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Merrimack School District Budget Committee
Minutes
October 15, 2024

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Present: S. Bernier, M. Berry, D. Coakley, L. French, G. Groff, J. McCormack, M. Murphy, R.
Paepke, S. Rand, A. Santoriello, B. Trant and School Board Liaison N. Halter
Absent: C. Mower
Also Present: Chief Educational Officer B. Olsen, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum A.
Doyle, and Assistant Superintendent for Business M. Shevenell

Acting Chair M. Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and led those present in the
Pledge of Allegiance.

Welcome & Introductions
M. Murphy welcomed everyone and asked members to briefly introduce themselves.

Public Participation
There was none.

Re-organization
Chair
M. Murphy called for nominations for Chair.

B. Trant nominated Jennifer McCormack. Second: A. Santoriello.

N. Halter nominated Mackenzie Murphy. Second: D. Coakley.

There were no more nominations. A. Santoriello asked for a brief statement from each
candidate. After each candidate spoke, a roll call vote was held.

J. Mc Cormack	M. Murphy	Abstain
K. Bernier		
M. Berry		
		D. Coakley
	L. French	
	G. Groff	
J. McCormack		
		M. Murphy
	R. Paepke	
S. Rand		
A. Santoriello		
B. Trant		
	N. Halter	
6	4	2

J. McCormack was declared elected as Chair and joined M. Murphy at the head of the table.

Vice Chair
M. Murphy called for nominations for Vice Chair.

R. Paepke nominated L. French. Second: D. Coakley

J. McCormack nominated M. Murphy. Second: S. Rand

Since M. Murphy had already made a brief statement to the Committee, L. French was asked to also make a brief statement.

A roll call vote was held

L. French	M. Murphy	Abstain
	K. Bernier	
	M. Berry	
		D. Coakley
		L. French
G. Groff		
	J. McCormack	
		M. Murphy
R. Paepke		
	S. Rand	
	A. Santoriello	
	B. Trant	
	N. Halter	
2	7	3

M. Murphy was declared elected Vice Chair.

Budget Process Proposal
E. Olson presented a proposal on possible changes to the Committee Budget Process.

E. Olson said the Administration would like to make a comprehensive global budget presentation to the School Board and then have the principals and budget managers will attend School Board meetings to explain and answer questions about their budget requests. He said the Administration is currently scheduling meetings (a listening tour) with each school and department to discuss budget needs and requests. He said that after School Board has reviewed and made its budget recommendation, he said the Administration would present the School Boad's budget recommendation to the Committee with the school principals and department budget managers in the audience to answer questions or discuss any issues. He proposed that the Committee forgo the usual liaison team meetings since his staff was already doing the groundwork in building their budget recommendation.

Discussion included:
- The administration plans to give an initial budget overview.

- This year there will be an informational sheet for each school and department summarizing what is new for fiscal 2026 and explaining areas where funds have been reallocated.
- M. Shevenell is working on a schedule to have the School Board budget recommendation finalized before Christmas.
- Committee members may find it helpful to attend School Board meetings with their budget books when the School Board is reviewing and discussing various school or department budget presentations.
- The current liaison process was explained: a small group of members is assigned to a specific school or department and meet with the principal or department budget manager to tour, review and discuss budget needs.
- Instead of liaison meetings, Committee members could send written questions ahead of time to school principals and budget managers so the principals and managers can provide comprehensive answers for discussion during the specific school or department presentation to the Committee.
- A global budget presentation to the entire Committee would be a welcome addition to the process, but several members would prefer school principals and department managers to directly present their budgets to the Committee.
- Members discussed that the information gathered at the liaison team meetings is important. Concerns were raised that detailed information gained from meeting directly with the principals and department heads might be lost if liaison meetings are eliminated.
- The Committee could divide the budget into sections and assign various members to review a specific section or two.
- The Committee wants to look at historical budget trends and ways to reduce the unassigned budget balance each year.
- Members would like better communication with the School Board.
- Members would like a more detailed explanation of what is in the default budget.
- The Committee cannot change the default budget.
- Members would like to know what budget "categories" can't be changed due to statute or contracts.
- It was noted that the Administration is responsible for submitting a budget to the School Board who is responsible for submitting its budget recommendation to the Budget Committee.
- The Committee's responsibility is to propose an overall budget amount (bottom line) at Deliberative Session.

J. McCormack proposed that the Committee table any vote on this proposal until the next meeting. By consensus, the members agreed.

