

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION FINANCE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
MEETING HELD JANUARY 23, 2020 AT 7:30 P.M. AT DODD MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Board Members Present: Anthony Perugini-Chair; Adam Grippo-Vice Chair; Kathryn Hallen-Secretary; Faith Ham; Anne Harrigan; Andrew Martelli; Timothy White (arr. 7:10)

Board Members Absent: None

Administrators Present: Jeffrey F. Solan, Superintendent of Schools; Marlene Silano Assistant Superintendent of Schools; Vincent Masciana, Chief Operating Officer; Tracy Hussey, Director, Pupil Personnel Services; Mary Joscelyn-Gadd, Principal-Cheshire High School; Maureen Reed, Assistant Principal-Cheshire High School; Michael Woods, Principal-Dodd Middle School; Diana Burns, Principal-Chapman Elementary School; Ann Donnery, Principal-Darcey School; Amy O'Brien, Principal-Doolittle Elementary School; Scott Jeffrey, Principal-Highland Elementary School; Kevin Hanlon, Curriculum Coordinator K-8; Robin-Anne Carey, Supervisor of Elementary Special Education; Marie Broadway, Supervisor of Secondary Special Education

1. CALL TO ORDER – 7:30 P.M.

- A. Roll for Quorum. The roll was called and a quorum determined.
- B. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.
Mr. Perugini led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

2. PUBIC BUDGET REVIEW AND DISCUSSION REGARDING THE SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET.

The meeting began with a presentation by Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Tracy Hussey on Special Education (on file). Ms. Hussey reported that 12% of our students receive special education services which is lower than the state average but similar to other DRG B districts. She thanked the Board for being supportive of mental health providers and approving the additional positions in the previous year's budget. She explained the different programs at each of the schools and out of district. Ms. Hussey reviewed the positions that are being requested in this budget; .5 Special Education Teacher at Darcey School, .5 Special Education Teacher for Transition Instruction and a .5 Board Certified Behavior Analyst.

Ms. Ham asked what warrants an out of district placement and Ms. Hussey responded that it happens when the district cannot meet the needs of the student.

Mr. Masciana next continued with the last session to be reviewed during this budget process, Maintenance and Operations which is 5.1% of the Operating Budget. He noted that the average age of our schools is 69.25 years old.

The 2020-2021 request for Maintenance and Operations is \$3,924,616, an 8.13% increase over last year's budget. He noted that maintenance of our buildings is an important part of our budget. He reviewed each of the line items in this account.

		EXPENDED	BUDGET	PROJECTED	REQUESTED	CHANGE	% inc/
		2018/19	2019/20	2019/20	2020/21	(From BGT)	% dec
410	PUBLIC UTILITIES	\$ 1,015,512	\$ 1,018,686	\$ 1,018,686	\$ 1,043,458	24,772	2.43%
420	MAINTENANCE/REPAIR EQUIPMENT	\$ 182,154	\$ 152,100	\$ 152,100	\$ 157,850	5,750	3.78%
430	MAINTENANCE/REPAIR BUILDINGS	\$ 2,033,358	\$ 1,888,424	\$ 1,888,424	\$ 2,079,350	190,926	10.11%
613	MAINTENANCE SUPPLY	\$ 325,800	\$ 205,650	\$ 205,650	\$ 255,650	50,000	24.31%
620	HEAT/ENERGY	\$ 352,626	\$ 364,743	\$ 364,743	\$ 388,308	23,565	6.46%
	MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS	\$ 3,909,450	\$ 3,629,603	\$ 3,629,603	\$ 3,924,616	\$ 295,013	8.13%

Masciana provided detail of what is in each of the categories in this account. Utilities and heating is 36.5% of the Maintenance & Operations budget; building maintenance and repair is 32%, Building Cleaning Services is 20%, Maintenance Supply is 7% and Equipment Maintenance and Repair is 4%. He explained the largest requests are for maintenance and repairs for the buildings, as that account has been reduced in the last few budgets. The increase of \$50,000 under Maintenance Supply is to buy supplies as one of our maintainers is now licensed and can service our burners and equipment in-house.

Mr. Masciana reviewed the Capital Requests for 2019-2020 through 2023-2024. He also reviewed the historical pension rate of returns which he explained is available on the Town's website. Mr. Masciana shared building use fees for the past year noting that building use fees go to the Town as revenue and custodial fees charged are used to offset our custodial wages.

He also re-shared a slide from a previous meeting for cost and revenue per sport and noted that another column has been added for "support group donations" which is purchase of equipment or goods.

Superintendent Solan thanked all of the administrators as well as central office staff. He offered final thoughts on the recommended budget and offered some key takeaways:

- The initial budget request of over 7% has been aggressively reviewed to present a conscientious and prioritized 4.05% request.
- Cheshire Public Schools is an outstanding value for our community spending \$6 million less than the average DRG B district with exceptional results.
- The addition of 1 certified position in special education is needed to address needs at the elementary and post-secondary levels.
- The recommendation was ultimately made to add an additional \$6,200 to the budget to offset costs for girls ice hockey. He said that figure was taken from the 10-year average. He said this was a base number and he would suggest budgeting \$12,600 for eight players.

Mr. Solan also reviewed the list of accolades for Cheshire Public Schools in the past year. Cheshire is one of the highest ranking school systems in the state.

Mr. Perugini explained that tonight the Finance Committee will discuss and possibly put forth a motion to go to the full Board and then next week, the Board will meet to adopt a budget. He thanked everyone who has worked on the budget and attended the meetings.

Mr. Grippo asked for clarification on Title IX certification. He asked who determines if we are in compliance. Mr. Solan answered no one determines compliance on an annual basis. The Office of Civil Rights oversees and provides guidance on Title IX. They provide guidance on what constitutes a sport. You don't have to have equal sports and they expect districts to have fluctuations. If there is a trend, it must be reviewed. Mr. Solan said that although our attorneys have confirmed that we are in compliance, we also want to be sure that our students are provided opportunities. Mr. Grippo asked for an annual report on this in June going forward.

Mr. Perugini asked if there are additional hockey players interested in joining, could our budget absorb any potential over the eight. Mr. Solan answered, yes.

3. **PUBLIC DISCUSSION REGARDING SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET**

Martha Linder, 652 Ashley Court. Mrs. Linder has two children, a son and a daughter who both play hockey. She said she is thrilled to hear that the Board is considering 8 students, although that number may be low. She thinks it would be equitable and fair to fund 10 players, 1/3 of the boys team. In addition, she said they are hoping the girls can get varsity status. Mrs. Linder handed printed information to the Board.

Mr. Solan said regarding varsity status and the Captain's Council, he said they will definitely look into it.

Mary Burnham, 45 Tress Road. Ms. Burnham was commenting on student stress and anxiety. She said a great deal of pressure has been put on these students because of Common Core. She thinks as a Board, with the concern with too much technology, the Curriculum Committee needs to take a look at not only phones, but smart boards and tablets. All the technology takes away from interpersonal relationships, real personalized learning. You can subtract the technology money and put it towards teachers.

Jack Bester, 45 Tress Road. Mr. Bester said it is really important to understand there is a growing body of evidence that is indicating the amount of electronic use with our students and instruction is not benefiting them. He said sometimes we get caught up with how well our students are doing on tests, but tests are not the end all. He said he would rather see personnel in the budget instead of technology. He distributed a letter to the Board.

Jami Ferguson, 105 Copper Beach. Ms. Ferguson asked the Board to look at the medical trust fund because it is always discussed by the Town Council. Her other concern is

building use fees and the cost of custodians. She suggested a fund within the Town to help offset costs for town clubs or volunteer organizations.

Rob Oris, 71 Autumn Court. Mr. Oris, the Town Council Chairman, responded to Ms. Ferguson saying she is advocating to add to the budget. He said the problem is with custodial fees, and he believes we need to find an alternative method to manage that space other than the \$65 per hour custodian.

Mr. Perugini responded to Ms. Ferguson that she has great ideas. He and Mr. Grippo have been working with administrators to try to reduce the fees for these groups. The Board needs all of the facts before they can respond publically. He said ultimately it will be a Board decision. He said Parks and Rec can staff events and that would not violate the custodian's contract.

4. **POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING 2020/21 PROPOSED BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET**

Mr. Grippo said tonight the Finance Committee will discuss and bring forward a proposal which will go to the full Board for discussion next week. He reviewed the Superintendent's recommended increase of 4.05% or \$2,973,541 over the 2019/2020 budget. Mr. Grippo said he would recommend a 2.65% increase or \$1,945,632. He shared his line item deductions with the Finance Committee.

MOTION by Mr. Grippo, seconded by Ms. Ham

MOVED that the Finance Committee recommends and forwards to the full Board of Education a Budget of \$75,302,143, an increase of 2.65% or \$1,945,632 over the 2019/2020 budget.

Discussion:

Mr. Grippo said in his proposed increase he added in \$12,400 for girls ice hockey for 8 positions.

Ms. Ham said in regard to hockey, she is concerned with the precedent the Board will be setting and will they be opening the door to other clubs to ask for similar funding. She loves the girls playing hockey and if they can find a way to overcome the issue and resolve that she would be willing to go along with the \$12,600.

Ms. Hallen said she cannot support the reduction Mr. Grippo proposed. She said she does support funding the girls ice hockey players but agrees with Ms. Ham's concern. She stated that while we may be able to reduce some of the accounts, she does not agree with Mr. Grippo's proposal to not fund the Medical Benefits account, his reduction to Pupil Personnel, or his elimination of the Board Certified Behavior Analyst position. She also does not support the reductions to Maintenance, Maintenance Supply, or his reduction of \$20,000 from the Library Supply Account as we should be investing in library books. She questioned his reduction to heat and energy. Mr. Masciana confirmed

the increase is the estimate of heating oil costs. Ms. Hallen said she thinks his projection of six retirements is a high estimate.

Ms. Ham said her concern is that they are constrained by the salaries and even if they reduced all of the proposed increases, they are still looking at a sizeable increase to the budget because they have to meet the salaries and the benefits. She said she thinks special education needs the funding for the students. She would like to look at student activities and staff training. She suggested decreasing staff stipends. She said while the administrators are the experts, she is thinking of the town taxpayers who have to absorb these costs year after year.

Mr. Grippo said with this proposal he thought of the needs of the Town as a whole including the School Modernization Committee and Mr. Jaskot's presentation on debt service and controlling expenses. Mr. Jaskot assumed a town increase of 1.5% of spending of the total town expenditure. He said he preserved almost all current funding levels. He said of the three positions requested at \$40,000 each, he is proposing only two. He said it does not matter to him which position is not funded. He thinks his reductions are reasonable. He explained the six retirements are not included in his proposal, only a side note to consider in the spring. He said in good faith, they should offer the Town Council a budget number that is reasonable.

Ms. Hallen said she would suggest some additional funding to the trust fund and to the maintenance accounts. Mr. Grippo defended his recommendation of keeping those accounts level.

VOTE: The Motion passed 2-1 (Ms. Hallen opposed)

5. **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by Ms. Hallen, and seconded by Mr. Grippo, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Perugini, Board Chair

Attest:

Carol K. Jesensky, Board of Education Clerk

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