

# Town of Plymouth

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# Board of Finance

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1. Call Meeting to Order – The Regular Meeting of the Plymouth Board of Finance was called to order on Monday, March 24, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Peter Cook in the Community Room, Plymouth Town Hall. Members in attendance: Vicky Carey, Peter Cook, Pattie DeHuff, Michael Drozdick, Dan Murray, James Zalot. Also present: David Bertnagel, Director of Finance; Robin Gudczauskas, Recording Secretary; Mayor David Merchant; Superintendent Cruz and Mike Santogatta, Business Manager.
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Budget
  - a. Board of Education Presentation  
Superintendent Cruz stated Mr. Santogatta will speak with her in slide review and thanked everyone who attended tonight. Slide presentation reviewed noting partnership and believes town hall has reached across the street and work together; challenge in budget constraints, taxpayers burdened and objective is to work with community as much as possible without compromising the things the school system needs to do. Review held of: new Mission Statement; strategic plan; past history of budget requests with proposed 2014-2015 at 1.37% totaling \$23,572,023; percent increases, actual allocations; budget details by account location (Main Street cost to maintain structure and operating costs; PCS down 10%; FES even; reduction in 5 elementary teachers and not yet sure how they will be spread out; THS down; School Facilities up \$9,000; Special Education down; Health Services, nurses and services within buildings, up 2.6%; System-wide up \$613,000 which is medical costs of about \$185,000; Technology stable at 1.2%; Library up 6% from contractual salary issues; Central Office up 10.9% for professional technical services and to educate staff; Board of Education up 42.3% from legal costs, mediation costs, etc for a total of 1.37% or \$319,232 and of that medical insurance is \$489,000 of complete total.); Salary comparisons reviewed noting despite contract wage negotiations but down due to elimination of positions; non certified down due to headcount reductions; administration up \$28,000 and while one less administrator had to move cost of 60% of administration away from grant which was declining in value to local budget; health fund; substitutes up \$48,000 due to health, professional development substitutes, maternity leaves; Professional development up, taxes/benefits up; books, materials/supplies up; equipment furniture; technology no change; other instruction. Operation costs reviewed. Medical insurance slide reviewed and in this year spending amount of money on health/medial insurance the same as in 2007-2008. Mr. Santogatta stated last Friday he and the Superintendent had an outstanding meeting with the Mayor and Director of Finance on regarding health insurance stating the town hall is fully insured and Board of Education is self insured and discussion was

held on combining and move together for one large self insurance program which will realize considerable savings. Student enrollment slide reviewed noting declinment in enrollment is 19.95% over the last five years; have done better research on incoming kindergarten enrollment which is expected to yield approximately 73 students; historical enrollment slide on population dips down to 2013 and expect next 5-10 years to continue class size guidelines, reviewed, as well as staff reductions; class sizes per grade level reviewed and will continue to monitor; review of employee groups that accepted no wage increase; contracted salary increases by group and estimated savings by reductions of staff in the amount \$360,180. Efforts to mitigate; 4 teachers took early retirement and option has been opened as of tonight until April 7<sup>th</sup>. Student achievement: elementary school student performance want to see consistent upward trends; middle school with downward in math, reading, writing and science at all grade levels; high school has increased percentage in writing, reading and math and science but still sending students there not reading at grade level; will put in place a co-teaching model k-12; need training on SRBI. This district has been fiscally responsible, student enrollment down and per pupil expenditures are below the DRG average; next year will focus on writing.

Questions: Mike Drozdick, 2 places big numbers fall into place, salaries and health fund as far as staff remaining and with increases; what is net impact on the budget; Mr. Santogatta stated net increase is -\$112,000 and if no reduction in staff, certified would have been up \$257,000. Next year's salaries \$112,000 less than this year and 18 less people working for us next year than today; net increase across the board is a negative.