Right to Know Memo
M. Shevenell shared a memo on RSA 91-A (the Right to Know Law) that had been prepared by the District's attorney. He said the law emphasizes public access to government actions and transparency. He said the RTK law focuses on what constitutes a meeting, how the use of email be considered a meeting, public vs non-public meetings, a quorum is required to make decisions, and the requirement of making available meeting minutes for public inspection.

N. Halter told the Committee how the School Board handles emails that are sent to the School Board.

A. Santoriello suggested that members sending emails to other members should "bcc" them which eliminates the chance to "reply all."

Committee members noted that communication with the public was crucial and there is a need for better engagement regarding meeting schedules and agendas.

Committee Policies and Procedures
M. Murphy said the Committee approved a list of Policies and Procedures last year and reviewed each.

1. Meetings.
M. Murphy mentioned that there is a possibility that the Committee could meet at Town Hall.

2. Meeting Attendance
D. Coakley made a MOTION to revoke Committee Policy "*2. Meeting Attendance: b. On 1/31/2023, the Committee defined attendance at posted committee meetings as in-person presence and voted to not allow remote participation by members.*" Second: L. French.

D. Coakley said he feels strongly that this policy is exclusionary and he had voted against it.

Discussion included:
- Remote participation should be allowed on a case by case basis.
- Should the Committee limit how many times a member participates remotely?
- The District should consider ways to improve the technology available for remote participation.
- The right to know law allows for member to attend remotely, but there are specific requirements for voting and participation that must be followed.

J. McCormack called for a vote on the motion.

B. Trant asked about amending the motion to include types of technology that could be used. J. McCormack told him voting had already started and needed to be completed, but he could make a new motion after the vote was complete if he wanted.

MOTION PASSED: 7 – 1 – 1 (N. Halter opposed, J. McCormack abstained. K. Bernier and G. Groff did not vote.)

J. McCormack and R. Paepke clarified that this vote in accordance with RTK allows Committee members to attend a meeting remotely as long as an in-person quorum (7 members) is present at a physical location but does not allow the Committee to meet as a whole remotely.

3. Voting
N. Halter reminded the Committee that Roll Call votes are required for decisions made when a member is participating remotely.

4. Public Comment/Participation at Meetings

5. Correspondence
M. Murphy explained that the Committee maintains a unified email address for members of the public who wish to communicate with the Committee and any email received is forwarded to all members.

6. Member Conduct
M. Berry made a MOTION that a copy of the Committee policies and procedures should be provided to new members when they are sworn in. R. Paepke made a MOTION TO AMEND the original motion to amend that the Policies and Procedures should also be posted on the Budget Committee's website. Second: K. Bernier. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

7. Liaison Team Meetings
These meetings are required to be posted ahead of the meeting date, are open for members of the public to attend, and minutes must be taken. Additional notes were shared about the logistics of how these meetings are conducted.

R. Paepke asked about having Committee meetings at Town Hall.

After a brief discussion about the committee's preferences as well as the technical and logistical aspects of changing meeting location, J. McCormack made a MOTION to continue to meet at the High School. Second: A. Santoriello. MOTION PASSED 9 – 1 – 2. (K. Bernier opposed & N. Halter and M. Murphy abstained)

Next Meeting
M. Murphy announced the next meeting would be on November 19th. She said that M. Shevenell would present the FY 23-24 Year End Budget Review and an FY 24-25 first quarter budget update.

K. Bernier asked to have the reports sent to members to review before the meeting. J. McCormack said she would facilitate the request for more detailed budget line item data of expenditures to be provided to the Committee prior to that meeting.

Public Participation
Justin Slez (Merrimack TV) told the Committee he was glad that the Committee was discussing meeting in the Matthew Thornton Room at town hall. He said the Matthew Thornton Room is rated for 50 – 60 occupants, shared details about the set room set-up and the benefits of meeting in that room. He suggested that members of the Committee could stop by and view the set-up. He urged the Committee to reconsider its decision on the matter.

Committee Comments
L. French thanked J. Slez for sharing his point of view and asked additional questions about the burden on Merrimack TV to accommodate the high school location.

K. Bernier asked whether the Matthew Thornton room would be ADA accessible.

M. Berry seconded the value of this new perspective and asked whether the community

could reconsider and learn more.

R. Paepke made a MOTION to get more information about the possibility of meeting in the Matthew Thornton Room at Town Hall. Second: L. French. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

M. Murphy said that the November 19th meeting will be at the high school/

G. Groff made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: R. Paepke.   MOTION PASSED unanimously.

M. Murphy declared the meeting adjourned at 9:27 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat