

**Budget Committee
Minutes
January 11, 2011**

Present: R. Barnes, T. Beard, M. Beck, B. Boyd, R. Buckley, B. Cummings, S. Heinrich, G. Markwell, M. Publicover, A. Schneider and School Board liaison C. Ortega

Excused: J. Burk

Also Present: Superintendent M. Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent, Dr. M. McLaughlin, School Business Administrator M. Shevenell and various department heads

A. Schneider called the meeting to order at 7: 03 P.M and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements:

A. Schneider announced that the Committee had decided not to fill the seat left vacant by the resignation of Emily Coburn.

Approval of Prior Minutes

S. Heinrich made a MOTION to approve the minutes from November 9, 2010. Second: B. Cummings. No corrections were suggested. MOTION PASSED: 9 – 0 – 2 with B. Boyd and C. Ortega abstaining.

S. Heinrich made a MOTION to approve the minutes from December 2, 2010. Second: M. Pelletier. No corrections were suggested. MOTION PASSED: 8 – 0 – 3 with M. Beck, M. Publicover and R. Buckley abstaining.

Public Participation I

There was no Public Participation.

Budget Review Process

A. Schneider gave a brief overview of the budget review process, including the dates of upcoming meetings:

- January 25th – budget presentations
- February 1st – work session on budget, presentation of warrant articles
- February 8th – budget recommendations at 7 PM, public hearing at 7:30 PM and final actions after the public hearing.
- March 7th – Deliberative Session.

He also said that January 27th, and February 15th had been scheduled as snow dates. He indicated the purpose of the budget presentations was to meet with each department head and ask questions. He said it would also be appropriate to ask questions about what impact certain Committee actions might have on a budget during budget presentations. However, he indicated that no actions would be taken until the work session.

A. Schneider said he had had a request from a member to change the date of the meeting on January 25th to January 27th. He said that Administration has indicated that it would be difficult for the department heads to attend a meeting on January 27th, unless it was necessitated by a

snow cancellation. He also said he would prefer not to change the date from what was already planned and posted. He suggested that it was possible that the member who would be away could participate telephonically.

A. Schneider asked for Committee comments or motions. There were none.

Department Presentations

Food Services

Department Head: Dave Dziki

Committee Liaisons: B. Cummings, A. Schneider.

Mr. Dziki told the Committee that his proposed budget showed a 6% decrease from this year's budget. He said the decrease is due in part to the fact that the department will be purchasing less food and that food prices have decreased. He said there were increases in the cost of the technology support contract and the addition of an on-line pre-payment system. He noted the elimination of one position at the upper elementary school.

Liaison Report: B. Cummings told the Committee that the food services department has found savings by using different vendors to purchase certain bulk items as well as to comparison shop.

Discussion included the following points:

- Pre-payment System
 - Food services is working with the bank to set up a credit card pre-payment system so that parents can remotely log-in and put money directly into a particular students lunch account.
 - This will eliminate the need to have children bring in and deliver checks to the food service workers.
 - The cost of the program is \$500 per year.
 - There will be a convenience surcharge, which should offset the cost of the program.
 - In the past, this idea has been considered as a way to improving cash handling and speeding up the lunch service process. However in a survey conducted in the fall, parents strongly favored an on-line payment system.
- Vehicles
 - Last year the District bought a 2008 van, which had 30,000 miles on it.
 - The van is only used to deliver lunches to the Ferry schools and it is well maintained.
 - The van does not have a warranty.
- Education and Training
 - These funds are for professional development and networking.
 - There are in-state and out-of-state conferences that Mr. Dziki could attend.
 - Mr. Dziki has not attended a conference out of state recently.
- Food Services Surplus Account
 - Food services is essentially self-sufficient.
 - Food service only receives funds from the School District General Account if it has a deficit.

- By statute, funds left over are put into a surplus fund which is used to make up deficits, and to purchase equipment (such as the van) or upgrade existing equipment – in other words: food service costs.
- The surplus account has been considerably reduced over the last few years.
- Meal Requirements
 - Meals have to meet government nutritional standards in order to be eligible for federal reimbursement funds.
 - Ala carte foods may be eligible for reimbursement as well
 - The Federal guidelines for these foods are currently being reviewed.
 - The high school is the only school that offers a subsidized breakfast program.
- Lunch costs
 - Hot lunch costs \$2.50 at the high school and \$2.25 at the elementary school.
 - As the result of running at a deficit for two years, lunch price was increased in 2010 to break even or generate a small surplus.
 - The plan is to keep this price for several years.
 - The cost is comparable to area schools.
 - Ten percent (10%) of the school population gets free or reduced cost lunch.
- Left-over food
 - The department uses a daily elementary school “production report” and prior history to help it closely determine how many lunches to prepare each day.
 - The staff can cook to order if necessary at the upper elementary, middle and high school.
 - Since the department receives federal funding, there has been no thought to donate any meals that might be leftover at the end of a given day.
- Linen rental
 - The department does not own linens that are used to clean and sanitize the kitchens each day.
 - It has a service that retrieves weekly dirty linens and delivers clean ones.

