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Minutes of the Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting Held on December 4, 2014

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, December 4, 2014 at Campbell High School, 1 Highlander Court, Litchfield, NH 03052.

PRESENT: C Couture (Chair), R Peeples, C Pascucci, D Vaillancourt, K Douglas, B Bourque (School Board Representative), F Byron (Selectmen's Representative)

Absent: A Cutter (Vice Chair), W Spencer

Mrs. Couture called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

3. REVIEW/ADDITIONS TO AGENDA

FfY16 Salaries and Benefits budget review under School Business will be moved to December 9.

4. REVIEW/ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

The December 2, 2014 draft minutes were not available.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. Couture reported that correspondence regarding teacher retention was received from Mr. Peeples.

6. SCHOOL BUSINESS

- **Budget Review**

- **CHS**

Mrs. Couture commented that CHS was recently ranked 142 out of 15,000 schools across the nation. She noted it is a significant achievement and congratulated Mrs. Rothhaus. She indicated that all the years since CHS opened leading up to the designation with all the programs offered cultivated that achievement.

Mrs. Rothhaus commented that CHS has amazing teachers and that is what it comes down to. She noted that several factors were considered for the ranking as well as the success of our students after graduation.

Mrs. Rothhaus presented the FY16 CHS School Board Recommended budget to the Budget Committee. She indicated that the budget reflects an increase of \$27,199. She noted that all the Curriculum Facilitators worked with the Business Administrator. Mrs. Rothhaus gave the following summary:

DRAFT

This year, the budget discussions were centered on presenting a fair budget with curriculum facilitators creating a budget that represented real needs and some long term planning. Being mindful and sensitive to the economy and taxpayers, many reductions to the budget were made. In 2007, CHS had 546 students, 46 full time teachers, 2 part time teachers and 8 professional staff. Today CHS has 507 students, 34 full time teachers, 8 part time teachers and 8 professional staff. A full time physical education teacher was requested for 2015-2016. Our athletic director currently teaches two classes with a class load of 30 students in each section. The NH graduation requirements state .5 health education and 1 full credit of physical education. We are expecting 515 students next year and it will be difficult to meet all of our student needs if it is removed from the budget. The School Board made \$29,999 in reductions to the original proposed budget and administration reduced the budget by an additional \$95,000. With the exclusion of self-funded programs (\$30,865), the CHS budget would reflect a decrease of \$3,666.

Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that CHS is looking to move the vocational program to Pinkerton, which would reduce transportation costs. She commented that much research has been done in this area. In addition, Mrs. Rothhaus reported that CHS has entered into an agreement with the International High School for students to pay tuition and attend CHS for one year, according to the current law.

Mr. Peeples asked how international students lower costs and how many does CHS have currently. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated one is currently attending CHS and international students would pay tuition under this agreement.

Mr. Peeples asked why we want to do that. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated there is room in the classrooms and we do not want to lose any of our outstanding AP programs. She noted that the students are well vetted.

Mr. Peeples commented that is the type of thing put before the body of the town to see if they want that kind of program.

Mrs. Couture asked why you would ask the town specifically about these students. Mr. Peeples commented we are going into the business of selling our school and asked if we want to do that on a large scale.

Mrs. Couture commented we have always allowed student to tuition into the schools in Litchfield. She indicated there have always been foreign exchange students and as our population declines there will be more spaces.

Mrs. Rothhaus commented that Bow High School spent much time on this, which is one of the ways they addressed the drop in their population. Dr. Cochrane indicated the School Board voted to approve taking the next step in the process. He commented it is a no cost MOU that we can opt out of at any time. He noted that the students can only attend one year under the current federal immigration law. Dr. Cochrane commented the students we currently take do not pay tuition and this would at least cover the tuition.

DRAFT

Mr. Byron commented that at some point you would be looking to increase the amount of students and asked at what point would more staff be required for this program. Mrs. Rothhaus commented we would not add staff as we would not take in enough students to require more staff. She noted if we take in students it is only for one year.

Mr. Byron was concerned that there would be a point where additional staff would be required. Mr. Bourque commented that it is not a flow of students we cannot stop.

Mr. Byron asked if the immigration requirements are changed to allow a two-year program, would you still only take the students for one year? Mrs. Rothhaus answered in the affirmative. She commented this will be controlled. She indicated one of the requirements of the program is that the parents of the students have to have the money to transport a student home at a moment's notice.

Coach Patterson commented that it is a cultural point. He indicated that it is clear that CHS does not have a lot of diversity. He noted these children need to see a sampling of American society. He commented the fact they can experience other children from other cultures, albeit gifted children, brings culture to the school.

Mr. Pascucci commented that is the decision of parents that chose to send their children to this school because it is not diverse. He indicated there are many reasons why this should be brought to the people of this town to get their opinion.

Mrs. Couture commented that this has already been occurring [with foreign exchange students] since the school opened. She noted that her children liked the experience.

Mr. Peeples commented that CHS may have had the international interaction, but never promoted it or entered into an agreement to promote it. Mrs. Couture disagreed, indicating the school has had contracts to have foreign students attend.

Dr. Cochrane observed that this has no impact on the budget.

Mr. Byron agreed and commented this is a program the high school wants and the Budget Committee is not responsible for its review.

FY16 CHS Recommended Budget

Mrs. Couture commented that Mrs. Rothhaus mentioned 515 students are expected next year. She noted when the enrollment projections stated 489 students next year at CHS. He indicated that is what the Budget Committee uses in the budget process.

Dr. Cochrane indicated that the enrollment projections were revised to 499 students. He commented there was a \$5,000 reduction in supplies, but the enrollment numbers were not changed in the budget notes.

DRAFT

Mrs. Douglas commented that in Art Education three digital cameras are budgeted. She asked what happens if they are broken.

Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that the students are responsible for them. She commented that not all students have digital cameras, which is the reason for the request. She noted that students would sign a contract to use them. Mrs. Rothhaus pointed out that the cameras were cut from the budget.

Mrs. Rothhaus noted there was a question about textbooks and why there are some texts in the school budget. She indicated that those books are for Child Development and the FACS teacher has been teaching a dual enrollment course as well as a Running Start course. Mrs. Rothhaus commented the current books only cover child development to age 4 and books that cover up to age 12 are needed. She noted there will be areas where we have replacement texts or texts for the increase of freshmen going into their sophomore year.

Mrs. Douglas asked about the workbooks budgeted for Photoshop. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that was a difficult reduction. She noted she asked the teacher for a three year rollout so that they are more in line with applications that are coming out.

Mrs. Douglas asked if the curriculum director would be the person to talk to about replacement texts. Mrs. Rothhaus commented these would be their current workbooks and they do not align with the application software.

Mrs. Rothhaus mentioned that in the music program there is a need for additional equipment for the band as it continues to grow. She indicated that the music teachers requested a storage unit as opposed to locking the instruments in a room. She noted that this was another difficult reduction. She commented that music stands and chairs are needed because the equipment is aging out.

Referring to Science, Mrs. Couture commented the budget notes state 'year two of a five year plan to update science equipment'. She asked if we are still on track with this plan. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that CHS is still on track with the plan. She noted when the teacher requested supplies and equipment last year, she was told to prepare a 5 year plan.

Referring to Theater Arts, Mrs. Couture asked where the income goes. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that the income goes into their account. She noted each year they go on a music field trip and use those funds to support what they do. She mentioned that the recent musical, 'The Wedding Singer', was excellent and that she is always amazed by the talent in Litchfield.

Mrs. Couture was concerned that many lines are flat or decreased in regular education, but increased in athletics. She believes sports are important, but that cuts need to be made across the board. She commented that athletic supplies reflect an increase of almost \$15,000.

Coach Patterson explained that wrestling was moved from self-funded programs to the budget. He noted there is approximately \$6,000 remaining in athletic supplies and we are now getting started in the second season of sports. He commented adding a sport is very expensive.

DRAFT

Mrs. Couture asked what supplement the Booster Club supplies. Coach Patterson commented they help fund special projects, but do not subsidize specific sports. He noted they supply scholarships, varsity club sweatshirts and have funded the track award board. Mrs. Rothhaus commented they work tirelessly for homecoming and help needy students.

Coach Patterson mentioned this year we were awarded the State wrestling tournament. He noted they would like to make enough through the tournament to purchase a new mat.

Mr. Pascucci asked about the actual cost of wrestling in the self-funded program that was moved. Coach Patterson indicated it was around \$10,000 - \$12,000. Mr. Markiewicz indicated it was absorbed into the budget.

Mrs. Rothhaus commented that the wrestling program has grown significantly and many Litchfield students/children are involved. Mr. Markiewicz commented that the mats are constantly pulled out, set up and broken down and are used constantly.

Mr. Pascucci asked how the 2015 budget amount was determined. Mr. Markiewicz indicated that budget was reduced by the School Board last year.

Mrs. Couture indicated when they received the default budget they went through the exercise of reducing lines.

Mr. Pascucci commented this is discussed each year. He acknowledged that the athletics department is doing a great job, but this is the fear we have because if it goes to voters and they do not approve this budget, it will get reduced again. Mr. Markiewicz commented whatever the voters approve as the bottom line, it is our responsibility to find places to reduce.

Mr. Pascucci asked about the software that was moved in the athletics budget. Coach Patterson indicated that the impact testing software was moved from Account 339 and the Hudl software was moved from Account 610. Mr. Markiewicz indicated this is not new software, rather it was budgeted under the wrong line in the past.

Mrs. Couture asked how pre-season trips for sports teams are self-funded. Coach Patterson indicated that the team determines how to pay for the pre-season trips or they do not go.

Referring to Guidance Services, Mrs. Couture asked why tutoring for students who have medical absences is increased and how do we know how many students we will have next year. Mrs. Rothhaus indicated that currently we have 60 students with 504 plans and that number has increased. She noted there are three hearing impaired students who require 135 minutes of consult. She added we know we have had a number of students with medical absences because of concussions and we wanted to be sure we had enough money for that line item.

DRAFT

Mrs. Couture referred to Line 272, Conferences/Workshops, under School Administration and commented it is reduced. Mrs. Rothhaus commented that she felt she should sacrifice something since she was making difficult reductions across the budget.

Mr. Vaillancourt asked about an increase in supplies in Account 1501. Mrs. Couture indicated that is self-funded programs and will have reimbursement. Mr. Markiewicz indicated that is dollar for dollar reimbursement.

- **Budget Voting**
 - **School Board**

There were no motions.

- SAU

District Administration:

MOTION: by Mrs. Couture

Move to reduce Line 534, Postage, in Account 2320, District Administration, to \$2,464, a reduction of \$750

SECOND: by Mr. Pascucci

Mrs. Couture commented that the reduction brings the line closer to the historic average.

Mr. Byron commented that using an average in this case does not make sense.

Mrs. Couture indicated that it was stated in the commentary from the previous meeting that there was a significant increase in the budget. She commented that she realizes some difficult cuts had to be made, but in order to get this budget approved we have to make more reductions.

Mr. Pascucci agreed and commented that the School Board did a great job, but we may have to dig deeper into some of the smaller things.

VOTE: 5-2-0, with Mr. Bourque and Mr. Byron opposing
The motion passed.

MOTION: by Mrs. Couture

Move to reduce Line 890, Miscellaneous, in Account 2320, District Administration, to \$1,825, a reduction of \$2,175

SECOND: by Mrs. Douglas

Mrs. Couture indicated that she understands the rationale behind the recognition.

