

Town of Montville Town Council
Public Hearing Board of Education Budget Minutes
Thursday, April 25, 2024
6:00 p.m. – Montville High School – Auditorium

- 1. Call to Order
Chairman May welcomed the public and called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance
- 3. Roll Call
Present were Councilors Jaskiewicz, Lathrop, May, Southard, Yuchniuk. Absent were Councilors Caron and Sabilia. Also present was Mayor Bunnell, Sr.
- 4. Public Hearing

TOWN OF MONTVILLE
NOTICE OF BUDGET HEARINGS

Notice is hereby given that public hearings will be held at Montville High School Auditorium, 800 Old Cokchester Road Oakdale, CT on April 24, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. on the General Government Budget and on April 25, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. on the Board of Education Budget for the Town of Montville for the fiscal year from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

Revenue Summary 2024-2025					
Description	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ADOPTED	2024 ESTIMATE	2025 DEPT REQ.	2025 MAYOR PROP
PROPERTY TAXES	44,025,661	48,679,745	47,625,959	48,802,741	49,302,741
LICENSES & PERMITS	1,086,988	1,071,000	1,092,253	1,095,000	1,095,000
REVENUE USE MONEY/PROPERTY	948,242	110,000	440,962	960,000	960,000
REVENUE OTHER AGENCIES	328,299	224,000	240,453	249,000	249,000
STATE GRANTS SCHOOL	13,465,642	13,200,229	13,228,673	13,287,864	13,287,864
STATE GRANTS UNSPECIFIED	5,095,366	4,075,613	4,723,968	4,629,640	4,629,640
CHARGES FOR CURRENT SERVICES	696,263	431,500	442,613	452,000	452,000
MISC REVENUE	1,596,631	1,377,600	1,755,501	742,100	742,100
TOTAL REVENUES	67,243,092	69,169,687	69,550,382	70,218,345	70,718,345
Expenditure Summary 2024-2025					
Description	2023 ACTUAL	2024 ADOPTED	2024 ESTIMATE	2025 DEPT REQ.	2025 MAYOR PROP
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	2,743,061	2,851,267	2,652,250	3,116,847	2,967,398
INTERGOVT CONTRIBUTIONS	84,153	99,800	99,800	113,495	93,500
FRINGE BENEFITS/INSURANCE	5,101,145	5,751,000	5,751,000	6,132,500	6,152,000
DEBT SERVICE	5,000,241	5,051,082	5,051,082	3,268,089	3,268,089
LAND USE	238,633	302,800	218,875	324,785	323,985
HUMAN SERVICES	735,031	755,130	721,412	797,758	796,258
CULTURE AND RECREATION	472,556	442,730	412,000	484,630	491,690
PUBLIC SAFETY	5,853,496	6,234,954	5,286,647	6,474,097	6,517,808
PUBLIC WORKS	2,469,556	3,795,380	3,100,663	4,065,930	3,992,930
EDUCATION	40,599,823	43,261,544	43,261,544	45,527,416	44,343,086
CAPITAL	849,750	624,000	62,400	4,999,323	1,771,601
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	64,147,445	69,169,687	66,617,673	75,304,870	70,718,345

Detailed copies of the budget by department are available at the office of the Town Clerk or online at www.montville-ct.org.
Dated at Montville, Connecticut, this 17th day of April 2024.

Leonard Bunnell Sr.
Mayor

Tim May
Town Council Chairman

Barbara Griffin
Finance Director

Superintendent of Schools Laurie Pallin thanked everyone for the opportunity to speak and provided a brief overview of the Board of Education’s (BOE) FY2024/25 Proposed Budget, which reflects a 4.537% increase. The BOE recognizes that the education budget represents the largest portion of the Town’s overall budget and appreciates their ongoing dialogue, collaborative and collegial roles, and attendance at their Board meetings as they discussed their budget. The Mayor’s proposed budget includes an increase of only 2.5%, excluding the \$200,000.00 in Cannabis Relief Funds – a nearly \$1.2 million cut from their requested increase. The decrease will result in significant changes that will severely impact their ability to meet their obligations to the students and their families. While over 91% of the budget increase is allocated to staff wages and benefits, the BOE agreed, with some

