

# TOWN OF STONINGTON

152 Elm Street • Stonington, Connecticut 06378

**BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING**

**Thursday, March 02, 2023**

**Board of Education District Office Conference Room**

**40 Field Street Pawcatuck**

**7:00 PM**

Call to order

Budget Presentations:

- BOE with CIP

Budget Calendar:

- Possible discussion of hearing/meeting dates

Review of Previous Minutes:

- TBD

Correspondence:

- Correspondence from Katrina Gottlieb
- Other - TBD

Adjourn

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STONINGTON, CT.

23 FEB 27 AM 11:44

SALLY DUPLICE  
TOWN CLERK



Dear Members of the Board of Finance,

My name is Katrina Gottlieb and I am the band director at Stonington High School. I write today in my personal capacity to urge you to keep the Board of Education budget intact. All of us in the community understand that this year's budgetary decisions will be extremely difficult for you. The general inflationary environment has touched us all. For us in the schools, we face a significant increase in transportation and heating costs. While you will see these increases reflected in the proposed Board of Education budget, I would ask you to consider the following. The increases do not reflect increases in programming, nor do they propose adding teachers. There are no wish list items, just a pass through of the required cost to run our buildings and transport our students. Yet any decision you take to decrease the budget will result in cuts to teachers and our ability to serve our community.

Unfortunately, we music teachers are familiar with the need to justify our value to our students and community in the face of potential budgetary decisions. This will mark my tenth time advocating to retain a full-time high school band director and to sustain our broader music program. While there is no one teaching position or program that is "better" to cut than others, the value of our program may not be fully evident at face value. Imagine, for example, no band at football games and no SHS representation in local parades. Imagine a bare minimum of school performances, with no band or choral groups at our community events. Most importantly, our students' lives will be lesser without this integral part of their education. Other music electives would have to be cut, such as popular Music Technology, Guitar, and Piano classes, as well as Unified Music, which serves our special education students.

On a personal note, fighting for my job every two to three years has taken a great personal toll on me. Considering that I work a minimum of 60 hours a week and have devoted my life to this job, it is professionally insulting.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the town. Please do not feel the need to reply, as I imagine you are receiving a lot of letters.

Katrina Gottlieb

2/28/2023

Board of Finance Committee  
Town of Stonington, CT  
152 Elm St  
Stonington, CT 06378

Dear Chairman O'Brien and Members of the Board of Finance,

Soon, the Stonington Board of Finance will, once again, have the opportunity to vote in favor of the recommended budget that will support our Stonington Public Schools students.

While I do understand that it will not be your position to decide whether to keep or cut specific programs, it has been historically noted, in districts nationwide, that when cuts come, the Arts are most often affected.

During my career as a teacher in the Fine Arts for the past fifteen years, here in Stonington, I have witnessed, first-hand, the power exposure to art has had in our children's lives. Aside from seeing growth in their development of visual and motor skills, problem solving, and decision making, the most rewarding part of my career has been watching students leave with a feeling of accomplishment, because they persevered and succeeded in finding their own creative voice.

Most significantly, in some instances, this experience, of the process of making art, has been so powerful, that it has made the difference between a student wanting to give up on their future, and finding worth in who they are. The process of creation can be that potent.

Tonight, your voice, your vote, will be paramount in shaping the outcome of the future paths of our students. You have the power to allow Stonington students to leave our schools with the courage and confidence to create the world they will be stepping into. Your vote of "yes" for the recommended budget gives Art a chance to continue to make a difference in the lives of our students' futures.

Attached, please find the letters of three of my former Stonington High School art students who wanted to tell you their story of the importance of having had art as part of their education.

A 'yes' for the budget now, is a confirmation that Stonington, and its citizens understand and support the value of art education.

Thank you.

Teresa A Bonillo, Teacher  
Fine Arts and Design  
Stonington High School  
Pawcatuck, CT 06379

February 14, 2023

Dana Campbell  
Shuttle Press & Bindery  
22 Bayview Ave., Box #77  
Stonington, CT 06378

Board of Finance Committee  
Town of Stonington, CT  
152 Elm St  
Stonington, CT 06378

Dear Chairman O'Brien and Members of the Board of Finance,

My name is Dana Campbell, and I am the owner and artist behind Shuttle Press & Bindery - a letterpress, stationery, and bookbinding studio in Stonington.

When I graduated from Stonington High School in 2009, I left for the Greater Boston area thinking that I would never return. As an artist, I felt the need to be near a big city, as metropolitan areas offer great opportunities for a career in the arts. As I've come to find out, Stonington has changed a lot in the last decade or so. I returned to Stonington in early 2022, and was delighted to find a growing, and thriving art scene. Be it the staple fine art galleries of Mystic, the gorgeous public murals throughout Westerly and Pawcatuck, or the hidden gem that is The Velvet Mill - Stonington and the surrounding areas has a lot more to offer for artists than it used to, and I'm glad to be back!

Now, as a working, Stonington-based artist, I cannot understate how important my foundational education was to me. While attending Stonington High school, I was enrolled in the Advanced Placement (AP) art program. When I applied for college, the credits that I earned participating in this high-school program counted towards my degrees. This allowed me to double-major in both graphic design, and illustration - fast-tracking me to earn two Bachelor's degrees in only 4.5 years. It saved me time, and it saved me thousands in tuition expenses. I am incredibly privileged to have been able to participate in the AP program.

I cannot pretend to understand all of the nuances that go into financial planning for a public school system - we all are feeling the strain on our wallets as we navigate this uncertain and rapidly-changing world. In spite of these challenges, I implore you to continue allocating funds towards the arts and art programs at SHS. A community is only as vibrant as its artists - and it's a sad truth that arts programs are often the first ones cut when difficult budget decisions have to be made. Funding the arts can change students' lives - I know it changed mine.

Sincerely,

Dana Campbell

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Jennifer Murphy, REAT, LMHC, MA, Clinician,  
Women's Center at SSTAR  
Providence, RI 02906

Board of Finance Committee  
Town of Stonington, CT  
152 Elm St  
Stonington, CT 06378

Dear Chairman O'Brien and Members of the Board of Finance,

My name is Jennifer Murphy, I am writing on behalf of the arts department at Stonington High School. I graduated from Stonington High School in 2012, where I spent much of my time involved with the art program. I then went on to Boston to attend the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Tufts University in their dual degree program where I both studied psychology and got my BFA. After college, I taught printmaking at the MFA, Maud Morgan, Mix It printshop, TILL, and Lesley University. I worked in museum education at the MFA and the ICA, a time when both institutions were actively questioning accessibility and engagement in the arts. I was managing an art gallery for TILL, where in addition to curating and installing, my colleagues and I were creating community events where our intention was to bring people together through the arts. I stayed with TILL for six years, until I finished my masters at Lesley University studying clinical mental health counseling and expressive arts therapy.

From a young age, I found solace and freedom in expressing myself artistically. It was a way to make meaning of my life and the world around me. Had I not had the experience of encouragement and guidance through teachers like Mrs. Bonillo, I'm not sure I would have had the courage to pick art school as my path. Through the arts, my life became expansive in ways I never could have imagined. Creating authentically invites autonomy, power, freedom, and the overwhelming belief that I could create the kind of life I wanted to live in.

Now, as a trauma therapist trained as an expressive arts therapist, I use visual art therapy, music therapy, dance movement therapy, and drama therapy in addition to more traditional modes of talk therapy to connect and communicate with my clients. Using the arts as a container to explore, to hold, to witness, to transform, and above all to express. The breadth of expression available through the depths of working in this way provides the client with abundance and choice in their healing process.

In conclusion, the art department is valuable. Life without the arts would truly be intolerable, and a world without creativity absolutely unbearable. Collectively, we should be cherishing and honoring the different ways of being in this world through all ways of expression, connection, and communicating.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Murphy

2/21/2023

Board of Finance Committee  
Town of Stonington, CT  
152 Elm St  
Stonington, CT 06378

Dear Chairman O'Brien and Members of the Board of Finance,

It has come to my attention that the arts programs at SHS may be in jeopardy. I sincerely hope you will reconsider making any changes to the arts programs on behalf of not only myself and previous classmates, but the future of the youth of Stonington, Connecticut.

Art class was not only an integral part of my education, but probably the only escape I had as a troubled teen trying to navigate through a difficult home and school life. Aside from Ms. Bonillo being such an incredible role model and advisor, her class as a whole really is one of the only positive memories for me through my time at SHS. I never excelled in the core curriculum through school; maintaining decent grades was a constant struggle, leading to a lack of confidence and purpose. There were many times I debated dropping out altogether. However, I miraculously discovered my love for drawing and painting Sophomore year. Art class soon became something I actually looked forward to in school, and it was the only place I felt truly proud of what I could produce. Having a creative outlet gave me a purpose; it was a place I could express myself in a judgment-free environment (a scarcity in high school). It taught me it was ok to be different, it was ok to be me. I felt invigorated and accomplished every time I left that classroom, which was the only place, at the time, I could find this solace.

The way Ms. Bonillo could introduce and teach new techniques and mediums has effectively stuck with me through the years. I knew from the beginning I didn't want art to be my occupation, I respected it too much as a hobby and escape. Ms. Bonillo allowed me to develop my own relationship with art that I could navigate through on my own. I still, today, find different ways to incorporate the indispensable knowledge from her class to maintain a creative outlet and make time for what makes me happy. From playing bass, to collecting curiosities, to taxidermy, to tattoos, and even decorating my home, I am forever grateful for my education in the arts from Ms. Bonillo and all the other wonderful instructors at SHS. I can't imagine a world where this fundamental piece of education and expression would be taken away from our future community of Stonington.

Madison Chaney, CVT  
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