

Merrimack School District Budget Committee
Minutes

January 7, 2025

Present: K. Bernier, M. Berry, D. Coakley, L. French, J. McCormack, C. Mower M. Murphy, R. Paepke, S. Rand, A. Santoriello, B. Trant and School Board Liaison N. Halter

Excused: G. Groff

Also Present: Chief Educational Officer Bill Olsen, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Amy Doyle and Assistant Superintendent for Business Matt Shevenell

J. McCormack called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Participation

Heather Callahan (King Henry Court) asked how the Committee justifies spending more money when student test scores aren't going up.

James Wood (Wilson Hill Road) said the economy wasn't conducive to raising taxes. He said he does not see the benefit of the money put in the budget.

Hollis McGuire (Wilson Hill Road) said the elderly/senior tax exemption makes no sense.

Jamie Gibson (Island Drive) said she was having a hard time understanding the increase and wanted to know how the School District was addressing the concerns of residents. She said she was not seeing any difference in her child's education.

Gloria Cole (Brek Drive) said the tax increase is unsustainable and that seniors should not be priced out of Merrimack. She said there was a lack of transparency in the budget and thanked the Committee members for their efforts.

Matthew Brown (MHS student) said we need to put the needs of the students first and complimented the Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) program. He said budget cuts will affect the students.

Tiffany Castellucci-Trant (S. Baboosic Lake Road) said that students with special needs are getting less of an education than those without.

J. McCormack thanked the speakers.

Approval of Prior Minutes

B. Trant made a MOTION to approve the minutes of December 10, 2024. Second: M. Berry. MOTION PASSED 7 – 0 – 3. (D. Coakley, L. French and N. Halter abstained.)

J. McCormack set the following guidelines for the meeting to foster collaborative and productive conversation that's also respectful and efficient which will help the Committee keep the meeting moving along:

1. Treat one another with courtesy and respect.
2. Limit individual comments to a minute or and allow time for others to speak.
3. Focus on key points.
4. Be succinct in your language.

J. McCormack said she wanted to ensure that every member has an opportunity to voice his or her opinion. She said that, after the Administration gave its presentation, the Committee would have a round robin conversation. She indicated that she would be a timekeeper to monitor and ensure that the meeting was running efficiently and on time. She requested that members be mindful of the time they are speaking and be prepared to summarize. She asked that members please be willing to have open dialogue with one another and hear differing viewpoints with respect and with collaboration.

Administration Budget Message

Chief Educational Officer B. Olsen, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum A. Doyle, Assistant Superintendent for Business M. Shevenell gave a presentation "Improvements to the Merrimack School District 2021 – Present." The presentation covered the following areas:

- Operational Improvements
- Curriculum/Student Focused Improvements
- Improvements Related to School Safety
- Personnel/Staff Development Improvements

The discussion following the presentation included the following:

- The Administration expects very few warrant articles this year.
- Salary lines budget for full staff; funds for contracted staff are not expended from salary lines.
- Anthony presented a spread sheet that he created to analyze prior expenditure trends.
- Voters don't have a good choice when default and proposed budgets are so close.
- State education funding has been reduced over the last several years.
- How the Default Budget is formulated.
- Union contracts vs. contracts with outside companies for services.
- Comparison of cost per student in various School Districts.
- Student enrollment numbers and test scores.
- Maintenance costs for School Districts vary based on many factors.
- The Administration's main priorities this year are security, curriculum and roof repairs.
- The effect of inflation on budget trend.
- Initial Curriculum costs vs. Annual Curriculum costs.

Next Meeting

J. McCormack said the next meeting would be on January 14, 2025.

Public Participation

Rebecca Woodman (Dwyer Street) asked the Committee to look closely at the budget.

Virginia Heald (Pondview Drive) asked how the proposed budget was going to improve our students' education.

Jamie Gibson (Island Drive) asked why the District was holding back teachers and not letting them teach. She suggested that the administration needs to talk directly to the teachers and support staff to see what they need.

Matthew Brown (MHS student) said the public school budget should ensure that public school students are adequately served.

M. Berry made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: B. Trant.

J. McCormack declared the meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM.