

Merrimack School District Budget Committee
February 13, 2018
Minutes

Present: K. Bobbitt, H. Gage, J. Guagliumi, J. Hanson, S. Heinrich, D. Illg, C. Mower, B. Nunez
and School Board Liaison N. Schoenfeld

Excused: A. Hyde-Berger, S. Jacoby and C. Lang

Also present: Superintendent M. Chiafery, Assistant Superintendent Dr. M. McLaughlin, and
School Business Administrator M. Shevenell

S. Heinrich opened the Public Hearing at 7:30 P.M

S. Heinrich explained the purpose of the Public Hearing was to give members of the public an opportunity to make comments on the proposed operating budget and any monied warrant articles before the Budget Committee finalized its recommendations.

S. Heinrich explained the Budget Committee had reviewed all the monied warrant articles and would vote whether to recommend or not each article. He said while the Committee could comment on particular concern with each warrant article, it could not change warrant articles. S. Heinrich said the Committee could make changes in the proposed operating budget; however, since the School Board can move money around in the budget, any change made is effectively only a bottom line change.

Article 3

S. Heinrich explained that Article 3 is a new three (3) year contract with the District's support staff. He said the contract contains a 3% raise in each year and additional health care contributions for staff. S. Heinrich indicated that the article includes the funding for the 2nd and 3rd years so if the article is approved, the funding for the 2nd and 3rd years is approved and will become part of the operating budget.

S Heinrich asked if anyone had any comments or questions.

C. Mower said he felt that Article 3 should be highly supported by the community.

Article 4

S. Heinrich explained that Article 4 is not a monied warrant article. He stated if Article 3 fails, Article 4 authorizes the School Board to renegotiate the cost items of the contract and hold a Special Meeting. He said, if this happens the Budget Committee would meet to review the newly proposed cost items and make its recommendation.

Article 5

S. Heinrich explained that Article 5 asks for up to \$150,000 to replenish the District's Repair Capital Reserve Fund. He said these funds would be taken from surplus funds from this year's operating budget and if there was no surplus, then the article will not be funded.

S Heinrich asked if there were any comments or questions. There were none.

Article 6

S. Heinrich explained that Article 6 asks for \$214,826 for pavement reconstruction projects at Thorntons Ferry School. He said, if the article fails, the District cannot use operating budget funds to complete these projects.

S Heinrich asked if there were any comments or questions. There were none.

Article 7

S. Heinrich explained that Article 7 asks for \$275,000 to purchase the Brentwood property. He said the building on the site is leased by Nashua School District until June and that Nashua would not be renewing the lease. He said the School Board sees this land as a potential site for a new SAU/Special Service Office building and then the District would raze the current SAU and Special Service buildings.

S. Heinrich recognized Andy Schneider of the School Board and Rich Hendricks of the School District Planning and Building Committee would had requested an opportunity to speak on this article.

A. Schneider said this article is a request to purchase land. He explained that SERESC had owned the site for many years, using the building as a school for students with special needs. However, the site is now owned by the bank. A. Schneider said the School Board approached the bank about the land and has a Purchase and Sale agreement with the bank to buy the property, contingent upon passage of this warrant article. He said the building is 10,000 square feet and the property has a current assessment of \$1,000,000. A. Schneider said that the School Board would like to put a new SAU/Special Service office building on this property and noted that one of the pushbacks it has heard from voters was the District should use an existing building for a new SAU/Special Service building. A. Schneider said that the District cannot provide a firm estimate on the cost to renovate until it owns the property, but a guesstimate would be \$2.5 million dollars. He indicated for comparison that the cost of building a new stand-alone building is approximately \$3.1 million dollars and the cost of building an addition to the high school to house the SAU/Special Service office was approximately \$3.5 million dollars.

R. Hendricks said the District needs to get its employees out of the current offices. He felt this was a good opportunity to do that and at less cost than building an entirely new building. He noted that the building is currently being used, already has a basement; the land does not have to be prepped and utilities already exist.

S Heinrich asked if any Budget Committee member had any comments or questions.

D. Illg asked what the cost would be if the District were to buy the building and not renovate it. M. Shevenell replied that there would be an annual cost of approximately \$20,000 to keep the heat on; however, he said the District would use portions of the building for other limited purposes. Further he indicated that no taxes are currently paid on the site and the site won't be taxed if the District owns it.

S. Heinrich noted that some portions of the building are not currently ADA compliant. He suggested bulldozing the current building and building anew on the current foundation. R. Hendricks replied that is one of the options that would be explored but stated that renovation costs are going up.

S. Heinrich said the site is zoned residential and that buying the property might be a good idea.

C. Mower stated he thought this concept was an ill-conceived idea which would result in nothing but problems. He felt it was time to build good government buildings.

B. Nunez said that the current SAU and Special Service buildings are in bad shape and she thought this was an opportunity to fix that situation but she felt there were so many unknowns.

N. Schoenfeld said everyone seems to agree that something needs to be done but whatever is proposed is not right. She said she was concerned that looking for the perfect solution will lead the District to do nothing.

S. Heinrich stated that when a new building had been proposed, it had received a majority vote, but not the needed super majority. R. Hendricks added that if that building proposal had passed, it would have been almost totally paid off now.

A. Schneider said the intent of the article is to purchase .69 acres which abuts District property and that once owned, the District can do whatever it wants with the building.

S Heinrich asked if any member of the public present had any comments or questions. No one did.

Article 8

S. Heinrich explained that Article 8 requests funding to implement full day kindergarten.

S Heinrich asked if there were any comments or questions.

Gillian Savitch (Fairway Drive) spoke in support for full day kindergarten. She said that a half day program does not offer art, music or science but a full day program would. She stated New

Hampshire has 2nd oldest population in the nation and yet, nearly 75% of its communities have kindergarten. She said Merrimack needs to become current in order to attract new families.

Maggie Logsdon (Brookside Drive) spoke in support of full day kindergarten.

Beth Grady (Parker Drive) said that while half day kindergarten is wonderful, it skims the surface of the curriculum and for some children involves a lot of transitioning during the day. She said a full day program covers it all, including social and emotional needs of the children.

H. Gage stated that many people believe that a full day program is too exhausting for children but the curriculum is play based learning and asked Beth Grady to explain the concept and benefits of “guided math.”

M. Shevenell explained that the District would get \$1,100 in state aid for each full year kindergarten student and, in the future, that amount could increase if keno does well. He said the funds would come as revenue in the year following the expenditure. He also explained the handout listing the status of kindergarten in various New Hampshire towns: most town offer kindergarten but 17 towns only offer half day kindergarten; of those, 10 are considering full day kindergarten and there are 6 towns that offer tuition based full day kindergarten but those towns cannot receive the state aid.

C. Mower said he was a staunch supporter of this article but he felt the funds should have been part of the operating budget rather than a warrant article. He said full day kindergarten is fundamental to a good beginning.

Article 9:

S. Heinrich explained that Article 9 is the proposed operating budget. He said the proposed budget is .74% more than the current year’s operating budget and includes a 2.9% healthcare increase, an increase in retirement costs as well as a roofing project at Reeds Ferry School. S. Heinrich stated that the Budget Committee added \$6,000 to the budget for school specific training for the School Resource Officers. He indicated that the School Board had not yet voted whether to recommend the budget with these additional funds. He said he felt the proposed budget was pretty lean.

S Heinrich asked if anyone had any comments or questions. There were none.

S. Heinrich closed the Public Hearing at 8:35 P.M.