Mr. Bourque commented that the information Mr. Peeples sent regarding teacher retention is 8 years old. Mr. Peeples commented that the information stated 17% of teachers in the Year 0-5 category leave because they do not like teaching or are not mentored well.

DRAFT

Mr. Bourque commented that recognizing good work is important. Mrs. Couture agreed, but indicated that does not have to happen with cash awards. She noted that involving teachers in decision making and making them more a part of the process helps make them feel more involved. She commented that it is more appropriate for the PTO to provide resources.

Mr. Bourque commented that those funds are not meant to be monetary awards.

Mr. Pascucci commented that it would be difficult for anyone in the room to argue that recognition is a bad thing. He indicated that Mrs. Couture's point is about affordability. He noted in these times we have to dig deep and that sacrifice may get help get closer to this budget passing.

Mr. Vaillancourt commented that the teachers should know the town is generous as they have an excellent benefit package.

Mr. Peeples indicated that Dr. Cochrane stated this line item would help with retention.

Dr. Cochrane commented having money to use to their advantage in their classrooms helps retention. He asked why do we have much turnover with younger teachers and mentor programs? He noted the best information from the study regarding retention is to ensure teachers know they make a difference, which requires more resources for the classroom. Dr. Cochrane commented it makes a difference to have the ability to be able to have something supplied and recognition to enhance their practice and reinforce what they do. He noted in this case it is not retention in the field; it is retention in Litchfield. He indicated that our benefits package is average and our salaries are below average. Dr. Cochrane commented the School Board felt it was an important token, which he supports.

Mr. Pascucci commented that the reduction will keep what was budgeted last year. Mr. Peeples commented he would like to keep every dollar either in direct education programs or to maintain the facilities.

VOTE: 6-1-0, with Mr. Bourque opposing.

The motion passed.

MOTION: by Mr. Vaillancourt

Move to reduce Line 610, Supplies, in Account 2320, District Administration, to \$3,509, a reduction of \$1,000

SECOND: by Mr. Peeples

VOTE: 5-2-0, with Mr. Bourque and Mr. Byron opposing.

The motion passed.

Business Office:

MOTION: by Mrs. Couture

DRAFT

Move to reduce Line 272, DW Conferences/Workshops, in Account 2510, DW Business/Finance Office, to \$1,200, a reduction of \$1,200

SECOND: by Mr. Pascucci

Mrs. Couture indicated she is an advocate of workshops and learning, but suspects that all 12 JLMC members are not going to be able to attend these conferences/workshops.

Mr. Byron asked what the JLMC Committee does. Mr. Markiewicz indicated they review accident incidents, safety concerns and building walkthroughs to name a few. He asked Mrs. Flynn to expound on the responsibilities of the committee. Mrs. Flynn mentioned the JLMC prepares, implements and monitors the District Safety Plan, incident command in all three schools, facility safety concerns through a physical audit, makes recommendations regarding safety and security to the Superintendent and monitors safety policies.

Mr. Byron commented that there is a need for the school to do the self-audits otherwise they cannot get things fixed. He indicated that they track safety issues.

Mr. Vaillancourt asked about the software line item and if the 4% increase in the finance software is a solid figure. Mr. Markiewicz indicated that is the number they were provided.

Mr. Vaillancourt asked about \$10,000 upgrade to the eFinance system. Mr. Peebles commented it is a one time upgrade fee for the accounting system. Mr. Markiewicz indicated it is an upgrade that is needed for enhancements to the system.

Mrs. Douglas asked about the payroll paperless module and if it is needed. She also asked about the Cognos customization and consulting. Mr. Markiewicz commented that there is no person in-house for Cognos and we have to change our requirements internally as well as externally. He noted we have a consultant we use quite often who is one of the few in the country that consults to education.

Human Resources:

Mr. Markiewicz referred to conferences/workshops and travel and explained that because our new director has a keen understanding of the database, she is looking to get more involved. He commented that he and the HR director are part of SNUG.

