

**Merrimack School Board Special Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Memorial Room
December 18, 2024**

Present: Ms. Lori Chair Peters, Chair; Ms. Jenna Hardy, Vice-Chair; Ms. Laurie Rothhaus, Board Member; Mr. Ken Martin, Board Member; and Ms. Naomi Halter, Board Member.

Also Present: Mr. Everett Olsen, Chief Educational Officer; Ms. Amy Doyle, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum; and Mr. Matt Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent for Business.

Not Present: Mr. Finnegan Haddad, Student Representative.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

At 6:00 p.m., Chair Peters called the regular meeting to order.

Chair Peters read aloud the Merrimack School District's mission statement into the record as follows:

The Merrimack School District will provide a high-quality, future-driven education to all students in the community. Students will engage in learning opportunities that reflect both rigor and relevance and meet their cognitive, social, and emotional needs. The district will prepare students to understand, adapt, and adjust to civic, economic, social, and technological changes in the world. Our overall goal is to inspire, create, and encourage students to be curious, connected, prepared, resilient, and dedicated individuals who are lifelong expert learners. Merrimack graduates exercise judgment; they are innovative and will become responsible contributors to society. We hope the discussions we have tonight will always align with that mission.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were none.

3. BUDGET PRESENTATION

a. Work Session

Board Member Martin commented that he felt the administrative team had done a fantastic job at finding ways not only to decrease the costs of things that were no longer needed or were not in need of improvement but also to find things that the district truly did need. He added that he felt nothing being requested was frivolous. He said he felt the requests were in line with the district's goals.

Board Member Martin said if he had to pick two items that could be cut from the proposed budget, it would be the van for the Food Services Department and to hire a police detail for events at the high school.

Chair Peters commented that the current van only had 65,000 on it and felt they could still get some use out of it.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that the Food Service Department's budgets had always been very frugal, but also said that it was critical to get the food to the different schools and perhaps selling the van would be a better option.

Vice-Chair Hardy said the Food Services Department was self-funded, including the van.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the Food Services Department had over \$300,000 in surplus, and by statute, they would have to spend it down. He said it would not affect the tax rate.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that the surplus funds could not be used for other purposes.

Chair Peters commented that every member of the Board had some concerns regarding having a police detail at so many events and asked for the Board's thoughts.

Board Member Martin commented that he did not feel there was any evidence that supported having a police detail at every sporting event.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that some events would draw more people, and she felt that having police details should be event-specific. She suggested that the amount of the requested money could be decreased.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to decrease the amount for a police detail from \$54,45 to \$27,072.50. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Board Member Rothhaus, regarding contracted services, asked if there was a way for the district to hire its own people in some of the positions. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that they always looked to hire their own people first.

Chair Peters requested that the district continue to look at finding the most efficient contracted services.

Board Member Halter said she felt the asks were not large. She said, however, that the delivery charges for electricity were a bit high. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell replied that the supply rates would be stable, the delivery charges were up to the Public Utilities Commission, and the district had no control over that. She also asked if they could decrease the utility lines by a little bit in each line item.

MOTION: Board Member Halter made a motion to direct the administration to look at the utility lines in the maintenance budget and find \$30,000 in cuts. Board Member Martin seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board Member Rothhaus commented that she was not comfortable with making that cut. Vice-Chair Hardy and Chair Peters agreed with Board Member Rothhaus' statement.

Chief Educational Officer Olsen commented that the utility accounts were often influenced by global instability.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said he was reasonably confident that they could make the \$30,000 in cuts.

MOTION FAILED: 1 – 4 – 0 (Nay: Chair Peters, Vice-Chair Hardy, Board Member Rothhaus, & Board Member Martin.)

Board Member Rothhaus, regarding the addition of three administrative assistants, said she wanted more information as she did not feel that the district needed three. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied he would provide additional information but noted that it was an area that the district needed to do a better job of mandatory compliance, record keeping, and communication.

Vice-Chair Hardy suggested that one or more could be part-time positions.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that at the last meeting, Student Representative Haddad was discussing a particular teacher who was giving up their prep time to teach. She said there was no budget line to address teachers who were teaching an independent study. She also said many talented teachers could teach something in their field, and it would be great to have a stipend line item at some point in the future.

Chair Peters asked if any other members of the Board would like to make changes to the budget. There were none.

Chair Peters said that the School Board's recommendation was to reduce the proposed budget by \$27,072.50, with the stipulation that there may be some changes regarding the three administrative assistant positions.

Vice-Chair Hardy stated that while there was a request for money to replace the football uniforms, she did not see any requests for other sports and wanted to make sure it was equitable. Chief Educational Officer Olsen replied that he would provide the Board with further information.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she felt it would be helpful for the Athletic Director to make their own presentation at the following year's budget meeting.

Chair Peters, commenting on co-curricular activities, stated that she would like to see the district's principals look into more parental volunteers and more creative ways to have them without increasing the budget.

MOTION: Board Member Martin made a motion to reduce the proposed budget by \$27,072.50, leaving a total proposed budget of \$96,823,198. Vice-Chair Hardy seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 5 – 0 – 0.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the default budget was approximately \$1 million less than the proposed budget the Board had just voted on. He said that equated to .50 cents on the tax rate, which was \$100.00 less than voting in the budget the Board just requested that the Budget Committee review. He read aloud an excerpt from RSA 40:13 as follows:

"The default budget as used in this subsection means the amount of the same appropriation as contained in the operating budget authorized for the previous year."

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell said the default budget was the purview of the School Board only and could not be changed at the Deliberative Session.

b. Warrant Article Discussion

Chair Peters commented that there was a Warrant Article that was not included in the School Board's packet, and it was related to the proposed new SAU building. She said they had not yet had a formal presentation from the Building & Planning Committee, but they had all watched the meetings, and at its last meeting, they voted to recommend the newest proposal for an SAU building. She said, as Chair of the School Board, she did not include it in the packet because they had not heard the Building & Planning Committee's presentation, and she was very concerned about putting a Warrant Article on the ballot about the SAU building. She further stated that the operating budget was critical for passing if they were going to provide the best education for the best tax dollar for the students.

Board Member Martin commented that he felt the number one priority was the passing of the operating budget. If anything could possibly get in the way of that not passing, then he felt they needed to have a serious conversation about it. He said although he felt support for the SAU building was gaining momentum, he felt it was a tough pill to swallow.

Board Member Halter commented that her biggest concern was that they had been in the same position before, and she said she felt they could not let the matter remain stagnant for years to come.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that not only was the building not ADA-compliant, but she had serious safety concerns about the current SAU building. She said she felt they should march on with the project, especially if they could get the price down a bit by getting other funding sources.

Vice-Chair Hardy commented that she agreed with her fellow Board Members' comments.

Board Member Rothhaus commented that perhaps they could have a Warrant Article that authorized putting surplus money towards the proposed project. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that it could be done, and it might soften the blow for the taxpayers.

Board Member Martin stated that he would be in favor of creating such a Warrant Article for a Capital Reserve Fund.

Chair Peters said they would continue the discussion at its January meeting.

Recorder's Note: Board Member Martin was excused at approximately 7:25 p.m.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated that the Deliberative Session would be held on March 4, 2025, with a snow date of March 6, 2025. He said the voting would be held on April 8, 2025.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell reviewed the Warrant Articles as summarized below:

1. Shall the Merrimack School District be authorized to accept, on behalf of the district, without any further action by the voters, gifts, legacies, and devices of personal or real property.
2. Shall the Merrimack School District be authorized to expend \$823,230 to replace the roofs on the '97 additions.
3. Shall the Merrimack School District be authorized to add money to an already existing Roof Capital Reserve Fund at such time as there will be a ten-year gap where the district did not have to replace any roofs.
4. Shall the Merrimack School District be authorized to create a Capital Reserve Account to fund the SAU building?
5. Shall the Merrimack School District be authorized to accept the 2025 – 2026 operating budget in the amount of \$96,823,198, with a default budget of \$95,808,066.

MOTION: Board Member Rothhaus made a motion to accept the Warrant Articles, as presented, with the adjustment to the budget. Board Member Halter seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. December 4, 2024 – Public Minutes

MOTION: Vice-Chair Hardy made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 4, 2024, meeting, as presented. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS

There were none.

MOTION: At approximately 7:50 p.m., Board Member Halter made a motion to adjourn. Board Member Rothhaus seconded the motion.

MOTION CARRIED: 4 – 0 – 0.