

**Merrimack School Board Meeting
Merrimack School District, SAU #26
Merrimack Town Hall – Matthew Thornton Room
February 17, 2020**

Present: Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Guagliumi, Board Members Schoenfeld, Nunez, and Schneider. Also in attendance were Superintendent McLaughlin, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Fabrizio, Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell, and Student Representative Koroma

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Barnes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

3. Preparation Warrant Presentation for Deliberative Session on March 3, 2020

Chair Barnes welcomed Mr. Lee French to the table.

Mr. French summarized his support of the following Warrant Article:

”The voter’s decided to purchase the Brentwood (AKA the red building) a year and a half ago. The understanding was to purchase the building mostly for the land and its location adjacent to the high school figuring it would be useful in the future as part of a larger project or the Master Plan to alleviate some of the town’s issue like temporary special education classrooms, a community center, additional parking for students or a potential building site for new offices. The building was old and in need of costly code upgrades so even if there was an intention to use it short-term the long-range goal was to tear it down.

It has remained vacant other than having been used several times by the Merrimack Police Department for active shooter training exercises and who has found it to be a very useful resource. Having checked with Sig Sauer Academy, an estimate for renting their training facility for a day is \$1,800. Although I hate to take this usage away from the police department, I don’t believe it is fair for taxpayers to pay for it at a cost of almost \$2,000 per month.

Last year, the School Board decided to hold off on adding \$125,000 to the budget to tear it down, but instead waiting for the Master Plan to come to fruition and potentially save money to have it become part of a larger project. The School Board Budget Committee voted and recommended that \$125,000 get put into the budget to tear it down which was then down by the School Board.

Another potential plan is to shut off utilities and board up the building. This would be considerably less costly; however, it will leave the town much more susceptible to liability due to having possession of an abandoned building. This would not allow anyone to check on the internal condition of the building which is not advisable.

This year's budget shows us that we will spend \$23,000 on utilities alone to maintain the vacant building. This includes \$2,000 for water/sewer, \$10,000 for electric, \$2,500 for oil, and \$8,500 for gas as well as other incidental costs.

There is a Warrant Article on the ballot to raise \$85,000 to hire an engineer to help design a Master Plan for the high school. If the Master Plan Article Plan passes it will likely take up to two or three years before the funding is approved and the Master Plan is implemented while each month costing the taxpayer's \$2,000 for a vacant building.

My Warrant Article request is that we raise \$125,000 now to remove the building and add fill and spread gravel to temporarily alleviate the lack of parking issues which many people see as the more immediate need.

Finally, I'd like to express my dismay with the School Board. After some debate, the School Board Budget Committee overwhelmingly recommended that we deal with this issue a year ago. We have wasted enough money, let's let the public decide if it's time to act prudently and resolve to get this done."

Chair Barnes clarified that the School Board was the governing body of the District and the School Budget Committee was not a School Board Budget Committee. She pointed out that the Boards were independent of each other.

Chair Barnes asked if there were questions or comments from members of the School Board.

Board Member Schoenfeld expressed appreciation for Mr. French bringing the proposed Warrant Article before the School Board.

Board Member Schneider commented the School Board was really on the fence as to whether or not it was the right year to tear down the building. He said they were all aware that it needed to be done. He also said by waiting one more year they would know whether there would be an opportunity to have an economy of scale to perhaps get a better cost to do it. He pointed out for clarity, it would cost \$146,000 to do it and he was certainly not against having the voter's chime in on it to see what their thoughts were.

Chair Barnes announced the discussion would be tabled until a copy of the proposed Warrant Article could be obtained.

4. Review of the School Calendar Survey Questions

Chair Barnes reviewed the draft survey for 2020 – 2021 as summarized below:

1. Do you support having no school on Columbus Day which is October 12, 2020?
2. Do you support having no school on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving which is November 25, 2020?
3. Do you support having no school on Martin Luther King Jr. Day which is January 18, 2021?
4. Do you support having no school on President's Day which February 15, 2021; recognizing the following week is February vacation?
5. With teacher workshops being held prior to the first day of school, we have scheduled the first day of school to be after Labor Day. Are you in support of continuing this scheduling structure?
6. How many students do you have in the Merrimack School District? What level of school are they in? Do you have internet access in your home? How many devices do you have that students can use for schoolwork?
7. After school, are your students taken to a childcare facility? If yes, does the facility have access to the internet access and computers available so your children can complete homework?

Vice Chair Guagliumi suggested clarifying question #5 by adding if parents were not in support there would be three workshops throughout the year.

Board Member Schneider suggested #7 should read as “After school and on snow days, are your students taken to a childcare facility?”

5. Summary of Upcoming School Board Policies for Review

Superintendent McLaughlin provided the School Board with a summary of the policies which would be put before them within the coming months.

Superintendent McLaughlin said the first set of policies would be the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Policy, the Volunteer Policy, the Investment Policy, the Alternative Learning Plans Policy, and the Student Discipline/Out-of-School Actions Policy.

Superintendent McLaughlin noted the first policy, the Volunteer Policy, would be brought before the School Board on March 2nd.

Chair Barnes indicated the Board would continue with item #3 which had been tabled. She read aloud from the Petition Warrant Article that Mr. Lee presented:

“Shall the Merrimack School District vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$125,000 for the primary purpose to raze the building known as the former Brentwood School – AKA the red building and to return the site back to a usable condition with appropriate fill, compaction, and spread gravel to allow for additional temporary parking. Further, to appoint the Merrimack School Board as agents to expend.”

A roll call vote was taken which resulted in the following:

VOTE: 1 – 3 – 1 (Abstained – Nunez)

MOTION FAILED

6. Comparison of per Pupil Expenditures versus State Average for New Hampshire School Districts

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell stated he took the list from the Department of Education’s website and sorted it from high to low. He said the state average was \$16,346 and Merrimack’s per pupil was \$16,779. He further said out of 162 School Districts, Merrimack fell at 106 out of 162. He said he was comfortable with where the Merrimack School District fell on the list.

7. Considerations Impacting High School Graduation Date Setting

Superintendent McLaughlin stated the date of graduation was impacted by how many snow days and delays the School District had. He pointed out that he understood it was important for families to know the graduation date to plan ahead but pointed out he did not want to set a date and then have to change it. He said they typically waited until mid-March to set a date.

8. Preparation for Warrant Articles on Deliberative Session – March 3, 2020

Chair Barnes stated she had distributed her suggestions of assignments for presentation.

- Item #1 – Election of Officers which is done by the signing up process.
- Item #2 – Acceptance of Gifts and Property – Board Member Schoenfeld to move it and Vice Chair Guagliumi to second it.
- Item #3 – Repair Capital Reserve Fund – Vice Chair Guagliumi to move it and Board Member Nunez to second it.
- Item #4 – Replacement of Merrimack High School Windows – Chair Barnes to move it and Board Member Schneider to second it.
- Item #5 – Master Plan Study – Board Member Schneider to move it and Chair Barnes to second it.
- Item #6 – Replacement of Gym Bleachers – Board Member Nunez to move it and Board Member Schoenfeld to second it.
- Item #7 – School District Operating Budget
- Item #8 – Petition Warrant Articles

Board Member Schneider asked where the Petition Warrant Article would be placed. Chair Barnes replied it would likely be item #7. Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented Petition Warrants Articles could be placed after the operating budget. Chair Barnes stated that would make it item #8.

9. Authorization to Sign Department of Education Documents

Superintendent McLaughlin commented the Office of Business Management at the Department of Education required authorization from the School Board to allow the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and the Assistant Superintendent for Business to sign official documents and forms. He said, however, the School Board needed to authorize it.

Chair Barnes moved (seconded by Board Member Schoenfeld) to authorize Mark McLaughlin, Superintendent of Schools, John Fabrizio, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, and Matthew Shevenell, Assistant Superintendent of Business to sign Department of Education documents.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

10. Approval of February 3, 2020, School Board Minutes

Vice Chair Guagliumi moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to approve the minutes from the February 3, 2020 meeting.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

11. Acceptance of Gifts/Grants under \$5,000

- Health Trust, Inc. to Merrimack School District for \$3,000.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Shevenell commented the gift was to be used for worksite health and safety activities to benefit District employees.

Board Member Schneider moved (seconded by Board Member Nunez) to accept the gift with the School Board's gratitude and appreciation.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.

12. Other

- a. Correspondence

Chair Barnes stated the School Board had a piece of correspondence asking if the School Board did not respond to a constituent request for an agenda item. She said she responded

that neither the Board nor the administration received a School Board agenda request from a citizen.

Chair Barnes also said the School Board received correspondence from a constituent regarding thoughts on Niche ranking, and free and reduced lunch statistics as well as ESL numbers. We thank them for their kind words and insights.

Board Member Schneider commented he had several brief conversations with voters regarding processes and methodology that the School Board uses to go through budgets and what the Budget Committee does. He said he provided some background information when asked.

Vice Chair Guagliumi stated she received a suggestion from a parent regarding considering Arabic and Mandarin to be considered as honors-level classes and for the District to look at the benefits of those language programs.

b. Correspondence

Board Member Schneider commented he received input from a resident about the presentation that the Superintendent made on January 21st regarding the potential cut and what it would be like. He said the person was fairly adamant that the lack of response on his part showed that he agreed with what was said and I did not call him out for anything that I thought was inaccurate. I want to go on the record as saying when I sit at a table and someone hands me a list of cuts that are significant, I do not make a knee jerk reaction statement. He said his silence that night was not an indication of his approval or disapproval, but he wanted to be able to absorb and listen in an effort to understand. He further said he took potential cuts extremely seriously.

13. New Business

There was no new business.

14. Committee Reports

Board Member Schneider the Budget Committee would be discussing the Warrant Article regarding the Brentwood building. He also said a motion was made to remove the \$75,000 from the budget for the drainage at the Merrimack Middle School and the Budget Committee did not recommend removal of that.

15. Public Comment on Agenda Items

Mr. Rick Foote, 129 Indian Rock Road, addressed the Board and commented he felt there were many parking spots that were not being utilized.

Mr. Scott Adler, 3 Deerwood Drive, addressed the Board and stated the Bedford School District had more teachers and more students and spent less money per student than Merrimack did. He said at some point in time he felt the citizens of Merrimack deserved to know why. He said every official, elected or not, had been unable to answer that question.

Mr. Adler added that he felt it was important to add the word “temporary” to the Warrant Article with regard to razing the Brentwood building.

16. Manifest

The Board signed the manifest.

Non-Public Session – RSA:91-A:3, II (a) (b) (c) – in Training Classroom

- Student Welfare

At 8:00 p.m. Board Member Schoenfeld made a motion (seconded by Board Member Schneider) to go into non-public session.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0 by a roll call vote.

At 8:42 p.m. Board member Schneider moved (seconded by Board member Schoenfeld) to adjourn the public session.

The motion passed 5 – 0 – 0.