reservations, to reduce the number of classroom teachers and includes several risks to propose the lowest possible budget. Contrary to one of the continuing misconceptions is the perception that school enrollment continues to decline, they are projecting an increase of 20 (twenty) students for the SY2024/25 and an additional increase of 20 (twenty) students over the next ten (10) years. During her first two (2) years as the Superintendent of Schools, the BOE has cut over 45 (forty-five) positions due to declining enrollment and decreased funding. As a result, there remain no additional items to cut. Another misconception is that the BOE Budget has additional or extra funds. Rather, the proposed budget is based on the actual numbers of the individual members of the staff and Special Education (SPED) and Magnet School students. In addition, the lack of any contingencies is evidenced by their use of funds from the Non-Lapsing Account in 2022 and 2023. Approximately \$305,000.00 of the requested increase is new and includes the addition of essential positions, including Paraprofessionals, a Board-certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and a Special Education (SPED) teacher. The current lack of these positions has resulted in significant issues and not filling these positions would result in greater costs in the future. While every effort has been made to reduce the budget, they will inform them of any additional cost reductions that arise during the budget process. Any further reductions in the proposed budget will result in the elimination of essential staffing and services. She requested the Council's thoughtful consideration and stated their openness to responding to their questions and engaging in discussions regarding the budget.

Chairman May invited members of the public to speak regarding the proposed FY2024/25 Board of Education Budget.

Gretchen Brochu, 1605 Bozrah Road, Oakdale, a 20-year teacher, parent of two Oakdale Elementary School students, and 3-year PTO President, advocated for the BOE's proposed budget, as presented. She has witnessed the staff work tirelessly with less and less support over the years as the difficulties in dealing with student behaviors increased. As a teacher, she stated the invaluable support paraprofessionals provide in the classroom and urged them to honor the BOE's request to increase the part-time to a full-time position, resulting in a larger candidate pool and adding consistency and support. The lack of support results in the Schools' lack of compliance with the IEP (Individual Education Plan) and creates additional stress on the teachers which trickles down to the students. The budget also includes the addition of a BCBA, which is an integral part of any school team and would help the staff address the students' behaviors and meet their needs more efficiently. The added position will improve student outcomes significantly. Any amount below the current nationwide inflation rate of 3.5% is unacceptable and would preclude the schools from operating at their current level. It also conveys the message that the Town does not value their children's education. She also stated that the members of the Oakdale Elementary School PTO, who were unable to attend the meeting, also supported the BOE Budget, as presented.

Rachel Dash-Dougherty, 291 Black Ash Road, Oakdale, a parent of an Oakdale Elementary student and member of the PTO, expressed her support for the BOE's Proposed Budget, as presented. She stated their wish to be proud of their country's education system, which ranks 13 worldwide, largely due to budget cuts. While understanding the necessity of budget cuts, she felt that those cuts should not be made from the schools, especially as children are requiring additional support as they recover from the pandemic. She questioned the possibility of investing even more funds to support their schools, stating that the Town of Montville funds \$761.00 less per student than the state average, according to the School+State Finance Project. Often, as a result of budget cuts, those students who need the most support are also the most impacted. While the student population may have decreased, the population of students with disabilities has increased throughout the state. The staff and administration must grow in tandem to address and support the students' growing needs. We

must prepare our children, who are entering a more complex, tech-focused environment that is full of issues. In conclusion, she quoted Sam Seaborn (West Wing) “Schools should not be opportunities to save money. Schools should be palaces.... Schools should be incredibly expensive for government and free of charge to its citizens....”

Ted Richmond, 51 Pheasant Run, Oakdale, a 27-year Montville High School teacher, English and Social Studies Chair, resident, and parent, spoke in support of the BOE Budget, including the proposed SPED position. Two of the most important initiatives in helping students achieve will be directly affected by the proposal. Many students are in need of individualized reading support and, currently, there is only one (1) Reading Specialist with no paraprofessional support. The proposed budget includes a plan to provide the Reading Specialist to work with additional students and is vital to improving the students’ overall success. The elimination of the proposed SPED teacher will decrease the opportunities for their most vulnerable and neediest students. There are currently 119 students registered for English next fall; the students in these classes will benefit the most from these resources. Fewer co-taught classes, fewer tutoring and individual supports, reduced access to dedicated and paraprofessional staff leads to inevitable gaps in achievement and success and the students and their families will needlessly suffer as a result of their decisions.

Carol Burgess, 28 New Hampshire Lane, Oakdale, BOE Member, urged the Town Council to support the Proposed BOE Budget, as presented, stating that the \$300,000.00 increase is very modest given the needs of the students. The additions, she felt, were vital. One of her greatest concerns is the issues surrounding the part-time paraprofessional positions, which many use as a steppingstone for full-time positions elsewhere. The time and money that is invested in training the individuals results in their lack of compliance with the IEP (Individual Education Plan). Investing in the increase will benefit the children and the community as a whole. She expressed her willingness to accept a tax increase that is justified by the services that they receive – education being one of the most important of those services. She thanked them for their consideration and stressed the need to provide the necessary services to the community, adding the possibility of having a distressed parent(s) present a legal challenge to the Town, resulting in further expenses.

Wills Pike, 71 Pheasant Run, Oakdale, announced that the BOE selected Dianne Vumback as their new Superintendent; she will assume her position on July 1, 2024. The BOE engaged in several exhaustive discussions with the administration regarding the budget and was provided with detailed explanations regarding class sizes, the distribution of teachers, and its dynamics between the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. He stated that para-educators or paraprofessionals have become a very integral part of the school community for both the staff and the students. Their job is to ensure that their students become productive members of society and, to do this, it must be made a priority for the future of humanity. He requested that the Town Council carefully consider their budget request and stated their openness to respond to their questions.

Tricia Hatcher, 227 Massapeag Road, Uncasville, a parent of a student attending Mohegan and Oakdale Elementary Schools, felt that the Town should be embarrassed by the lack of sufficient full-time paraprofessionals and proposed reducing other full-time positions in the Town to part-time. She stated the importance of the paraprofessional and BCBA positions and their resulting cost savings by preventing students from outplacement. Improper staffing will result in larger class sizes, resulting in additional struggling and SPED students, further exacerbating the issues and having a snowball effect that will be difficult to return from.

Lauren Terni, 24 Anderson Lane, Oakdale, a parent, and educator, compelled the Town Council to support the BOE Budget. She stated the importance of maintaining education as a priority of the Town as it is in the best interest of the children and community. She reminded them that an attractive school system will invite new

residents which will, in turn, invite new businesses, reducing their taxes. She believed that the taxes should be increased today to support the Town's school system. Not doing so will, in the long run, cost more and make the recovery efforts more difficult.

Chairman May asked if any additional members of the public would like to speak regarding the General Government Budget.

Chairman May provided a brief history of the BOE's decision to hire part-time, rather than full-time, paraprofessionals and informed the public that the Town Council does not determine their employment status. Such decisions are under the jurisdiction of the BOE. He expressed his full support for the increased hours, given their ability to do so.

Councilor Yuchniuk, a parent of a child in middle school, thanked the public for attending the meeting and expressing their support. He noted the "Welcome to Montville, Proud of Our Schools" signage welcoming those entering the Town. He stated his belief that the children are our future and expressed his full support for the budget, as presented. He strongly encouraged his colleagues to do the same.

Mayor Bunnell also expressed his appreciation and respect for their comments. He stated that his proposed FY2024/25 Budget, which includes a 1.29 mil rate increase, using \$500,000.00 of the Town's Unassigned Fund Balance, is part of the process and not final. He concurred with Chairman May that the Town Council only can provide the bottom-line funding for the BOE and cannot decide the allocation of its funds. He stated his respect for the BOE and their hard work and efforts and was understanding of the difficulties of their job. He was confident that a good decision that is satisfactory would be made.

Councilor Lathrop also thanked the public for attending the meeting and expressing their support.

Chairman May announced that the Finance Committee will be meeting next Tuesday, April 30, to review and discuss the budget. He implored the BOE to, possibly, do the same. He also recognized those residents who are in need, living on a fixed income, and/or elderly who would be greatly impacted by the budget and stated the importance of meeting the needs of and supporting *all* of the residents in the Town.

Councilor Jaskiewicz, who has worked on the budget for several years, expressed his confidence that a satisfactory agreement on the budget would be reached.

5. Adjournment

Motion made by Councilor May, seconded by Councilor Lathrop, to adjourn the meeting at 6:35 p.m. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 6-0, all in favor. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Montville