Mr. Peebles asked if SNUG is sponsored by Sungard or if they are independent. Mr. Markiewicz indicated they are connected with Sungard, but are a separate user group.

Mrs. Douglas referred to Line 734, New Equipment, and asked what kind of equipment is requested as the notes are vague. Mr. Markiewicz did not have the answer to that question and indicated he would provide the information from the HR director.

There were no motions.

o Curriculum

DRAFT

Dr. Cochrane mentioned that Dr. Heon is not in the office this week.

Mr. Bourque suggested deferring the review of the Curriculum budget until Dr. Heon can be present.

Mr. Markiewicz indicated she will be meeting with him to prepare a summary of the curriculum budget and provide more clarification on the accounts in question.

Mr. Pascucci requested that a representative attend when the Budget Committee reviews the Buildings and Grounds budget. He specifically requested Mr. Bennett attend.

Mr. Markiewicz mentioned there has been some reorganization in facilities. He suggested that Mr. Bennett and Mr. Ross, who covers both GMS and LMS, attend the meeting.

Mrs. Couture indicated the Budget Committee made reductions in the amount of \$5,125 this evening.

7. MEMBER INPUT/NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Couture commented as we go through and make changes weekly, we will make final decisions on the school budget on January 8. She suggested the Budget Committee use the MS-27 format for final reductions (by function).

Dr. Cochrane indicated he and Mr. Markiewicz began working on the Conferences/Workshops and Travel accounts. He noted the \$35,000 increase in Special Services Conferences/Workshops covers specific purposes.

8. PUBLIC INPUT

Jason Guerrette, 11 Perry Court, commented that a very impassioned conversation about the CHS band program was made. He noted it is a growing program. He mentioned there is a new charter school not far from here where band is required and every child brings their own instrument and none are stored there. He commented that is a public school. Mr. Guerrette indicated that in this instance, he pays twice: once in his taxes and once for his child's instrument. He believes it is not too much to ask for parents to provide their students' instruments. He commented it is about education.

Mr. Guerrette commented that there is a large increase in athletics. He indicated that their successes are not about what we spend, but because they are great athletes and there is great parental support. He referred to the statements regarding over spending because wrestling is now included in the budget, Mr. Guerrette commented it is not fair to pick and choose the sports we absorb into the budget.

Mr. Guerrette disagreed with Mr. Byron's statement on averaging out budgets. He commented that rolling over budgets year after year is real world practice and it is unfortunately how businesses make due. He indicated we can expect no different from the people managing our buildings. Mr. Guerrette commented it is the Budget Committee's job to give the voters something they will pass, but the Committee continues to present a budget that is high. He noted

DRAFT

that is why these budgets are not passing. He indicated that the Budget Committee needs to find those items that are priorities and weed the others out.

Referring to Mr. Guerrette's comments about band instruments, she clarified that students at CHS and LMS pay for their own instruments, with few exceptions. She indicated that the concern was that those instruments are secure during the day.

Mr. Bourque concurred that those instruments are not provided by the school. He noted only specialty instruments (i.e. triangle, glockenspiel) are supplied by the school.

Mr. Guerrette commented that after the conversation with Mr. Lecklider there was a wide breadth of instruments they wanted to purchase because parents did not want to spend the money. He indicated it is not the taxpayers' problem to buy these specialty items.

Mr. Bourque commented these are not normal items that students play.

Mr. Guerrette commented regarding storage, the students can take their instruments home. Mrs. Couture clarified that the students do take their instruments home and that the storage was for during the school day.

- **Upcoming meetings**

The next meeting of the Budget Committee is scheduled on December 9, 2014.

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to adjourn.

SECOND: Mr. Pascucci

VOTE: 7-0-0

The motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Minutes by:

Michele E. Flynn (Recording Secretary)

Date approved: