect receipts from our employees and, in turn, they are transferred to the town of Westport Finance Department. Over the course of five fiscal years, we have collected \$934,000 of tuition receipts and transferred the funds to the town.

[New slide: Education Cost Sharing Grant] Education Cost Sharing Grant is a direct payment to the town. In the same five-year period, \$2.4 million of State of Connecticut assistance for town of Westport educational purposes.

[New slide: Board of Finance approved appropriation] This final slide is the Board of Finance approved appropriation of 3.11 percent. The starting point was the Administrators Central Office budget of 5.71 percent. Superintendent Scarice reduced the original budget by \$2.4 million to arrive at \$130.3 million, 3.78 percent. The Board of Education's reduction of \$33,000 led to a Board of Education recommended budget at 3.75 percent. The Board of Finance reduction which is predicated on the now successful transfer to the highly deductible plan insurance with a possible savings of \$800,000, which reduced the total overall budget by .64 percent to arrive at a Board of Finance approved appropriation of \$129.5 million, year over year an increase of \$3.9 million, a 3.11 percent increase.

[New slide: Other budgets and debt service] Also, before the RTM this evening for your consideration and for your review and approval, are the supplemental budgets as well as the debt service assigned to the Board of Education. The private schools' budget in support of Greens Farms Academy and the Pierpont School, we have a separate budget request, in total \$529,000. We do operate a pre-school located at Coleytown Elementary School, Stepping Stones Preschool, where we collect tuitions from typical students that are enrolled in the program. We anticipate collecting \$199,000 during FY 2023, in turn, an offset budget that expenditures will match the collected revenues based on reductions that are made during the year to match expenditures to revenues. The final line item here is the debt service assigned to the Board of Education for capital projects over the years. Mr. Conrad has assigned \$8.4 million to the Board of Education.

Mr. Scarice: We'll be happy to respond to any questions folks might have.

Mr. Wieser:

Mr. Scarice, we'll get to those after a few committee reports. Thank you for that great presentation. I especially thank you for bringing along so many members of your team so those of us who haven't been at the committee meetings, we all get a chance to see everybody and talk to everybody and it's very useful. So, thank you.

**Committee reports**

Lauren Karpf, district 7:

We met on April 12 via zoom. Eight of our nine members were present. Given that two-thirds have heard the presentation and it was so complete, I really don't want to go through the background and everything in here. Everyone has it in their packet. Just to highlight some of the challenges this budget year. The projected certified salaries for FY23 amount to a 3.2 percent year over year increase, which is more than the 3.11 percent increase in the budget being presented. Enrollment increases we went through, Special Education increases in staffing, One thing I want to point out, I know Tom and Lee spoke the praises of John but not only John, the whole team here, really this was the smoothest budget process I've seen since I've been on the RTM. I know the Board of Finance Chair made a similar comment on her end. This was a team effort from the beginning. The budget is very lean. We discussed the efficiencies and the cost avoidances. We spent a good amount of time on facilities; the lessons that can be learned from CMS; maintenance of the schools; how to keep the students and staff comfortable and we decided that a separate meeting in May or June will be scheduled to discuss these issues in more detail. There was a motion and the committee voted 8-0 to recommend RTM approval of the Board of Education budget.

Finance Committee, Don O'Day, district 3:

I, too, will try to streamline but I had already streamlined. It is \$129.5 million or 3.11 percent voted unanimously by the Board of Finance and that is before us this evening. Tom and Elio mentioned the benefit of the ESSER or the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds that were used this year making the year over year comparison somewhat skewed. The 3.11 percent, all things being equal would have been lowered by about 60 basis points so even more attractive. While the expense management is quite strong and the tagger for expenses since 2013 as Tom and Elio pointed out was 2.45 percent, if you look at the cost per student over that period of time, it is 3.51 percent so higher by a little bit more than one percent. It's really a numerator and denominator issue. The expenses are the numerator. They are still rising while enrollment, the denominator, is falling. We talked about that a little bit. I think Lee and Tom both talked about their commitment to doing whatever they can on non-classroom challenges first. That would be the Administration taking on transportation which has always been a tough nut. The costs there are over \$7 million/year so anything there can happen but it is pretty clear to me and to others on the committee that the commitment is there this time and that is a very positive thing. The town and the Administration continue to work on shared services. Elio talked about returning excess funds to the school, \$1.8 million but I think what they also didn't say and they probably should have is that the very strong and careful fiscal management by Elio and his team and really everyone leads to the ability for the District to hire 11 more teachers outside of the budget when you have far more additional enrollment than you anticipated. This year's

enrollment was supposed to be 35,303 and ended up at 35,345 all in the els and that is what prompted the 11 teachers. Staples and the middle schools dropped. Next year's enrollment calls for a continued total reduction. Elementary schools will be up by 56, middle schools will decrease by 36 and Staples will be down by 85 or five percent. With those projections, both middle schools and Staples will see their lowest enrollment in more than 10 years if the numbers come in within budget. From a staff perspective, total staff is 943 next year. That is an increase of five. All of the FTE increases, as Tom and Mike have indicated, are Special Education teachers and support staff. Looking at next year compared to 2013, the benchmark that the administration set, staffing will have increased by 35 FTE while enrollment for that same period of time will have fallen by nine percent. That's 516 students. So, staff up by 35 in 10 years and enrollment down by 516 kids but there's a story there. Special Education staff increases drive more than the total of 35. In fact, Special Ed paras will be higher by 32 while Special Ed teachers will increase by 12 net a 44 increase in Special Education staff over 10 years. I think what is important to say is this is particularly true since the paras are the lion's share of the increase, we acknowledge and praise the Board of Education Chair and the administration for correctly calling our Special Ed paraprofessionals, in fact, all paraprofessionals as critical care staff because they are really the first in line for a great educational outcome for our kids. On the facility side, yes, we need to do better. We are beginning to. First steps have been taken with creation of a robust five-year capital plan. It's clear, this renewed focus must continue with all parties, the funding bodies, town, schools, partnering for the best outcome for everyone in Westport. As everyone has said, once again, a shout out to the Board of Education, the Administration, the Board of Finance and the RTM committees and their Chairs for getting us to where we are this evening. The RTM Finance Committee voted unanimously 8-0 to approve the operating budget for the 2022/2023 school year as we did for the other ancillary budgets. We can talk about that now or in another discussion. Jeff, it depends what you want to do. All were approved unanimously.

**Members of the Westport electorate – no comments**

Ms. Karpf read the resolution and it was seconded.

**RESOLVED:** That the Board of Education's budget items as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting be adopted and the sum of \$138,654,768 for the Board of Education Budget is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures.

**Members of the RTM**

Seth Braunstein, district 6:

I said this in committee but I'd like to say it in front of everybody who is here this evening, I think that the Board of Education has done a remarkable job managing the health care expenses, in particular. They have charted a course through unsteady waters. In a sense they have gained the system extremely well. I would just say...more power to you. Job well done. I'm eager to see how you will adeptly manage the health care expenses in particular. So, thank you. Congratulations.

Ross Burkhardt, district 3:



I'm just curious a little bit about the change in the health care plan going to a high deductible plan. How high are the deductibles?

Mr. Longo:

The deductibles are structured that the employee only is a \$2,000 deductible; employee plus one is \$4,000 and family is \$4,000.

Mr. Burkhardt:

Just out of curiosity, how does that compare with the State plan?

Mr. Longo:

The State plan is not a high deductible plan. Just a few years back, the Board of Education was on a high deductible plan and the deductibles have not changed. When the Board of Education was self-funded back three or four years, at that time, the deductibles were also \$2,000 and \$4,000.

Chris Tait, district 1:

Thank you very much Superintendent and all your team, John Bayers and Elio. Great job. I just want to make it clear, I got a pretty good eye opener the other night from the Board of Finance looking at Long Lots and some of the things we've got coming down the road in the capital plan, in the next five years, we are looking at a 10 or 15 percent increase in taxes. That is something we need to be aware of looking at this going forward from a school perspective. I just want to make that clear to the RTM what we are looking at in a couple of years.

**By roll call vote, the motion passes 30-0.**

Mr. Wieser:

Thank you to the Board of Education for a great year and a great process. Thank you all.

Ms. Karpf read the the second part of that Agenda Item and it was seconded.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:** That the Town of Westport General Fund Budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, as recommended by the Board of Finance and approved or amended by the Representative Town Meeting, be adopted and the sum of the Board of Education Budget, the First Selectman's Budget, and the Other Agencies and Organizations Budget in the amount of \$222,765,588 is hereby appropriated to meet expenditures and that for the purpose of raising a tax on the Grand List of 2021, the sum of \$222,765,588 is hereby appropriated.

Mr. Conrad: Those numbers are correct

**Members of the Westport electorate – no comments**

**Members of the RTM – no comments**

**By show of hands, the motion passes unanimously 30-0.**

Mr. Wieser:

The vote is unanimous. Once again, I want to say thank you to the Board of Education, the Board of Finance who came before, to the First Selectwoman and all of her Department Heads and all of the people who have worked so hard on these budgets in a very trying time. You've done a great job. And, to the RTM, I thank you again for your very positive approach; your in depth thoughtful questions. This is a tough time and a time when asking hard questions is very important. And you have done just that. I thank the Board of Education for responding in detail to our questions. Let's hope for the best for the new school year and fiscal year. Good luck to all of you and thank you.

**The secretary read item #10 of the call - To take such action as the meeting may determine, upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Board of Education, to approve an appropriation in the amount of \$439,000.00 from Westport's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, for Middle School Project.**

**Presentation**

Ms. Goldstein:

Tom, I'm just going to say a couple of things. Tom and Anthony, our Assistant Superintendent of curriculum are going to do the presentation. I just wanted to lead off with a couple of things. One, I hope you all got a chance to look through this. This course that we're asking for for the two middle schools is really terrific and I wanted to highlight that, unlike the ropes course which you looked at a month ago, these will be open to the community, not during school hours. So, this is an ask for the middle school but is also open to the whole community. We hear this question over and over, the question of need versus want. I know that we, as residents and elected officials, have opinions about that. Jessica spoke beautifully about it but I wanted to answer from the Board of Education point of view. It came up with the ropes course. In a \$130 million budget, can't you find \$63,000 for this ropes course that you really want, that you are saying is so great for kids' social and emotional health. The same question would be for this middle school project. The truth is no, we can't. If we had that money, we would spend it on teachers. We have three math coaches at the elementary school level who work with our math teachers. That comes out of ESSER funding. Next year, if we want that in our budget, that's already three teachers that we have to add. Yesterday at our Board meeting, we had a presentation from our visual arts teacher at the secondary level. We really need another art teacher in the high school. That's not in our budget. We know we have a lot of facility and maintenance needs. I can't speak exactly as to everyone's opinion about want versus need but I can say this is the kind of thing that we know is terrific for our kids and there is just no way we can fund it in our budget and that's why we're asking; that's why we're putting forth this ARPA request. Also, I mentioned this in committee, I can tell you as a former PTA President at the middle school, secondary fund raising at the middle school at the PTA level, it's not what it is at the elementary schools. The PTA's cannot fund this in the way that our elementary

PTA's have provided us with playgrounds. So, this is kind of the *wow* but we can't fund the *wow* with our budget. That's why we're coming to you tonight. And with that, Tom, please...

Mr. Scarice:

