

**Regular Board of Education Meeting – Approved Minutes**  
**Wednesday, March 5, 2025, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Town Hall Meeting Room**

Present Board Members: Liz Barlow, Monica Logan, Heather Lombardo, Donna Nolan, David Peling, Karen Richmond-Godard, Ali Zafar, and Sofia Brenson and Katie O'Neill (Student Representatives)

Absent Board Members: None

**I. Call to Order and Welcome**

Board Chair Logan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**II. Chairperson's Report**

Board Chair Logan welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the budget process and upcoming opportunities to work on the budget. She shared that the Plus One Budget was presented at a 5.67% increase and that the guideline from the Board of Finance (BOF) is 3.25% which is .15% below what it would cost to maintain the status quo despite growing needs. She commended Superintendent Burke and Director of Finance & Operations, Nickie Stevenson, and administration for crunching numbers, reopening old contracts, and turning over old stones to find every single penny to make the best possible decision for our schools and our students. She stated our students and community deserve the best and she hopes that finding opportunities to invest in our education system would bode well for our future and hopefully support can be obtained from within the community to do that.

Cheri Burke requested a pause between agenda items stating there is often an agenda item for BOE Recognition and shared that March is Board of Education Appreciation Month. She expressed gratitude to Board members stating that this year at convocation Kristin LaFlamme, Teacher of the Year, presented to the staff and her message identified LEGO as a powerful metaphor for teamwork highlighting the importance of diverse skills, creative problem solving, resilience in the face of challenge, and the balance between following instructions and fostering innovation. She shared this is the inspiration behind the Board member gifts this evening. Ms. LaFlamme gave every staff member a hand-made LEGO keychain. Superintendent Burke stated the Board's gift this evening is a memento of gratitude for your support and advocacy for the good of our students, a LEGO picture frame containing the theme this year *Connect. Believe. Achieve.* and a LEGO luggage tag for wherever your travels may take you next.

**III. Public Comment**

Mike Kramarenko, Notch Road, Granby, shared a list of concerns with the Board as follows: He is not aware of transgender athletes in Granby Public Schools or schools we play against, however, does not agree with biological boys playing sports with girls; he reported a rumor of a middle school student kicked off a bullying reporting website for overuse of the site; elementary school students accessing a website which is a decent site but also brings students to inappropriate information for their age; and a national website to report diversity, equity or inclusion appearing in publicly funded schools K-12.

Robert Killackey, Brook Pasture Lane, Granby, stated he recently attended the Superintendent's Community Conversations and was excited to hear about the institution of an SRO Program in Granby. He shared that after spending time in the military, he was a special education paraprofessional and has held unarmed security positions at the middle/high school level, and is currently a patrol officer. He stated that an SRO Program is a good program for Granby to consider; however, the cost is not small. He suggested the Board also look at a School Safety Officer (SSO) position which would be a retired officer, for example, who could receive an hourly rate without benefits. This option may enable the hiring of multiple School Safety Officers as opposed to sharing one SSO. Mr. Killackey also mentioned unarmed security guards as an option, as they can also be beneficial and could handle many things that an SRO can handle.

Michael Fitzgerald stated he recently read an article in *The Granby Drummer* based on a 5% budget and stated the article read more like an opinion piece as opposed to an article commenting that the State of Connecticut is short-changing Granby. The article went on to state that if the original BOE budget is accepted at 5.67%, the mill rate would be 6%; however, the article also stated that if a 3.25% budget was adopted, the mill rate would increase 3%. He inquired about the relationship between the mill rate and the proposed budget percentages. He also stated that the Federal impact on the budget is unknown; however, the town needs to invest in our schools as opposed to underinvesting in our schools.

Robert Flanigan commented on \$250K savings that was recently realized in the transportation contract and also stated the BOE gave back \$750K a couple of years ago. He stated that he sees buses around town with only 2-3 students on them and asked the Board to consider consolidating bus routes.

Jodi Okenquist thanked the Board and Superintendent for their work on the budget and stated she is a parent of young children. She is disappointed with the guideline of a 3.25% increase stating it is out of touch with the district's priorities and students' best interest. She shared that she loves the strings program for her third grader. She also shared that recently a staff member who works with her child was lost to a neighboring district due to salary and this is not the first time. She concluded by stating she does not want to see large class sizes and would like to see a budget that maintains enriching programs for students.

#### **IV. Student Representative Reports**

- Katie O'Neill stated the Winter Coffeehouse as well as a Pickleball Fundraiser were held this past weekend and both were a great success. Funds raised will bring the cost of prom down for students.
- The spring musical, *Legally Blonde*, will be held March 14-16 in the high school auditorium.
- A spring fling dance will be held March 21<sup>st</sup> in the Community Gym.
- Today was *Read Across America Day* and high school students visited Kelly Lane to read to students.
- Sofia Brenson shared the sports report stating that winter sports are wrapping up and spring practices will be starting soon. The boys' swimming state championship will be held next week at Cornerstone in West Hartford.

#### **V. Reports and Discussion**

##### **V.A. FY26 Superintendent's Proposed Budget**

Superintendent Burke presented the FY26 Superintendent's Proposed Budget to the Board and stated Granby is very close to being a premier district in the State of Connecticut and certainly the Farmington Valley. She shared that the budget process began in December with the Plus One Budget which provides guidance in developing the budget and tonight she will share the Superintendent's Proposed Budget; however, there are two additional opportunities to explore the budget in-depth at a budget workshop on March 12<sup>th</sup> and again at the next BOE meeting on March 19<sup>th</sup>. She asked the audience to take an approach to this budget by imagining a young neighbor or family member and having the best possible learning opportunity for that person; what that environment would look like and what tools would be needed in order for that student to thrive; what might their teacher be like; what might their classroom or building look like; what skills will they possess as they graduate high school. She then asked the audience, does Granby need to do to be forward-thinking and ready now? Granby is committed to leading in a way that brings the district forward.

Superintendent Burke stated the commitments of the Board are to develop programs for special education; modify the middle school/high school bell schedules to align which, in turn, helps students and staff; study transportation needs and bussing plans; and, evaluate the purchase and use of technology devices. She reviewed the two goals for the year in student achievement and communication and shared that the Communications Plan may need to be extended one year to look at additional website development and branding as there was not enough time/funding to complete those elements of the plan. The FY26 Superintendent's Proposed Budget is currently at 3.67% which is above the BOF guidance of 3.25%. This is

the lowest increase since 2021 and the district is facing significant risk of loss to Federal grant funds which can amount to \$500K to \$1M annually. She stated this budget includes the SRO Program which is an additional 0.42% increase. She shared that currently Granby has 56% of the student body classified as high needs which is defined as special education, English Language Learners and Free & Reduced Lunch, a rising need across the community and an indicator of economic need. Superintendent Burke stated the district is feeling the impact of three recently negotiated contracts as well as inflation and the cost of living increases. She shared past operating budgets for the BOE from FY21 to FY25 stating this is the lowest budget increase since 2021. She also shared a 5-year history on revenue/reimbursements to the town that are produced by district programs. This funding goes to the town's general fund and the costs for the BOE are not offset by these revenue/reimbursements. She also shared the total funds returned to the town by the BOE over the last 5 years is approximately \$37M.

Next, Superintendent Burke shared actual and projected enrollment numbers stating the projections are pretty accurate with a few bubbles here and there. She shared class size projections and noted that the Kindergarten class size is being closely monitored at 5 sections with a class size of 19.6 and she may have to increase a section in Kindergarten if more students enroll. Overall in elementary she plans to reduce 2 sections in this budget. The Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) was shared and for FY26, the PPE for Granby will be \$20,725 per student which is significantly lower than average spending in comparable districts of \$22,836.