Dan Murray, chart for medical by fiscal year and correct in reduction over year but 18.5% increase from last to this and being self-insured, how does it compute; Mr. Santogatta stated it is driven by experience, self-insured and experience in first quarter was bad. They purchase individual stop loss and aggregate stop loss and over last two years never had employee reach that but in October had 3 employees or spouses that hit that individual stop loss in that month. A normal month runs \$280,000 in claims and in that that month \$525,000 and carried into November as had two people that hit over 80,000 each that month. Anthem books us for next year, analyze our experience and recommend what we should budget for. They suggested additional 530,000 and we knew headcount reduction so budgeted less than that; reviewed this and past performance with comptroller and we will mitigate that number. Budgeted 480,000 because they know they will have less people and they are not aware of contracts where contributions are going up and contributions employees make are greater next year than this year. Stop loss insurance is about 39,000 per month and it will be about 46,000 per month next year and have asked them to review that due to performance in January and February.

Jim Zalot (a) not every student has textbooks and yet budgeted 356,000 last year, mentioned declining enrollment and asking 7385 more. Ms. Cruz stated some textbooks will be replaced, new courses at high school needing textbooks; 25,000 for elementary and 20,000 for textbook for high school. (b) bothers him that not everyone has textbooks. Ms. Cruz stated textbook companies had to come up to speed with new curriculum requirements and part of the problem is that not all textbook companies have material current with standards and they are hesitant to invest in a textbook if it

will not align with expectations and standards; next year will be year of study and if we invest in technology and on line resources, laptops and computers may be a better investment.

Pattie DeHuff (a) looking at actuals and noticed places in budget and various subject matters were taxpayers had funded money to purchase textbooks or workbooks and English language workbooks yet when report created on March 4<sup>th</sup> we were 66% through fiscal year, and it varies by school, you hadn't spent the money and in some cases it was minimal and is the budget line not realistic or a problem with not spending. Ms. Cruz stated to be 66% expended at this time of year is where you want to be and if principals put in place each student needed a spelling journal that would be at beginning of year but if need a set of materials that was put off until May/June. Budget is estimate to anticipate what they need to instruct students. (b) in presentation omitted was common core and yet purchase of chrome books has to do with common core. You hesitate to purchase textbooks as investment for 5-10 years but willing to make investment in common core state standards not yet approved. Ms. Cruz stated chrome books can be used as iPad, writing tablet, research and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills states to prepare children for future and future is technology. (c) total returned to the town was 593,000 and when added it is actually is 402,000 as you kept remainder in sinking fund and point of clarification. Ms. Cruz stated the sinking fund is for capital projects which relieves the town of funding. Chairman Cook reviewed sinking fund expenditures which require Board of Education and Board of Finance approval through a request and, in effect, an emergency fund. (d) operational cost and facilities additional \$14,700; Mr. Santogatta stated increase is district wide emergency repair and maintenance item for all schools; repairs have been running heavier at THS and Main Street and put in extra money. (e) class sizes have are recommendations and not law. Elementary and at PCS, first grade 3 teachers each 16 students but you could reduce that to two teachers with 24. Ms. Cruz stated that is not recommended and board decision to do that. (f) even though members of this community have not had pay raise for multiple years you recommend giving raise. She had the proposed budget off the website and a difference from that and handout tonight. Ms. Cruz stated at time of initial proposal had not added in teacher retirements as well as solar project had not been decided, reviewed. (g) back to teacher early retirement incentive, are you saying those teachers are not a part of budget; asking 1.37% increase and number not changed on website over weekend vs chart here today. Ms. Cruz stated the initial proposal was 1.7% to the Board of Education and then deducted 4 retirements and where 1.37%.

Vicky Carey, pages that say purchase substitutes in every school and then System-wide Services has non certified subs, certified subs, purchased subs, etc. Mr. Santogatta stated in this year's budget the Board of Education allowed each school 5,000 and Special Ed to bring in substitutes to release people for professional development and data teams; now various categories for subs and largest is certified for Kelly services, 150,000 budgeted and on individual daily basis; non certified subs are paraprofessionals and secretaries; purchased certified and also employ and use as substitute interns when we can get them, and try to get one for each school; long term certified subs for longer term i.e. maternity leave and use regular sub at \$70 per day; if a person will be out 3-4 months, we hire a teacher at bachelor 1 for long term to

maintain class at continuity.

Pattie DeHuff (a) if subs are used for teacher development/professional development and have you considered not having school open on those days. Ms. Cruz stated that is something they need to work with the community to discuss as with working families it can cause a hardship and some districts go half day every month and teachers have half day professional development. (b) subs don't know context of what the teacher is doing and in many cases they are babysitters. What is per pupil expenditure this year and next year. Mr. Santogatta stated we don't have this years and not a simple formula but a complex formula for inkind services from town, special ed costs are handled different and the state releases that. He is expecting that cost will go up.

Dan Murray (a) under Student Services, two line items, PPT Coordinator at \$20,000 this year and not present before. Ms. Cruz stated the challenge they have is making sure parents have consistency with process of ppt meetings and in Special Education there are many rules and regulations in regards to process. Across the district there were inconsistencies and will appoint an in-house person in each building to be communicator between parent and school to make sure paperwork done, communication done well and parent has what they need and we follow legal obligations. This is a stipend. (b) Special Ed summer school program ran \$24,000; \$40,000 and now up to \$60,000. Ms. Cruz stated in the past there was a summer school program and we were not providing summer school services for range of students and this time we will provide for middle school; we were not extending it long enough for students to benefit and increase in cost and cost for teacher, para, o/t and speech.

Pattie DeHuff (a) reduction in student enrollment and state statutes reviewed. Mr. Santogatta stated 3000 per student reduction with no more of 1/2 of 1 % of current year budget. (b) 116,000 could be reduced and number was given at a meeting of 105 fewer students. It is logical if you have more students you hire more teachers and realistic that if you have fewer you have fewer teachers; and out of 18 are they all full time positions. Ms. Cruz stated 5 elementary full time, 3 secondary full time and 6 non certified staff and 3 tutors who were brought in for kindergarten. (c) We have 414 students down since 2004.

#### 4. Public Input

a. Maureen Cappetto, 55 Heather Lane – (a) class sizes and curious on guidelines and how far over you can go. Ms. Cruz stated no firm number or law that says you can't have over 24 children but based on best practice and experience, reviewed. (b) if you look at Kindergarten enrollment and budgeting for 38 less next year and if don't get less but more what happens to class size. Ms. Cruz stated she would go to Board of Education, have a conversation and make shift. (c) is there a point where you step in and say too many. Chairman Cook stated the Board of Finance does not make the decision on class size but on the lump sum budget and only the Board of Education can figure out how to spend that money. (d) PCS had increase in students last year yet cutting 5 teachers. Ms. Cruz stated we did have a few classes of 12 at PCS and trying to correct for that and if we feel class size was unreasonable it will be addressed. The BOE needed

- to make the correction and to right the boat and go forward, class sizes are on low side and the parents can trust the BOE to do the right thing for students.
- b. Carole Grimes, Heather Lane, parent of a 2010 graduate and she got a decent education at THS for 3 years, could have been better and always room for improvement. She supports Ms. Cruz, likes her ideas and asks that we give her this budget. This town does some things very well and thinks sports are great, we don't have a lot for kids and things for them to do. Our biggest resource is our kids and we should approve this budget as it is. Very grateful for what we do have, the sports we do have and sees what it has done for them. Her daughter's college website asked about her greatest sports moment and to her it was helping to bring a state championship to Terryville and saying it to brag on the town and it says a lot about teachers, administrators and coaches. Our economy is very bad now and believe why you don't want to cut budget as if students don't get a good education they don't go to good colleges and don't get jobs.
  - c. Randy Picard, Old Waterbury Road – in town for 7 years and oldest will be 5 in a few weeks. He is at FES in preschool and special ed program there. He and his wife are happy he is there as they helped with speech and will be in kindergarten next year. Gave history of his education and as a father listening tonight, appeals to keep class size down. Also to get rid of teachers and eventually it will make sizes go up. Writing course, as children aren't writing much but his children are being taught abc's, 123's and you hand them a tablet and they learn and love idea of chrome books. Solar panels on schools is a great idea.
  - d. Ellen Roth, 13 Holt Street, raise issue of teachers, teacher herself and recognize how difficult to put together a budget; has daughter at PCS who is doing fantastic in kindergarten and remarkable about that school is a worth and genuine connection in the community; with staff cuts it worries her as trying common core and teacher evaluation at state level and pressure teachers are under and how larger class sizes at this point might make it more difficult. Do worry about teachers and pressures in the state.
  - e. Kari Nizzardo, 9 Whitney Court, and also a teacher in Waterbury; (a) do have ½ day professional development once a month and works well. Also teaches science, have netbooks this year and every student has an online code and all new, set to common core, aligned with standards and with next generation standards. Three kindergarten tutors at PCS and with decrease and losing teachers, why aren't tutors going with kids to first grade. Ms. Cruz stated they will wait and see enrollment numbers in the fall and if need support in the classroom the BOE will address it. (b) with common core why is teaching budget not going up. Ms. Cruz stated where you see increases; Rich Trudeau has gotten two huge grants this year which mitigated the budget increases. One was 96,000 where we put in video equipment and have chrome books being delivered to schools and another increase is in software as not just technology; some bump ups in curriculum areas are as we are investing in software we need as well, explained as well as items shown in other budget line items. (c) Use Thomaston as alternate location for alternative school, what about classroom in MSS that are not being used. Ms. Cruz stated it is not habitable for classrooms and issue Thomaston affords us as they experience declining enrollment and have entire wing of high school with

- kitchens, mechanics and machines, art room and all accessible by students and separate entrance. Main Street School would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to bring up to speed. (d) 20,000 increase in legal fees for what. Ms. Cruz stated we are going into arbitration with non certified contract and may carry to next fiscal year and we start negotiation of teacher contracts in the summer. (e) consultants up 50,000; Ms. Cruz stated it is important to bring training to teachers and important professional development in school and investing in those resources to have coaches come to us and work with teachers in classrooms.
- f. Paul Gabriella, 148 East Plymouth Road, lived here 11 years and when moving here he was told the reason not to live here was school system. Taking funds away are taking away from us when we are older and they will lead our society and taking funds away will hurt children in future. Idea of half days for professional development, do not want kids going to July and your mention of parents calling you about not enough textbooks, shame on you for not supplying students the materials they need and not a budgetary need that students don't have a book. Class size, national size recommendation is 13-17 students and we are high and going higher; ratio of student to teacher will have direct test score effect; and one on one scenario and class as a whole all benefit from smaller class sizes. Reducing staff by 18 will affect class size and things will get lost and students less educated from it. Music and art are researched to help children learn; special education and students learn at different rates and it takes a community or village to raise a child. Need to give budget to educate kids. Pattie DeHuff asked the Superintendent to clarify if music or art is being considered as a cut. Ms. Cruz stated music is being looked at in the middle school.
- g. Hillary Mailhot, 433 Mount Tobe, Pattie mentioned class size at PCS and to put sizes together her child would be left behind; ½ day kindergarten and Mrs. Collins set good effort to kids and objectivity; money pays in taxes should go to children, full day kindergarten is amazing; making class sizes larger and depend on full day kindergarten and cutting 5 elementary teachers and if cut budget it is ridiculous. Textbooks, children have not always had a textbook but teachers make a copy of the pages. Chrome books, thinks a great idea. Teachers are entitled to resources; kids need help and need teachers.
- h. Brian Dunn, 19 Carriage Drive, agrees with Randy that future will be computers and chrome books will be necessary for kids. Stepping away from basics of education and need to be able to look things up in a book; to hear no textbooks and they need them. Trip taken for administrators to Boston and one thing that stuck him and took money from kids. Chairman Cook reminded the public that the purpose is proposed budget for 2014-2015 and if talk about specific line items and how the BOE spends its money and past decisions of BOE, it doesn't help the BOF come up to decision for next year's budget. Brian stated his concern is decision-making and past ones are being felt today. Need teachers and need books.
- i. Chris Simo-Kinzer, 52 Old Farm Road – appalled to find out some children do not have textbooks when BOE approved transfer of \$12,500 to fund trip to Harvard. Cost of chrome books and some have been by grant and what is over and above costs. Technology is great but getting away from basics and not