Thank you for that opening, Lee. Some background: over the summer and fall, we did planning with the Federal Funding that was flowing directly to school districts. We were asked, specifically, because one of the demographics that possibly been impacted and suffered the most during the pandemic is kids. I think that was widely recognized across the town, across the community, across the State, across the Nation. Our kids really suffered a great deal so we were invited, if we had some ideas, to bring them and we were ready with some ideas and we brought them. We really are trying to find opportunities that meet the social and emotional needs of our kids and also trying to find opportunities that not only would the school system benefit, by the way, the kids in our schools are the kids in the community, but also, that any community member would be able to take advantage of as well and benefit from. This program, in particular, in the middle school, we are very excited about, one of the few middle schools that offer down time during the day for kids. We call it recess but it is a little different than you think of recess at the elementary level. It is time to turn the cognitive brain off a little bit and recharge and refresh and do something that kids were at a loss in doing during the pandemic which is socialize. There is a developmental necessity to that especially for school aged kids and more so at that middle age level where there is identity seeking going on; there is a sense of belonging being developed with peer groups. It's very different from the primary ages. Having the opportunity for unstructured time for kids to socialize but also having appropriate opportunities for them to do things that are at their age level. What you are going to see here is a presentation that has the FitCore Extreme Program obstacle course that benefits all kids from teens to adults, has a number of benefits. Again, this has been through both the Finance and Education Committees. This program has social and emotional benefits, the physical exercise piece, the interacting with peers, if kids want to push themselves. This [slide] shows what the extremem playground looks like. I was a middle school principal so I know what middle school kids do and I can envision kids having some fun, pushing themselves on this but also I can envision some of these stations being spots for kids to want to hang and socialize. If you ever watch an adolescent watch TV sometime in a living room, sometimes their head and the top of their bodies are hanging off the couch and they are very awkward. I would even go to the chiropractor based on the way that they are hanging. It's very age appropriate to be moving their bodies in different ways and the socializing component with it, as well, is really right in the sweet spot of this age group. You can see we have playground options and customizations. These are actual samples of some of the equipment. Dr. Bruno, perhaps you could do a better job than I could of elaborating on some of the equipment itself.

Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning:

This is the configuration that we priced out so when we talk about the budget, seven or eight individual pieces here. They can be done as a circuit or they can be done individually. There is some variation based on the site and what fits best. They might not

look exactly the same but this is the one we priced out. It is seven to eight unique pieces. They are designed specifically for middle school aged students to adults. This idea was really attractive to the student body. As Tom said, this is really an opportunity for the students to get outside. A lot of students are looking for something a little bit different and this is something that really affords students the opportunity to get out, exercise, socialize. During the pandemic, a large number of students were isolated for a long time and that social development has been more compromised than the academic for the students. That's why we're targeting something like this.

Mr. Scarice:

[New slide] You can see the satellite view here of Bedford. Along the building, we have some options. It looks like wide-open land around it but there are restrictions. Right near the building, you'll see it's too close to instruction. We're pretty confident of the primary site right now. It's right near our modular units were. It would be a perfect spot if kids were out during recess time. I think playground equipment is really a misnomer when you look at the equipment and see what the potential is for physical activity and beyond that, what it offers the community as well. There are people on the Bedford and Coleytown Middle School campus all the time after school hours. There are events going on constantly, especially during the fall, spring and summer, probably not as much during the deep winter. It is a great opportunity for people who are already there or for people to make it a point to go and get a workout. [New slide] At Coleytown Middle School, right in the back, you can see there are two locations next to each other. Again, we feel confident in that first site but we have an alternate just in case. This is where students are congregating in that general area already during their downtime right after lunch. [New slide] Jen Fava has been a great partner. When the pandemic began and we were coming back to school in the fall of 2020, we had to find ways to get creative in our lunchtime. We borrowed tables from Parks and Rec. and we used them. We were able to spread kids out and thin out the population in the cafeteria. Well, things are back to normal in Parks and Rec. and Jen would like the tables back. We were able to get her to hold tight until June and we want to take advantage of some outdoor seating, as well, as part of this package. So, kids will not only have that physical element for socializing but also have some shaded outdoor seating, maybe even bring a lunch or snack out there as well. It is a very comfortable, casual setting and gives a very homey feel to the campus. [New slide] Overall, this is the Bedford budget. There is the FitCore equipment and benches, some surfacing with playground mulch that is needed there for safety purposes, site work installation and some fencing and that is \$222,000 for Bedford. A very close number for Coleytown, the FitCore, the surfacing. They are already equipped with some outdoor stations and so forth so they have seating and tables, so just site work installation. The total is slightly less at \$217,000 at Coley Middle. I'll turn it back to the full RTM. I know that the Finance and Education Committees have already been a part of the presentation but we're happy to answer questions from anyone.

### **Committee reports**

Education Committee, Ms. Karpf:

I will be brief again because that was so detailed and covered everything. We met April 12 at the same meeting where we covered the budget. Eight of the nine members were present. We discussed the FitCore circuits to be installed at Bedford and Coleytown Middle Schools providing, as we heard, an activity for recess. Currently, there are so few options, only basketball and Four Square. This will provide, as Tom described, developmentally appropriate activity for them. It will also be utilized during the PE class. I think an important part here is how accessible this will be to the community at all times. I know that other towns, such as New Canaan have a similar circuit that is very highly used. This circuit can be completed individually or as a group. We discussed costs for insurance, low maintenance and associated costs required. The committee was very much in favor of the project and the motion passed 8-0.

Finance Committee, Mr. Braunstein:

Quite frankly, it's been so well fleshed out between the presentation that the Board made and the pieces that Lauren wrapped up but I know that Stephen did put the work in to create a report...

Stephen Shackelford, district 8:

I'll be fast. The Finance Committee met on April 13 to consider this request for the ARPA funding for fitness equipment. Lee Goldstein led off the discussion by explaining how the equipment would be great for middle schoolers and also used by the whole community. Ms. Goldstein also explained how it would be impossible to raise this kind of money to do this through the PTA fundraising, for instance, and that's why the ARPA money is particularly important for this kind of a project. Superintendent Scarice then spoke about this kind of equipment and a lot of what he said tonight about how this would be a magnet for this age group in all sorts of ways they could hang out outside and get exercise. RTM members at the meeting asked how the administration decided on this particular equipment. Mr. Scarice said that they looked at numerous options and this was very popular with both the faculty and the students. Mr. Scarice also confirmed that even though the appropriation was budgeted for specific FitCore equipment, the Administration is going to bid out the project with the typical RFP process which is required for Board of Education expenditures over a certain amount, even though, technically, this is an expenditure of Federal ARPA funds. RTM members suggested the Board get ahead of any environmental issues of the sort that came up in earlier RTM votes and the Administration said they were. There was discussion about the Parks and Rec. benches which Superintendent Scarice has covered. There were some RTM members who expressed concern about spending this money when we have big fiscal challenges coming up. It was suggested that we perhaps tap the brakes on expenditures like this. Other RTM members acknowledged these concerns but still strongly support the proposal given its alignment with the letter and the spirit of the ARPA and all the work done by the Administration in deciding on this particular proposal which is precisely the kind of proposal that many on the RTM had encouraged the Administration to explore. At the conclusion of the discussion, we moved to approve the requested funding. It was seconded and the Finance Committee approved it 7-1.

**Members of the Westport electorate – no comments**

Ms. Karpf read the resolution and it was seconded.

**RESOLVED:** That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Board of Education, the sum in the amount of \$439,000.00 from Westport's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, for Middle School Project is hereby appropriated.

**Members of the RTM**

Dick Lowenstein, district 5:

This is going to be available after hours for the community, you said?

Mr. Scarice: Correct.

Mr. Lowenstein: What are those hours?

Mr. Scarice:

It won't be lighted but during daylight hours like any other playgrounds we have in the elementary schools or ballfields. During school hours, it would not be used. Our PE program is looking to incorporate some of this into the curriculum as well.

Mr. Lowenstein: Will it have supervision during school hours?

Mr. Scarice: Absolutely.

Mr. Lowenstein: How about in the community hours?

Mr. Scarice: No. Our playgrounds don't have that now.

Mr. Lowenstein:

Is there any real risk with this equipment compared to other equipment?

Mr. Scarice:

I don't believe so. We have climbing structures throughout the district. The high ropes course at the high school will not be accessible after hours.

Mr. Lowenstein:

When we are talking ARPA, we are essentially talking OPM, other people's money. As someone said, it's easy to say yes on ARPA projects because it doesn't affect the finances of the town. Let me give it thought. Thank you very much.

Wendy Batteau, district 8:

So these are meant to be used during phys. ed. classes. When else are they meant to be used by the kids?

Mr. Scarice:

Actually, they will probably be used quite a bit during lunch recess time. That's every day, for all three grades. You are talking opportunity for 1100 or 1200 kids at the middle school level to access this on a daily basis. Chris Water who is our Curriculum Coordinator in the district for all the schools has specific units in physical education that she sees incorporating as part of that.

Ms. Batteau:

After the last meeting, I talked with people I worked with on various projects like Hole in the Wall Gang Camp and a number of other projects, with Edutopia, which I was one of the co-founders and a number of other groups. What I'd like to know is what kind of help or accommodations or what kind of equipment like this are you going to provide for the kids who are not physically fit, have emotional challenges, who are shy, who have some kind of physical challenges that makes them feel awkward and out of place because I had worried about that in the beginning and I understand now that it's not just my concern, that it's really a valid general concern and I'm worried. In all that equipment that we saw, there were these spry physically fit children hanging from the equipment and so on. What about the overweight girl? What about the kid who people don't know has asthma or joint problems? What I'm seeing is a lot of equipment for your basic Westport privileged kid and not the challenged kids.

Mr. Scarice:

I know that Dr. Buono has information and I certainly have information and would be happy to respond. Just a couple of things...The last presentation we did was on the high ropes course at the high school and that's a very different program from this. On the lunch/recess side, this is optional for kids. Becoming part of a PE program, I have complete confidence that our faculty are not only sensitive to the different needs of kids who have a different readiness-level for academics as well as physically. That's what PE teachers are trained to do. But also, we are required to know if a student has a medical condition. You listed a couple, asthma, possibly some joint issues and so forth, that's a requirement for us to know and to accommodate. I know we've already settled the high ropes one but I'll come back to that briefly for a second, there are roles where kids have a sense of authentic inclusion without needing to participate. They can participate at different levels. The same thing here. If you take a look at the equipment itself, there are all different types of levels of complexity, if kids want to go further or not.

Dr. Buono:

I just want to say we've had a lot of conversations about that. The picture depicts one possible configuration but there are a variety of different pieces that have a different level of accessibility to kids. Our plan, moving forward if approved, is to really involve kids in making those decision and trying to have a circuit that is more balanced and accessible to all students. Those are some of the conversations that we've had, but if it is finalized, we would have to take a closer look at that and finalize those decisions and we have had initial conversations around that, Wendy.

Ms. Batteau:

Therefore, all the equipment is aimed at the physically fit, emotionally fit.

Dr. Buono:

No. There are a variety of pieces that are accessible to a variety of different levels of physical fitness, even accessible to certain handicapped students, as well. Those are the things we are looking to incorporate.

Mr. Scarice:

Our elementary schools, I believe all of them have adaptive equipment but I really want to distinguish between physical and emotional, the way you describe both of those. It is critically important when we have our teachers working with kids, they are incredibly sensitive to the different emotional states that kids have, maybe on a given day, their readiness levels, their confidence levels and so forth. We do a lot physical activity now in our PE program. This is just equipment that augments it. It's not that our PE program is overhauled because we have some new equipment. We haven't even designed how we would incorporate the units yet. This is initially for that social experience for kids outside because right now, as Dr. Burk described, we have four square and basketball. I think that's more limited for kids. If that's what we have right now, to me, that's compromising the state of our kids. We are looking to expand that and give kids opportunities to have more interactive experience physically during recess.

Ms. Batteau: I'm sure that the PE teachers will do what they need to do.

Jack Klinge, district 7:

This is going to be kind of a tough talk for me because over 25 years, I've probably had issue with three or four of this kind of investment on behalf of our students. As most of you know, I've been a substitute teacher for most of those twenty-odd years. In this case, I'm not sure we're going to get enough bang for our buck. It's really a lot of money, \$450,000 out of the \$8 million of ARPA funds. I'm not sure we're going to get enough real use by the kids who we expect to take advantage of this investment. Let me give you an example: I've probably monitored well over 100 recess/lunch time periods. Let me take you through the timing when it's available to these kids. They have lunch and then they are offered the chance to go outside for recess, exercise and socializing. That only occurs when the weather is good which is probably 120 out of 180 school days. So, they line up by the door by the cafeteria and, in the case of Coley Middle School, it's a short walk to where the basketball nets are and the four square. At Bedford, it's a bit further to get out to the parking lot and would be a lot further to get to option #2. They are out there for about 12 or 13 minutes exercising. What do they do right now? First of all, only about 2/3 of the kids leave the cafeteria. The rest prefer to stay in, finish their lunch, talk to their friends, work on homework and some degree of socializing. Those outside, you get 10 or 12 boys who play basketball, a couple of kids who play four square and for the most part, the 10 or 12 minutes are used to socialize with friends from the different pods who they don't see and there's not a lot of time for anything out there. Put that in the context of the fact that when the school bell rings after school, everybody runs to the school bus. So, they are not going to be using them after school or before school or on weekends. I defy anybody to tell me that there are kids in Westport who have time on the weekend between music practice, dance class,



lacrosse, soccer and goodness knows what else. I don't see these facilities being used when school is out of session. They will just sit there with an occasional family or kid who may drop by. So, I'm really concerned we're not going to get a lot of bang for our buck. We need more kids, better weather and 13 minutes a day is not working for me. I loved the idea of the ropes at Staples. That made a lot of sense. This investment of this much money does not make sense to me. So, I am asking you to think before you vote, are we really going to get enough value out of this amount of money benefitting enough kids or people in Westport over a long enough period of time? I think the answer is probably not. I would rather wait and see if we can't find better alternatives for \$450,000 of ARPA money. By the way, I talked to a number of kids in the schools and there was no research done with the kids saying 'What do you think about this?' Nothing was done formally or informally during connections or pod meetings. A couple of kids I talked to today said 'Oh yeah, they are going to put a park out there with benches and trees and flowers.' I said 'No, no. It's going to be exercise workout stuff.' They said, 'Ew, who would want to do that after lunch? I want to meet my friends and socialize.' So, I'm going to vote no and look for a better option to spend \$450,000.

Liz Milwe, district 1:

I think it's a great project. We just went through a pandemic where the kids were not able to go outside and this is an opportunity. There are so many creative things that can be done on all these different apparatuses. The kids will figure it out. There will be games. Kids will hang out in one area. The more we can do so that kids can be outside after what has gone on for the last two years, I support it. I think the kids will use it in the afternoon. I see the kids outside on the weekends by the middle school. I think we need to rethink. There are so many things that need to be done outside now. We have spent two years for the kids to be stuck inside and there weren't enough places in town for the kids to be outside. For them to have an activity outside that is social and at the same time using their bodies, so, I'm going to vote for this.

Jaime Bairaktaris, district 4:

I'm actually very excited about this. As I said before, I work in a middle school and I also went to Bedford when we moved from Redding here to Westport. I have to say I have a lot of kids in Redding who would be really annoyed to hear that we are getting this here. Just as I was excited that we are getting the ropes course here in Westport, now I have something that I want back in Redding. I think recess, because of the size of the schools and the way they are situated, is a little more unstructured because it really is limited to that parking lot area. At least it was when I was there, which is fine because you have your basketball, your four square and games like that which are hard to integrate into for some kids. I think this is a really good mix of unstructured versus structured socialization and exercise for kids. I think it will be different by grade. The eighth graders might use it to hang out on. We have a small piece of exercise equipment where our eighth graders use it to hang upside down and have conversations. That's great. We're happy with that because they're using it. Some kids are going to go crazy for this because it is going to give them something to use in an area where typically middle school is not known for its recess. I just think it's a great opener for further activities for recess time. It might mitigate some behavior strategies.

Unstructured sometimes does that. If you ever ask a kid going from elementary to middle school, what is your biggest fear? It usually is, there's no more recess. I just think it's a nice way for us to open the door to give a big grouping of kids, maybe not all kids, something to look forward to and maybe facilitate some good social and emotional behavior during recess. I will be voting yes and I am actually very excited about this one.

Arline Gertzoff, district 3:

I just wondered about a couple of things. First of all, are there any other programs like this that are a bit more cost effective? I do think it's a very large outlay of money. Also, are there any districts nearby that are using it? Thirdly, how will it be supervised? I gather when people use it on weekends there won't be any supervision. Also, what about vandals? I'm not against it. I just think it's a bit heavy duty pricewise.

Mr. Scarice:

I think I heard four questions: cost efficiency, other districts, supervision and vandalism. [Yes] As far as cost factor, there are about 1200 kids at the middle school level. Again, not every kid will be using it but just by that number, we are talking about \$365/student. There is at least 10 years useful life for this. You saw the cost breakdown. A big part of it is site preparation. The equipment is not cheap but site preparation is about \$75,000 for each school. Regarding other districts, I know that New Canaan has one there and I've had reports from colleagues about how well it has worked out for their middle level learners. As far as supervision, during the school day, there are adults there whenever kids are outside. We have certified and support staff out there. Weekends, we would not be supervising it obviously but we don't have supervision on our basketball courts or our current playgrounds at the elementary level that we have right now. As far as vandalism, the town has been very generous working to outfit the entire campus with cameras so we do have camera systems outside to supervise our grounds.

Dr. Buono:

As far as vandalism, Tom, I would just add that we have play-scapes at all the elementary schools and that hasn't been an issue.

Mr. Tait:

Once this is approved, this will be incorporated into your budget every year as maintenance, correct?

Mr. Scarice:

As far as ongoing maintenance, there's really not a great deal. Maybe something with the surface, Anthony, the mulch?

Dr. Buono:

I think with all the playgrounds, we have periodic safety checks. There is a cost but it is very minimal. And then there is surfacing. It depends on the kind of surfacing we get. If we go with the wood chips, they just need to be replaced periodically and we do that with our existing playscapes. That would be a recurring cost as well.

Mr. Tait:

When you talk about the surface you use, just from the town's perspective, insurance-wise. If someone is there and a Saturday and gets hurt?

Mr. Scarice: Elio, if you have feedback on that.

Mr. Longo: It is covered under the town's and Board of Education general liability policy.

Mr. Tait:

I appreciate that. So you are covered there. I go back and forth. I hear what Jack said. I do have two girls in the system so I know what a fabulous job you do with them. But, recess, I asked my daughters and they said they're out there for like 10 minutes. So, I think there are some challenges there. Back in my day, we had the old Nike site which is now Bedford and we did something similar within the school budget. The seating, what are we looking at? May, June, September, October. The rest of the time, it's really too cold out there.

Mr. Scarice:

Not really. We have kids wearing shorts in February. Kids are outside a lot. Up until Thanksgiving actually.

Mr. Tait:

Thanks. I guess my concern is that we have maintenance in the budget. Going forward, I wanted to make sure it was easy to do. Insurance is covered. I appreciate the fact that anybody will be able to use it after school hours, correct? [Yes. Correct.] So, you won't be kicked off on a Saturday afternoon...

Mr. Scarice:

No. To that point, as far as the concern that was raised earlier about use after hours, if you drive past those campuses on weekends and after hours during fall and spring especially, there's tons of people on those campuses. We are confident that our kids and their siblings will do that. Not every kid. There are 1200 kids. But we did some small focus groups as well and we believe they will use it after hours.

Ms. Bram:

My greatest fear here, I know you said it is open to the community, God forbid I ever get to go up on one of those ropes! I think this is brilliant. I am very exacting, as everybody knows, about the ARPA funds, the purposes of ARPA, which is mitigating the effect of the pandemic and I don't know anybody who has felt the effects of COVID more than our kids. Socializing is such an important part of school and they were separated. So, anything that promotes socializing and I love the fact that these are interactive rather than competitive, being someone who was called on last in team sports; I think the idea that it is outdoors is great in terms of mitigating contagion, especially with those tables, so I think it fits right in with ARPA protocols and principles. It is a brilliant solution and I support it.

Sal Liccione, district 9:

Tom, thank you guys and your staff for doing a great job this year. Have you guys met with the First Selectwoman about the second tranche? Are you going to want more rescue funds?

Mr. Scarice:

We've actually funneled all of our requests through the First Selectwoman's office and the Board of Finance, Sal. These first two that have come before the RTM have already been at those levels. The last entails a variety of projects at the elementary level. We wanted to make sure we were equitable to all three levels. After the Board of Education approved the elementary programs last night, those will go to the First Selectwoman's office and then the Board of Finance.

Mr. Liccione: How about the second tranche?

Mr. Scarice: This program here, yes.

Lori Church, district 9:

I have two children and 11 nieces and nephews in Westport. I can absolutely guarantee that every single one of them have been socially and emotionally affected. That's not news to anybody but I felt like I wanted to start there. They have lost hours and hours of unstructured time with their friends to socialize and interact face to face. Instead, they have spent so much time alone not having a chance to see each other and be together. We won't know, for years and years, the ramifications of that. Will this particular playground or playgrounds immediately solve all of that trauma for every single sixth through eighth grader? Absolutely not. But, there is no one magic bullet that is going to magically solve it for them. We won't know for years what has happened to them and we won't be able to fix it with one thing. I disagree with Jack that this is too expensive. This is one piece, an opportunity to give these specific students to have a destination to go to that they can then hang out, sort of like, you need an excuse to chat. You can't just sit across the table from each other at that age. Adults need that too, right? You are doing something so that then you can chat and interact. It is so important for all of us but especially our children who have been affected so much. We need to just chip away at some of this trauma and slowly heal what they have been through. To Arline's point, there might be other programs that could also do some of this work. Frankly, I hope that Tom and your team continue thinking about it and brainstorming additional ideas. Someone has said that with ARPA, it can't be a program that has ongoing expenses so this is a great option. It will do a lot of good. It will not incur additional expenses down the road. It will give our children a destination to start healing some of this that they have been through. Thanks for listening and thanks to Tom and the whole team for this idea. I will be voting yes.

Mr. O'Day:

I will be a no for this proposal. Let me just share some of my reasons why. I tend to agree with Jack. It's a good amount of money to spend for essentially recess. Recess

isn't that long of a time and there will be some limited use, I'm sure after it is installed and I do believe it will pass so it will be installed. And after hours. But my gut is telling me it's not as much. The real driver is two reasons for being against this. The ARPA funds, it's not a fishes and loaves kind of situation. It's going to run out and I believe what we have is a major expenditure for Long Lots and another major expenditure coming up for CES and I want to look at all funds as fungible. I am just applying some personal financial discipline to this town-wide decision to say we do have to tap the brakes on almost everything. This isn't a must have. This would be great. My personal opinion is we have to look at this as a community and say we have to look at what's coming down the road in two, three or four years. Huge, huge numbers. And anybody who thinks that Long Lots which we think might be 70, that's going up. CES, that could go up too. We went through the Board of Finance budget and we looked at OPEB, investments could be falling. I just think it's time to be a little bit more prudent and use ARPA funds for must haves. I don't think this quite gets there. Great thing but I'm not sure it quite gets there. That's why I'm a no.

Louis Mall, district 2:

If you want to talk about tapping the brakes on ARPA funds, last night, I tried tapping the brakes on designing parking lots with ARPA funds so we've spent \$400,000 to design the parking lots, not build them. So far, the expenditures for Public Works, what I consider infrastructure, we are almost at \$2 million of the \$8.4 million already committed so if we wanted to tap the brakes, we could tap the brakes along the way before we get to those most impacted by COVID. It's been our kids. Listening to the discussion in the Education Committee, I came away with our children, our teachers and administrators, and our parents, parents of school children have been very impacted by COVID. One of the things I walked away from the last Education meeting was some of the concerns that some of the parents of children in the school system were saying. My wife has a saying, "You're as happy as your least happy child." When I hear my nieces talking about their kids and what they've been through, I hear what Lori Church is saying, I didn't experience that with my child in our school system. We're lucky. She got to experience everything that Westport had to offer and more. A lot of these kids have missed out on what first day of school is, prom, graduation, their first year in college, it's been really tough. So, what we're talking about is spending \$439,000 of the \$8.4 million on our middle school children and our community at large on weekends. When you go to a ballgame or soccer game and so forth, some of the siblings get bored and want to go off and do something else, you think they wouldn't love to go and hang out on these ropes and so forth, they are going to get used plenty when there are other activities going on in these fields. I am concerned about the social and emotional skills that these kids have missed out on, their mental health. This also provides something for their physical fitness and their physical health. In my opinion, this is what ARPA was meant to be. Those who were most impacted by COVID are deserving of the funds. One last thing: So far for the mental health and human services, we have spent to date, \$185,000. I don't think we're getting the money to the people who need it most, those who have been impacted by COVID. I am supporting this wholeheartedly.

Ms. Karpf:

I completely echo Lou, Lauren, and Liz comments. I absolutely respect the fact that Jack spoke to some of those kids who weren't excited about it. I was surprised to hear that because I also spoke to some incoming sixth graders and eighth graders and they could not have been more excited about it. What I've heard over and over from kids from both middle schools, more from Bedford, is that there isn't as much to do at recess at all and that they are hanging out with the same group of kids. They're not meeting other kids. I think this will help different cliques, so to speak, merge together with a common interest during recess. Aside from that, this is something for the town as a whole. We have elementary school playgrounds and there's Compo Beach but there really isn't anything else to do. I am at these fields seven days a week and they are packed. It's not just the weekends. There are practices at every field. Siblings are there and the kids play before and after practice. These will be used, if not seven days a week, six days a week. The other thing I wanted to say is we have talked about ARPA a lot during the past several months, the beach jetty, for instance. Everyone said the jetty is about getting out and walking and that is an appropriate use of ARPA funds. This is that times a thousand. This is exactly what we're talking about. When you talk about social, emotional, there's risk taking, there's pushing limits. There's all the things we talked about with the ropes course which is the same here so I am very, very much in support of this. I spoke to my own children who were beyond excited about this and they are not in middle school yet. They would like to use it on the weekends and when they get to middle school. I think this is something that the entire town can use from all age groups. I want to thank you guys for bringing this forward because I think it's a really, really strong project.

Mr. Shackelford:

I don't want to go too long. I completely agree with what many have said, Lauren and Lou. I think this is right in the sweet spot of what the ARPA funds would be. I understand the concerns about the budget issues coming up. But the other reason I am very supportive of this is that we asked the administration and the Board to figure out something to do to make great use of these funds that would be consistent with the spirit of ARPA. Yes, this is a lot of money but we have been assured that it is going to be bid out responsively and we can get something great for the kids that is outdoors in two locations plus the outdoor tables and so forth for less money, they'll do that. I want to throw my support behind this as I did in committee. I know Don said he thinks it's going to pass. I want to make sure it does pass. I encourage people to vote for it because I think it will be good for the middle schools and I'll be proud that this will be one of our bigger ARPA expenditures. Thank you Board and Administration for bringing this to us.

Mr. Burkhardt:

I have a question for the Superintendent. I hear a lot of talk about how this is going to be used during recess and off hours. I also think I heard you say that this is going to be incorporated into the regular PE program for the schools. Is that correct or not?

Mr. Scarice:

One of the key people who is involved in the selection and design is Chris Water. Chris is our K-12 PE and Health Coordinator. We already have fitness units. She saw this as an opportunity to expand our fitness units. Physical Education is not just rolling out balls and playing games. There is an instructional side because of the fitness that goes along with it. This is something that she sees that could be a part of that as well.

Ellen Lautenberg, district 7:

I do feel that this fits into the ARPA mandate. While I respect what Jack Klinge added with his vast experience in the educational system, I think that this is something that can be used in creative ways now and potentially very long term. I think this is investment in a long term opportunity and we don't know what's coming down the pike. Maybe we're done with COVID. Maybe we're not. We don't know what other things will come along. But it sounds like something that will provide a lot of opportunities for the kids and primarily I trust the judgement of the Board of Education and the staff on this and my guess is that they thought really long and hard about asking for this amount of money to be applied in this way. I would rather see spending this money rather than on long term capital projects that really are the town's responsibility and not specifically related to COVID. So, I will be supporting it.

Noah Hammond, district 4:

This is just a coordination question. Last night we approved \$850,000 to repave the parking lots at Bedford and now we are talking about cutting them up and taking a decent portion of them for a play structure. Are we expecting the \$850,000 to go down a bit because we don't have to repave or go up a bit because we have to reconfigure?

Dr. Buono:

Just to clarify, this isn't located where the blacktop is. It's located where the portables were situated at Bedford. The quad portables were located on the grass area. The grass died as a result of that. That's where the location would be.

Mr. Hammond: Okay. Perfect. Thank you.

Karen Kramer, district 5:

I totally support this project. I think anything we can do to help middle school kids for 10 minutes, for 15 minutes, to be outside off of computers, I think is great and I think with all the activities around town, so many more people will be using it. I'm for everything outside as much as possible since we don't know what's coming. I fully support this.

Candace Banks, district 6:

Really quickly, as a parent of a recent and one current Bedford student, the options for recess, other people have said it, four square and basketball. When we are talking about social and emotional welfare of the students, there is a fair amount of drama which I get updated on pretty much daily about who gets to use the four square --- what kid is included in the four square. I mention that to say more options for that age group to do something social and get out and move. There are only a finite number of basketball hoops and a finite number of four square. Not every kid will be on the play

structure at the same time but some other option that would be appealing is sorely needed. The other thing to consider is that it is a real benefit to the neighborhood. As you know, with the elementary school playgrounds, people use them on the weekends or after school and it's a real draw to live around those places. For those of us who live around Bedford, it's another place for kids to meet and use so it's a real benefit. So, I'm voting for it and I hope you all do too.

Ms. Batteau:

This has been a really interesting conversation. There has been a lot of information to think about and I'm still weighing it. It's a bit like trying to weigh apples, oranges and grapes and figure out where you come down but thank you to everybody who spoke. I actually raised my hand when somebody was talking about fluffing up the surfaces. I just want everybody to remember turf in your mulch. Finally, I do understand that the children have really lost so much, taking a page out of Jessica's book, let's not forget the people who lost their health care, couldn't afford food and still don't have homes and so on. It's not something for the school district to find ways to mitigate but as we talk about ARPA funds, let's not forget those people who are really suffering.

Mr. Klinge:

As my old friend Polonius said, "Be true to thyself." I still can't support this but I certainly hope I am wrong. I hope it is a tremendous success, that kids flock to it and I'm proven wrong (which around my house happens often). But seriously, it's more than my gut. It's what I've seen and what I've experienced makes me wonder if this is truly the best way to spend this money when other people in town are in need of anything. But certainly, our kids are and I wish them well. I hope they are all over those contraptions swinging and climbing and jumping and hanging.

Brandi Briggs, district 7:

I agree wholeheartedly with Lauren, Candace, Lou, everybody so I'm not going to repeat that. One other thing I liked about this project is when the kids go out in middle school, they have nowhere to sit. This provides them with areas of seating opportunity. My middle school son complains that they have to sit on the blacktop and they want to sit by the fence. So, this just gives kids who are not as into the climbing the opportunity to be social and be around people and hang out, but also, have a nice place to sit so we are giving people another outdoor opportunity there.

**By roll call vote, the motion passes 28-2; Opposed: O'Day, Klinge.**

**The secretary read item #11 of the call - To approve an appropriation in the amount of \$148,656.00 for Coleytown Elementary School Modular Classroom Funding.**

**Presentation**

Mr. Longo:



On screen is an interoffice memo from Superintendent Scarice to First Selectwoman Jen Tooker, a request in the amount of \$148,656 for a 48 month lease term of two unit modulars for Coleytown Elementary School. As we are aware, we know that at Coleytown Elementary School we have in large part the Stepping Stones Preschool which has an increased enrollment and is causing some growing pains at Coleytown Elementary School. We are proposing to add a two unit modular where the most recent modular existed up until April of this year. We have since demolished the old modular. To date, we have secured funding approval from the Board of Finance and we have also secured approval from the ZBA and P&Z. My interoffice memorandum to Superintendent Scarice summarizes the bid process. It was in early to late February that the Business Office issued an RFP, our official bid for a Coleytown Elementary School relocatable classroom. Two bids were received. Of the two, I only qualified one bid. The one bid that I did not accept was not signed by an authorized agent of the company. It was actually intentionally submitted without a signature so the bid was incomplete. That being said, the unit that is being considered at this time was recently located at Fairfield Public Schools. It was constructed in 2016 and refurbished earlier this calendar year. It is on hold at this time pending all town approvals, structured for a 48 month term. ZBA and P&Z approved the modular with the condition that it would not exceed a 48 month term. The monthly rental fee is \$1,650, by extension, for four years, it is \$136,656. At the end of the four year term, there is an additional cost of \$12,000 for teardown/removal so we arrive at the request of \$148,656.

**Committee reports**

Education Committee, Ms. Karpf:

The Education Committee met on April 12, the same meeting as two other items tonight. Eight of the members were present. We discussed the need for the modulars and how Stepping Stones and Coleytown have increased to a level beyond the capacity. Basically, this is a stop gap as the district works on long-term plans for the best location for Stepping Stones. This will be used for specials class rather than housing one class all day. Students will come and go. Elio brought us through the bid process. The discussion was very brief since the need was apparent to the committee. One thing I will note, these costs do not include necessary components such as the wiring, canopy costs, hook up costs and that will be brought to us as a separate appropriation. The motion was brought forth and seconded and the committee voted 8-0 in favor of the appropriation.

Finance Committee, Cathy Talmadge, district 6:

The Finance Committee met on April 13 to review this appropriation. Everything, I would say, has been covered extensively except for a couple of things. First, the ZBA initially denied the approval because of security concerns; however, April 12, the Board of Education secured ZBA approval as the concerns were addressed. They will still need to go to P&Z for a special permit site plan approval. Seth Braunstein asked about those incremental costs for the canopies, ramps and utility hookups as Lauren mentioned. That incremental cost is expected to be \$400,000 to \$500,000. Finally, Don O'Day clarified that the two classrooms would not be used for Stepping Stone classrooms. Superintendent Tom Scarice confirmed that it would be used for specialist areas such

as music and world languages and that Stepping Stones classrooms would remain where they are. It was moved by Christine Meiers Schatz and seconded by me. The vote was 6-0 to approve.

Members of the Westport electorate – no comment

Ms. Karpf read the resolution and it was seconded.

**RESOLVED:** That upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance and a request by the Superintendent of Schools, the sum in the amount of \$148,656.00 for Coleytown Elementary School Modular Classroom Funding is hereby appropriated.

**Members of the RTM – no comments**

**By show of hands, the motion passes 30-0.**

Mr. Wieser:

Thank you again Board of Education, those of you who are still with us. Thank you for your presentations tonight. They were very illuminating. RTM, thanks. We got through a lot these two days. We don't have to meet tomorrow so have a good night tomorrow and thanks for your hard work over these past many months. Thank you for being here and we'll see you on June 7 with a lot of committee meetings before then. We will advise where all those are going to be. Ms. Milwe and Ms. Purcell, June 9.

Ms. Milwe: June 9, party time.

Kristin Purcell, district 1: We'll be sending out a sign up list for food, etc.

Ms. Milwe:

It will be six o'clock and you can be outside, six feet apart and you can yell at each other. Spouses are included. It will be dinner. You'll all bring food.

Mr. Wieser:

We hope to meet in person on June 7 before the June 9 party.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jeffrey M. Dunkerton  
Town Clerk



by Jacquelyn Fuchs

**ATTENDANCE: April 5, 2022**

DIST.	NAME	PRESENT	ABSENT	NOTIFIED MODERATOR	LATE/ LEFT EARLY
1	Matthew Mandell	X			
	Liz Milwe	X			
	Kristin M. Purcell	X			
	Chris Tait	X			
2	Harris Falk	X			
	Jay Keenan	X			Left 8:30 pm
	Louis M. Mall	X			
	Christine Meiers Schatz		X	X	
3	Ross Burkhardt	X			
	Arline Gertzoff	X			
	Jimmy Izzo	X			
	Don O'Day	X			
4	James Bairaktaris	X			
	Andrew J. Colabella	X			
	Noah Hammond	X			
	Jeff Wieser	X			
5	Peter Gold		X	X	
	Karen Kramer	X			
	Richard Lowenstein	X			
	Claudia Shaum	X			
6	Candace Banks	X			
	Jessica Bram	X			
	Seth Braunstein	X			
	Cathy Talmadge	X			
7	Brandi Briggs	X			
	Lauren Karpf	X			
	Jack Klinge	X			
	Ellen Lautenberg	X			
8	Wendy Batteau	X			
	Rachel Cohn		X	X	
	Lisa Newman		X	X	
	Stephen Shackelford	X			
9	Lori Church	X			
	Nancy Kail	X			
	Sal Liccione	X			
	Kristin Schneeman		X	X	
<b>Total</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>5</b>		

Thank you again. Stay healthy everybody. Farewell.