Superintendent Burke went on to share some facts in how Granby compares to other districts, such as, the PPE cost; average budget increases across the State (5.42% average); and, teacher salaries in Granby compared to other districts in Hartford County (29<sup>th</sup> out of 30). She stated teachers are often lost to other districts due to salary. She also shared student achievement data in SATs stating Granby attained 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 24 in ERW proficiency and 4<sup>th</sup> out of 22 in Math proficiency. She stated Granby is doing more with less and she will continue to do so but would like to do more. A pie chart was shared showing the increases in areas such as personnel, purchased services, tuition, maintenance/utilities, supplies, and activities. Clearly, the majority of the budget (73.67%) is comprised of personnel and benefits. She reviewed the budget drivers showing contracted salaries as well as salaries residing in grants; new initiatives for special education programming; and, additional program improvements. Notable budget offsets include -3.0 FTE retirement savings; -3.8 FTE enrollment driven; renegotiated transportation contract; as well as savings in fuel.

Superintendent Burke stated in order to go from 5.67% in the Plus One to 3.67% for this budget, items that were reduced include the lunch/recess monitor at Wells Road; Department Chair stipends; Groundskeeper and Maintenance Technician; and, a Certified Reading Intervention Teacher. Additional reductions include the transportation contract savings and not filling positions being vacated due to retirements. Remaining in the budget from the Plus One is the SRO Program; Special Education and mental health positions (Director of School Counseling; Board Certified Behavior Analyst, and 5 Teaching Assistants).

The next steps for the BOE is to consider meeting the BOF guidance of 3.25% by either reducing \$120K for technology in the Q&D Fund; not purchasing new laptops for staff; removing the SRO Program; further reducing staffing positions; and/or eliminating programs. Questions should be forwarded to Linda Powell/Monica Logan by 9 am Monday morning, March 10<sup>th</sup>. Ali Zafar commented stating what can be done that does not affect programs/teachers. He moved to Granby for the school district and is deeply rooted in the community. What other efficiencies can be looked at and work together for the best of the community?

## **VI. Business Requiring Action**

### **VI.A. Minutes**

A motion was made by Liz Barlow and seconded by Donna Nolan that the Granby Board of Education approve the minutes from the February 19, 2025 Board of Education Meeting. This motion passed at 8:35 p.m. with one abstention (Ali Zafar).

## **VII. Committee Reports**

### **VII.A. Board Standing Committee Reports**

#### **VII.A.1. Curriculum/Policy/Technology/Communication**

Met this evening to discuss the Asst. Super's report – PD on Friday K-12 vertical teams; scheduling details will be shared at a later date; curriculum, assessment and instruction and how resources are selected; policies some of which will go forward to the BOE soon.

#### **VII.A.2. Finance/Personnel/Facilities**

Approved minutes are in the packet.

### **VII.B. Other Board-Related Reports**

#### **VII.B.1. CREC/CABE**

A Day on the Hill will be held on March 12<sup>th</sup>.

#### **VII.B.2. Granby Education Foundation**

Liz Barlow reported that GEF is continuing to look for sponsors and teams for the GranBee.

### **VII.C. Calendar of Events**

Monica Logan highlighted the GMHS spring musical, *Legally Blonde*, to be held March 14-16. Tickets are available online.

### **VII.D. Board Member Announcements**

There were no board member announcements.

### **VII.E. Action Items**

Board members should submit questions to Linda and Monica by 9 a.m. on Monday, March 10<sup>th</sup>.

## **VIII. Superintendent's Report**

- Two community conversations were held recently via Zoom and were well attended.
- Learning walks were held last week. Thank you to our Student Representative, Katie O'Neill for attending.
- *Read Across America* is being celebrated districtwide this week.
- *Music in our Schools* is being celebrated at Kelly Lane this month.
- There is no school this Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, for Professional Development.
- Mental Health First Aid sessions for middle school/high school parents is being offered by the Farmington Valley Health District. There are two sessions on March 13<sup>th</sup> and March 20<sup>th</sup>.
- The next meeting will be a Budget Workshop on March 12<sup>th</sup> held in the BOE Conference Room at Central Office. The next regular Board of Education Meeting will be held on March 19<sup>th</sup>.

## **IX. Adjournment**

A motion was made by Donna Nolan and seconded by Ali Zafar that the Granby Board of Education adjourn the Board of Education Meeting. This motion passed unanimously at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Elizabeth H. Barlow  
Board Secretary