Mastricola Upper Elementary School

Principal: Marsha McGill

Committee Liaisons: T. Beard. B. Boyd and R. Barnes

Liaison Report: T. Beard reported that the liaison team went through the budget book from front to back focusing on Everyday Math instructional materials, furniture, Project Safeguard, language arts, field trips, the maintenance contract and police details. He felt there was nothing controversial. R. Barnes concurred with this assessment. B. Boyd suggested that there might be an opportunity to streamline printing and copying costs, at this and other schools by considering a centralized printing location. He thanked M. McGill for taking to time to have an in-depth discussion with the liaison team.

Mrs. McGill reported that two factors that influenced the proposed budget were the district literacy initiative and the standards based math program. She also said she hopes to fully implement a new arts curriculum next year and to continue replacing 5th grade desks.

Discussion included the following points:

- Gifted and Talented Program
 - The program was level funded for next year.
 - 75 – 100 students participate in math enrichment activities.
 - 75 – 100 students participate in gifted and talented activities.
 - School wide activities include a chess club, geography bee, robotics, and stock market project.
 - Academic benefits have not been measured. However, math benefit could be shown if student grades improve.
- The District is looking at both state and national standards for arts programming and will be revising and implementing a new curriculum that meets these standards.
- The maintenance salaries listed for each school is employee-specific. Building assignments may change from year to year, leading to an increase in custodial salaries at one school and a corresponding decrease at another when a long-term employee moves to a different school.

Merrimack Middle School

Principal: D. Woelflin, Assistant Principal A. Caragher

Committee Liaisons: A. Schneider, G. Markwell

Mrs. Woelflin told the Committee that the budget was put together with three concepts in mind: maintaining critical efforts, seeking smooth transitions and attempting to establish consistency throughout the school. She said the budget does reflect decreases in many accounts that are tied to student numbers as the population is going down. She also indicated that bookcases and novels have been eliminated from the budget. She closed her remarks by indicating that the middle school has begun a collaborative assessment to review and revise its curriculum as needed to meet standards.

Liaison report – A. Schneider said that the School Board revisions to the middle school budget included a reduction of two teaching positions, to create a fourth 8th grade team of 2 teachers and 2 department heads. He said the liaisons had asked questions about the impact this cut would have to various programs such as Gifted and Talented (G & T) and that he was told that the rest of the staff would be providing G & T opportunities to the students as needed. He said that with the additional cuts made at the School Board level, he felt the budget was more frugal than the upper elementary school budget. G. Markwell said he had questioned why a whole team had not been cut and that why only two teachers were cut was explained to his satisfaction. He also said he saw the need for more storage and was surprised at the cost of bookshelves, but noted that the bookshelves had been cut.

Discussion included the following points:

- Cost of referees is determined by the state interscholastic organization.
- Field Trips
 - All funding for field trips was cut from the current budget and no funding is included in the proposed budget.
 - There are still field trips happening at the middle school – though fewer than in the past.

- Teachers must request administrative approval for each field trip proposed and there are strict approval guidelines in place.
- Parents pay for all costs of fields trips. At the other schools, the District pays for the cost of transportation.
- There is some PTO funding for those for whom the cost would be a financial hardship.
- There has been no negative feedback from parents on this issue.

- Gateway/G & T
 - The current G & T teacher is also a certified Science teacher. In order to comply with state standards regarding the number of students (maximum: 24) in a science lab, he has been assisting 7th grade teachers when science labs are held. There are not too many 7th grade science labs.
 - Next year, he will help out in 8th grade science labs. Administration estimates approximately 2 – 2.5 hours a day.
 - Department heads or other staff will cover any full-class G & T activities when needed.
 - The G & T teacher does a variety of activities with a specific group of students during lunchtime.
 - Mrs. Woelflin indicated she was confident that the needs of all G & T students would be met.

- Curriculum Facilitators & Coordinators.
 - There are curriculum facilitators or coordinators for Language Arts, Social Studies and Math and Science.
 - The Math and Science facilitators are currently full team teachers.
 - The Language Arts facilitator
 - Does not teach this year, but will be teaching next year.
 - Is the Reading Specialist,
 - Tests new students for reading placement,
 - Oversees Title One program,
 - Works with specific students having a weakness in reading
 - Evaluates curriculum needs
 - Evaluates language arts teachers.
 - The stipend received is not contractual.

- Foreign Language
 - Both French and Spanish are offered.
 - There is more demand for Spanish.

- Guidance Counselors
 - The middle school currently has 2 guidance counselors.
 - Counselors work with students individually or in small groups.
 - Counselors are involved in placement testing.
 - Counselors implement the state testing.

- Student/Teacher ratios
 - Maximum class size per state standard is 30 students in a “regular” class; 24 students in a science lab.

- Math classes are grouped according to ability and could have 30+ per class in the 8th grade if an entire team is cut.
- Population projections do not show a consistent decline in student numbers.
- Class size seems to rise one year, fall the next and rise again.
- Mrs. Woelflin suggested the possibility of the 4th teaching team moving between grades each year as needed.
- Phone bills
 - Efforts have been made to ensure that the confusion between which telephone charges belong to the middle school and which belong to the upper elementary school has been cleared up.
 - The total telephone expenditure for all schools is accurate.
 - The district is looking “voice over IP” for possible implementation next year.
- Facilities
 - The core facilities of the middle school were built to accommodate 1,000 students.
 - Classroom space was only built for 870 students.
 - The school is currently at 70 – 80 % of capacity.