- teaching them cursive. Chrome books will be used for common core and what on line safeguards for chrome books do we have. Prefer to have control over what online sites kids are visiting and looking at numbers on page 17, software, curriculum and staff development which are all high. Suggest areas get looked at.
- j. Laura Wipfler, 6 Stevens Street – under impression whole purpose of cutting budget is that you want another 320,000 budget cut and looking through line items see cost of health insurance which was spoke to, 489,000 more than last year and there is 320,000; she works in healthcare and has not had raise in 5 years and cost are going up. Has a 21 year old THS graduate who had an extraordinary educational experience here and all teachers did everything they could for better education. Has a 5 year old who will enter kindergarten and on the fence for a year on whether to enroll her in Terryville or send out of district; student education seems to have decreased, performance declined and now taking away more teachers. We are in digital age and will need more software and technology and chrome books and expenses we have to incur. We have to invest in kids future so they can take care of us; propose support budget and make no further cuts; need to be competitive and people moving out of town as not the best place to live anymore.
  - k. Jennifer Yeziarski, 28 Hickory Street – layoffs and numbers not adding up, reviewed. Class sizes and teacher layoffs and children need small class sizes and if eliminate teachers and tutors, how are teachers suppose to teach. There is a mix of students.
  - l. Melanie Church, 328 Main Street – there are many alternatives and think people here have been scared and other things discussed where cuts could be made and first thing when talked about zero based budget; has looked at budget and last 5 years and remind you we had Obama money as grant and used as excess money for extra staff and programs and agreed when money went away, the staff would go; has seen it increase and this past year with budget 3 new people hired and some grant money and some money gone. Do we really need two special ed people in administrative office, do we need books that have been cut and they were in budget last year and not used and if no books, why are we doing more trips this year for staff and more substitution for staff than has been done in history of town and budget keeps going up. Budget going up doesn't mean a better education and if look, will see the town side has to cut but how can you turn around and say don't want raise on town side but ok on BOE side. Lost 400+ students in last few years and we don't go down on budget. Every budget needs to be cut and not always are needs but wants. We have to cut BOE as well as town side as we were promised a 1 mill decrease. You can look through budget and can't say line items but you can look; alternative school in Thomaston so why need all the staff, share it. We don't need all these administrators and can cut and won't hurt the children. Take away from central office and get rid of 2-3 people from there. In private sector, asked to do more work with same pay. You need to set budget and asking to set zero based budget because you can't justify any more. Purchase subs, trip to Japan, not against education but we can send kids to Naugatuck Valley College to take a course there for less than what it costs to educate here. Asking to cut the budget.

- m. Linda Kazmierski, 20 Joseph Street – have heard more people say supporting budget than to cut and consider what people are saying and do not feel layoffs are in best interest of school system. Teachers pay taxes and you cut them how will they pay taxes. Do not cut budget any more.
- n. Mark Berube, 48 Ronald Road, suggest all parents home school and give every parent 10,000 per kid and you will save 6 million but absurd. Insurance, very little control over insurance and when all said and done that number can be lower or higher. Professional development, has 2 grandchildren in system now and full custody of them and vested interest in type of education they get. Anyone who is an educator it is through professional development we develop teachers and get up to speed. He is in Wolcott, and their professional development budget is over 100,000 and Wolcott out performs Terryville across the board. Alternative ed, and gave overview on outplacements and costs and savings by bringing back in. Obama money received and he was on BOE then and made considered effort not use that money to hire teachers as we knew that money would go away. We are a mediocre school system and average and time we shift focus from fixing our infrastructure and focus on kids; time to start focusing on education of kids. Finally getting professional development which is necessary, pertinent and will help kids. Please vote for the budget.
- o. David Morgan, 16 Chestnut Street, has a 6<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grader and supports budget, does not support cuts, will support increase in class size and keep extra teacher and let them float around. Agree with some speakers and get into schools and he volunteers and sees how hard they work. Mandatory planning time, meetings and get emails back on weekends, nights, holidays and working hard and don't take any more away. Leave tutors and teachers alone and look elsewhere in town. Give them what they are asking for.
- p. Melissa Kremmel, 28 School Street, suggest approving budget and wish you would increase budget; has two children and considered home schooling and sees declining grades and test scores. Has special needs child who requires more than she can give them. Consider passing budget.
- q. Jeff Levins, 51 Meghan Boulevard, support Mr. Santogatta and Ms. Cruz. He has son at UConn; and a sophomore and when in 8<sup>th</sup> grade they looked at other schools and they looked at size of classroom and it was small and comparable to Watertown and smaller than Holy Cross and oldest had a great experience; applaud teachers in our school system. They truly care and know each student in classes. Support these people for what asking. Heard questions and we are talking about millions of dollars and want kids to get better opportunity and reflect on community. He is proud of our school; walk through halls, talks to teachers and see what they do.
- r. Ray Engle, 6 Knight Lane, BOE Chairman – thank you to everyone for coming out and thanked the BOF and BOE who have worked very hard and countless hours in it; there is no easy decision made when any of us decide on budget. Have put everything on table and looked at all sacred cows. Remember they are working closely with the Mayor's office. He gives Mr. Santogatta, Ms. Cruz, Mayor and Comptroller Bertnagel a lot of credit for coming up with potential creative methods to balance budget.



- s. Jerry Bourbonniere, 6 Fairmount Ave, statement made and promise made in political atmosphere of 1mil decrease within 2 years and what is driving the train and understand BOE point of view. Need money to give education to kids to compete in global society; finance board knows they need to curtail costs with taxpayers who voted and looking for financial relief toward taxes; question is how many actual taxpayers it this town; reviewed breakdown and stated in years past the BOE was very nice and gave money back to the town and in hindsight a huge mistake to give money back and should have spent every single dollar to enhance education system.
- t. AnnMarie Rheault, 125 North Main, 3 children 2 at Eli, 1 at Fisher and she graduated from here stating while do not support all aspects of the budget we have to be careful about cutting. She has one child with special needs and gets services and cannot afford to lose those; she volunteers in system and sees what goes on and cannot imagine being in classroom all day with those children trying to teach. Do not cut teachers anymore and pains to see cut from music budget and only place some kids have opportunity to be exposed to music and arts; some kids don't have a parent at home to help with homework. Who else but teachers will help these kids; understands economic makeup of our town and recognize it.

## 5. Correspondence

## 6. Board Member Comments

- a. Vicky Carey – on board of finance for 22 years and we cannot tell the BOE where to cut or what line items to cut. We give a bottom line number and approve or disapprove budget to us. There are 6 very diverse members on this board and 6 very different opinions and before come up with figure it will be hashed out. Once get to that it will be up to the BOE to decide what they will do with the money.
- b. Dan Murray, thanked everyone who is still here; it is encouraging to see participation by every walk of life as good representation of what people are saying and feel, a good blend and variety; those in favor and those aren't. Just like the BOE had work cut out, we do as well not only on this aspect and everything else. Thanks for being here and support.
- c. Jim Zalot, thanked everyone for attending; taking input to heart and when discussing the budget he will note everything said and taken into consideration.
- d. Pattie DeHuff – so pleased to see 90 people in room and wonderful participation in your government and hope it will double next time. We get to choose bottom line of BOE budget and some concerns addressed need to go to BOE; for the record she used to be a music teacher and very important to her too and also used to be a BOE member in New Britain and aware of how budgets developed; substitute teacher at one time and a home schooling parent and done it all. There are many many good teachers and some there for the money, benefits, time off and as whole believe most go into teaching for love of children and want to help children. Listened, watched and seen and told reason why scores are so bad and told not proper buildings and we invested in buildings and did not solve; and this BOE is going with common core and not adopted and was put out by Bill Gates who will make a lot of money from common core and you should question BOE

- of why adopting common core. Encourage all parents and taxpayers to ask for BOE accounts by facility and look at what money the taxpayers gave to the BOE last year and how much they have spent at this point in time. Thank you for coming out tonight and hope you continue to come to BOF and Town Council and all meeting as this is your government.
- e. Mike Drozdick – reiterate surprise on so many people here and thanks for being here and for comments. It is put to the board to decide if budget is adequate and will be in process of deciding in next few week.
  - f. Chairman Cook stated the BOE has done their duty with budget and presented to us with the next action on March 31 we will talk about this and not sure if we will come up with final number as they will give time for additional savings. Appreciate work and in the end, both boards are drawing on same financial monies, same taxpayers and to service same people; education is very emotional and our job is to balance all needs of the town and not just needs of the BOE. They are unique and massive part of budget. April 21<sup>st</sup> we will have a public hearing on entire budget to the town and welcome everyone to come.

7. Adjournment

**MOTION:** To adjourn by Pattie DeHuff; second Jim Zalot and the vote unanimous.  
Meeting at adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Gudeczauskas  
Recording Secretary