



BUDGET COMMITTEE

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MINUTES OF THE BUDGET COMMITTEE HEARING

Wednesday, December 02, 2015 – 6:30 p.m. – Town Hall Conference Room

Members Present: Chair Mary McDonough, Alyson Baryames, James Connelly, Toby Fedder, Bob Krasko, John Penacho - Selectmen's Rep, Mark Raque, Kristen Syphers, Pat Walsh – School Board Rep

Members Absent: Steve McKenzie, Don Miller

Also Present: Jim Katkin – Business Administrator; Salvatore Petralia – Superintendent of Schools; Peter Smith – Principal, Greenland School

Chair McDonough opened the Budget Committee meeting at 6:34 p.m. and a roll call was taken. The Chair stated that a quorum was present and the meeting was being recorded.

1. School Budget Review

M. Raque reviewed information he prepared using data from the Department of Education, which included teacher salaries throughout the State, the student/teacher ratio, and an analysis of cost per student by district. Note: Teacher contract negotiations are still ongoing.

Briefly reviewing the student/teacher ratio analysis, M. Raque noted that Greenland, with 12.2 students per teacher, is close to the State average of 12 students per teacher. P. Walsh questioned the student/teacher ratio, stating he was unaware of any classrooms with 12 students to one teacher. He also questioned the comparison of teacher salaries, which may not compare to the local economic community. A. Baryames commented that a more useful number would be the surrounding area.

J. Katkin stated the information as presented was correct. He added that data was looked at without any comparative points. J. Katkin prepared an analysis using surrounding towns and the State average (copy on file). He continued that the student to teacher ratio may be done by taking the number of classroom teachers and specialists, and then dividing that into the total. Looking at the per pupil cost, J. Katkin noted that the State average is \$14,200; Greenland is \$13,034.74 (copy on file). Chair McDonough asked if there was a comparison with schools of a similar size (Newington and New Castle show a higher per pupil cost; those schools are smaller). He felt Newfields, Kensington or Hampton Falls may be closer in school population. The school enrollment is currently 394 students. There was a discussion regarding the per pupil cost and how it was calculated.

J. Penacho questioned the proficiency ratings. He asked for a listing of the proficiency ratings of surrounding towns for comparison. J. Katkin responded that it would be included in next year's budget. Chair McDonough noted that they would not make a recommendation on the warrant article for teacher salaries until negotiations were done.

M. Raque also prepared a school budget comparison from 2014-2105 to this year's proposed budget, which he reviewed. J. Katkin explained the Unassigned Fund Balance and how it affects the district

assessment and tax rate; the tax rate can be reduced through retainage if approved by the School Board. Responding to a question by Chair McDonough, J. Katkin stated that there was not any money added to the expendable trust fund for unanticipated tuition. It was pointed out that there was a warrant article that passed in 2015; J. Katkin will make sure the transfer into the Tuition Expendable Trust Fund was made. J. Katkin explained that the unassigned fund balance is money that has not been expended.

Responding to a question from B. Krasko, J. Katkin stated that there are two pending Special Education lawsuits against the school. He explained that the unassigned fund balance was low due to pending and potential cases. Any legal fees for Greenland are paid through the Greenland School budget. There was a lengthy discussion about legal fees, out of district placement and Special Education requirements.

J. Katkin added that of the \$9.6 million dollar budget, \$1.3 million was Special Education (13.65%). The State-wide average is 15%. State of New Hampshire law states that the appropriated budget, as approved by residents of the town, could not be exceeded. J. Katkin explained that if there was a situation where the school knew they couldn't make the budget, smaller bills may not get paid in that year and moved to the next year; or if he felt the budget would not make it to the end of the year, a deficit appropriation would be requested at the Deliberative Session. A deficit appropriation allows the Town to transfer money to the School District to cover costs, providing it's approved as a warrant article by residents. They could also petition the Commissioner of Education to use funds from retainage. J. Katkin added that there is a tuition account that can be used for Special Education tuition.

The Committee was reminded of the possible change in school hours for Portsmouth next year, which would affect the buses in Greenland. J. Katkin added \$50,000 to pupil transportation in anticipation of that change. If the decision is made by Portsmouth before the Deliberative Session, the budget could be changed on the floor during that hearing. T. Fedder suggested leaving the money to build up a reserve in the Tuition Expendable Trust Fund. J. Penacho suggested the scope of the tuition fund should be expanded or a separate fund established. J. Katkin explained that to expand the scope, a warrant article would be needed to cancel that fund; another warrant article would be needed to create a new fund. He suggested it may be easier to create a Special Education Expendable Trust Fund which would be a broader scope. J. Penacho reminded members that it must be voted on every year to add money to a trust fund. He added that funding needed to be consistent, and suggested setting a maximum amount.

Chair McDonough told members that Town department heads would be reviewing their budgets at the meeting on Tuesday, December 08, 2015. Recommendations for the Town and school budgets could be done on the same night.

The Assistant Principal position was discussed at length. P. Walsh stated that they had looked at the quality of education in other towns and will provide demographics, which will be emailed to members. P. Smith reviewed the proposed position. J. Katkin added that with the litigation they're now seeing, a competent individual to assist P. Smith was needed; he can't be everywhere all the time. An assistant principal would be a safety net and litigation issue that becomes a concern; people are becoming more sophisticated. S. Petralia added that there is a higher emphasis on supervision evaluation. There is a plan for effective teaching in the SAU, which is the blueprint for evaluating and support staff. As the staff in Greenland ages and retires, the professional certified staff is being replaced with people who are new to the district. They require more mentorship and supervision; there are greater needs for a teacher new to the district than a 25 year veteran teacher. The SAU Board is placing a heavy emphasis on fidelity to the plan for effective teaching. Sara Huestis, School Board, commented that with the various curriculum initiatives coming, there are many committees within the various disciplines. The

principal is required to attend those meetings; an additional administrator attending some of those meetings would allow the principal to focus on other issues.

M. Raque stated that adding staff was a difficult decision. There should be a job description for that person, including their responsibilities. He added that he didn't see enough of a hardship. P. Walsh commented that putting things in perspective, if the principal was compensated for all his extra hours, it would be approximately \$80,000. A. Baryames felt that members may not have a complete understanding of the complexities the principal's responsibilities on a daily basis. J. Penacho added that there are more federal and State mandated programs; he felt it was a risk not having an additional person when working with mandated programs. He added that it was a small amount of money when risking a potential lawsuit by not following through on mandated programs. The salary, without benefits, is \$85,000. With benefits, using a family health plan, the cost would be \$129,000. A single health plan would bring it down to around \$115,000.

Technology was discussed. M. Raque questioned the need for every student in Grades 3 through 8 to have a Chrome Book. P. Smith explained that they currently share them, which can be inconvenient and disruptive. The additional Chrome Books could be utilized by every day by every teacher for various activities and research; they are essential in today's environment. It was added that testing is also done on the Chrome Books. M. Raque asked if they applied for any program assistance similar to what was offered on the Apple site. P. Smith responded that some of the Chrome Books they own were obtained through grants and other entities. J. Katkin added that they did look into leasing; it was cheaper for the district to purchase them. They felt the IT infrastructure would be able to handle the additional computers.

T. Fedder asked if they had considered solar panels. J. Katkin responded that they had looked into it and were told it would not be beneficial for this area. They did receive a \$250,000 grant for all four districts from EverSource for upgrading bulbs and ballasts. They're hoping to see a 25% savings. Lighting has also been changed on exit signs and in the parking lot.

Food Services: J. Katkin explained that there would always be a \$30,000 loss. The cost to prepare the meal exceeds what is being charged. If the price is increased, more students would bring their lunch: as the price goes up, participation goes down. They try to use commodities as much as possible.

The School Psychologist is paid through the IBEA grant, which is a federal grant of approximately \$200,000. It goes through the SAU office and is divided into proportionate shares. J. Katkin understood that position was going to be removed from the IBEA grant. He continued that grants have not been increasing, so they have to start to reduce what is offered through the grant. In addition, he has spoken to the Special Education Director about the evaluations performed by Portsmouth Neuro-Psychology. He was told that due to the difficulty of the students that are being received, they want third party evaluations. They don't want evaluations from school staff because of biasness. Third party evaluations are also better if they have to go to the State. Chair McDonough explained the neuro-psych testing process to members.

Chair McDonough reminded members that the Town budget review would be next week. The following week would also be the Town budget review; recommendations could be made at that time. The final review of School and Town budgets will be on January 06, 2016. J. Penacho told members that it would be important to ask questions when reviewing the Town budget. If additional information regarding the School budget was needed, P. Walsh would like to know as soon as possible. J. Penacho asked to see the qualifications for the assistant principal position.

2. Approval of Minutes: Wednesday, November 18, 2015

MOTION: B. Krasko moved to approve the minutes of Wednesday, November 18, 2015. Second – J. Connelly; eight in favor, one abstain (T. Fedder). **MOTION CARRIED**

3. Adjournment

MOTION: A. Baryames moved to adjourn at 8:40 p.m. Second – T. Fedder; all in favor. **MOTION CARRIED**

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, December 08, 2015 – 6:30 p.m., Town Budget Review, Town Hall Conference Room

Respectfully Submitted – Charlotte Hussey, Secretary to the Boards

Approved: Tuesday, December 08, 2015