Questions about Special Education at the middle school were deferred until the Special Services budget is presented.

Maintenance

Department Head: T. Tousseau

Committee Liaisons: M. Publicover, S. Heinrich, R. Barnes

Liaison Report: M. Publicover stated the liaisons had a good meeting with T. Tousseau, going through the budget, page by page. In summary he said:

- Water and sewer costs for all school district buildings show up in the Maintenance budget. The Merrimack Village District sets the rates and that the schools with sprinkler systems have a higher increase in the proposed budget.
- The rubbish disposal line was level funded, even though the line has been under-expended over the last few years.
- The School Board removed some costs in “Care and Upkeep” for painting and tile repair but the cuts were part of a joint effort by the department, administration and the School Board. The department has agreed to pick the most important projects and defer others.
- The School Board reduced the line for Snow Plowing because the contract for this service was finalized at a lower number.
- There is a new line in the budget for camera maintenance/extended warranty, because the warranty on the security cameras located at all schools has expired. This line will now be part of budgets going forward.
- The asbestos removal project at Thorntons Ferry was put off last year and is in this year’s proposed budget. The project will complete removal of all known asbestos at Thorntons Ferry. Asbestos removal at Reeds Ferry and the middle school is complete.
- The School Board has decided to defer replacing the cafeteria tables at Reeds Ferry School, but kept in replacement of the tables at Thorntons Ferry School, as they would have to be removed for the asbestos removal project. Parts of the Thorntons Ferry tables

will be used to repair or maintain the tables at Reeds Ferry for one last year. In addition, the schools are now keeping track of the numbers of injuries from the tables.

- The 3% increase in the Honeywell line is by contract.
- The cost reflected in the budget is the overall heat/light cost.
- The School Board is proposing redesigning the entrances at Thorntons Ferry and Reeds Ferry so that each school has a secure entrance. A similar project for the entrance at the upper elementary school has been put off.
- Lyons Road is owned by the School District and is in need of major repair.
- There is a difference in cost of oil due to the wide swing in price per gallon. The District bids with the town to get a locked in price, but does not pre-buy a specific quantity of oil. The price for this school year is \$2.39 per gallon.

S. Heinrich said the maintenance budget has historically been the “go-to” budget when the School Board or Budget Committee has been looking for places to cut the budget. He noted that Mr. Tousseau has said he can make the budget as currently proposed work and asked Mr. Tousseau to explain some of the details of the asbestos removal project and the Lyons Road project.

Mr. Tousseau told the Committee that the asbestos removal project at Thorntons Ferry included the first 16 rooms and the hallway outside the All Purpose Room. He said only the floor tiles and mastic were involved. He said every six months he does a survey of all know asbestos to make sure it is not friable and that every three years an outside person is brought in to assess each school. He said he felt it was very important to move ahead with asbestos removal projects. He also noted that part of the Lyons Road problem is crumbling pavement on the sides of the road where cars park for sports.

R. Barnes suggested that members viewed Lyons Road and suggested that plowing should be a separate budget line since it will be a recurring contracted expense.

Discussion included the following points:

- Lyons Road
 - The entire road will be repaved.
 - The town does plow this road during snowstorms.
 - The School District will work with the town D.P.W. to get a good price for pavement.
- Camera Maintenance
 - The extended warranty and maintenance contract includes annual cleaning and on-call repair.
 - If a camera is broken, it is replaced under the warranty.
 - Vandalism to cameras is not covered under the warranty.
- Mowers
 - The District does have some rotary mowers, but mostly owns and uses reel movers.
 - There is \$5,000 in the budget for a reel sharpener.
- Staff
 - There are 43 Maintenance positions.
 - Six employees who deal with inside building repairs are called “Mechanics.”

- However, the District does own several vehicles and Maintenance staff does general maintenance on them. Major repairs are sent to the dealer.
- Two employees who deal with outside building issues are called “Groundskeepers.”
- Heating Fuel
 - The District looked at having all District Building heated by one type of fuel during the Honeywell energy savings project.
 - It was determined that the cost of conversion and the cost to tie into a gas line made this idea prohibitive.
 - Looking at solar panels as an alternative was suggested.

Other

R. Barnes offered to serve as the third Committee liaison to the high school.

C. Ortega made a clarification regarding the cuts made to the proposed budget by the School Board. He said that the School Board had asked Administration to come back with a proposal for additional cuts. Then working together with Administration, the School Board made some additional budget cuts, but did not make all of the additional cuts the Administration had suggested.

A. Schneider told the Committee that at its next meeting, the School Board will be approving final wording of several warrant articles and encouraged members to view the meeting.

Public Participation II

There was no public participation.

S. Heinrich made a MOTION to adjourn. Second: R. Buckley. MOTION PASSED unanimously.

A. Schneider adjourned the meeting at 8:56 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Heinrich