

**Minutes of the Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting  
Held on January 15, 2015**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, January 15, 2015 at Campbell High School, 1 Highlander Court, Litchfield, NH 03052.

**PRESENT:** C Couture (Chair), A Cutter (Vice Chair), R Peeples, W Spencer, C Pascucci, K Douglas, B Bourque (School Board Representative), F Byron (Selectmen's Representative)

**Absent:** D Vaillancourt

Mrs. Couture called the meeting to order at 8:13 p.m. after the budget hearings were closed.

**1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**2. CHANGES TO TOWN BUDGET**

Mrs. Couture indicated that a community member suggested adding money to the 2015 Recommended Town budget.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

*Move to reopen the 2015 Town Operating budget bottom line of \$5,232,478*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Peeples

**VOTE: 7-1-0**

**The motion passed.**

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

*Move to add \$1,800 to Account 4611, Conservation*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Peeples

Mr. Spencer asked for the details.

Mr. Cutter indicated that the amount consists of:

- Property Management: increase of \$1,500 for gravel at the Moore's Falls parking lot, a new gate and lock at Moore's Falls, and maintenance at Parker Park by the County Community Service Workers
- Equipment Purchase: increase of \$300 for two bat boxes at the request of the Mosquito Control District.

Mrs. Couture commented that the Budget Committee actually added \$100 for property management in that account.

Mr. Byron commented that the Board of Selectmen felt the requested money should come from the Conservation Fund. He indicated the Conservation Commission has the authority to use that money without Board of Selectmen approval. He noted the Board of Selectmen made recommendations to the Budget Committee. Mr. Byron indicated the vote of the Board of Selectmen was to recognize that the Conservation Commission can use their land funds. He noted there is nothing in the law that disallows the use for that money.

Mr. Peeples commented the intent by the town was never to use the money that way.

Mr. Byron indicated that state law states what is covered.

Mr. Spencer commented that the Budget Committee voted on this budget in November. He indicated he would have been comfortable if someone came back when we were working on the budget to request a change. He noted that he is concerned with being presented with a change tonight and there is no one here to speak about it.

Mr. Byron commented the person was speaking on behalf of the Conservation Commission and she thought once it was presented she did not have to be here. He noted the Conservation Commission is requesting those funds be added back into the budget.

Mr. Pascucci commented there were no bat boxes in the Conservation Commission budget. He noted that the Budget Committee left bat boxes in the Mosquito Control budget. He indicated it is evident that the Board of Selectmen declined to put the money in the budget.

Mr. Byron clarified the Conservation Commission does not need to come to the Board of Selectmen as they already have the money in their budget.

Mr. Pascucci commented that he stands corrected. He applauded they spoke at the hearing. He believes that they should take the money out of their budget.

Mrs. Couture commented when the Budget Committee added \$100 to their budget it was understood that much of the work is provided by volunteers and sharing resources with the highway department. She felt that what is in their budget is sufficient.

Mr. Peeples believes that they have to have a public hearing to spend that money. Mr. Byron indicated they only have to have a public hearing if they want to purchase land.

Mr. Cutter commented after hearing the discussion he feels there is no reason why they cannot use their money for this purpose.

**VOTE: 1-8-0**  
**The motion failed.**

Mrs. Couture indicated the 2015 Recommended Town Budget bottom line remains unchanged at \$5,232,478.

### **3. CHANGES TO SCHOOL BUDGET**

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

***Move to reopen the FY16 School District Operating budget bottom line of \$21,031,613 for discussion***

**SECOND:** by Mr. Bourque

Mr. Cutter commented that there is continued debate regarding the teacher reduction when we are so close to the policy. He believes the district is more susceptible to risk if more families with school aged children move into the district.

**VOTE: 5-3-0**

**The motion passed.**

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

***Move to add \$55,000 to the Salaries and Benefits account***

**SECOND:** by Mr. Bourque

Mr. Cutter indicated his personal opinion is that enrollment is too close to policy and that a reduction would leave us open to risk. He commented that it is a valid point that this is a bottom line budget and the district can fund this position if it so chooses. He was concerned that there will be areas of reduction in other areas of the budget.

Mr. Pascucci believes the budget total is sufficient. He commented the School Board can reallocate money if necessary. He indicated he does not support the motion unless reductions are made elsewhere in the budget.

There was more debate regarding the reduction of teaching staff and transportation.

Mr. Pascucci recommended that the Committee add a teacher and a bus back into the budget. He commented it will most likely be added back at Deliberative Session. He indicated the Committee can reduce another area of the budget.

Mr. Peeples commented that it becomes a game of chasing dollars. He noted the School Board will manage to the bottom line and is not supportive of the argument.

Mr. Pascucci commented many people feel it is the Budget Committee's fault that a teacher will be reduced unless the School Board actually reduces the teacher and states they made that decision. He is in favor for adding the money back in and reducing elsewhere.

Mrs. Couture commented if there are places to change it is the School Board's decision. She indicated the Budget Committee does the mathematical equation and that equation has not changed. She noted the School Board has to make a decision on what they will do when they receive their numbers in the summer. She commented they have done this in prior years. Mrs. Couture was not supportive of making a change in the budget.

Mrs. Douglas commented that Mrs. Couture mentioned the Budget Committee left \$400,000 in the budget.

Mr. Cutter commented that he is making the motion based on the policy and student ratios. He indicated it is his opinion we are cutting that line too close.

Mr. Spencer disagreed. He commented we have done this in the past [and had the same numbers] and never jeopardized education.

Mr. Cutter commented there is a human and rationale aspect to this that has been made clear to every Committee member over the past week. He indicated it is not 'black and white'.

Mr. Pascucci commented we have always stuck to a certain plan. He indicated \$21M is plenty of money.

Mr. Byron called the question.

**VOTE: 3-5-0**

**The motion failed.**

**MOTION:** by Mr. Bourque

***Move to add \$65,000 to the FY16 Recommended budget for air duct cleaning***

**SECOND:** by Mr. Byron

Mr. Pascucci asked for the justification for the need.

Mr. Bourque indicated that CHS has been open for 15 years and the ductwork needs to be cleaned.

Mrs. Douglas commented that amount of money should warrant pictures and a field report. She indicated she would like to see a report, testing and pictures and if there is a need it should be budgeted. She noted that we do not know there is a need at this time.

Mrs. Couture commented we did ask for a copy of a proposal and did not receive it.

Mr. Peebles indicated that enough time has passed to do an inspection. He commented he would support the motion if there were a report and results determined a cleaning is needed. He noted that there are enough problems trying to maintain the building. Mr. Peebles commented he would support the request as a warrant article.

**VOTE: 2-6-0**  
**The motion failed.**

Mrs. Couture indicated the FY16 Recommended School District budget of \$21,031,613 remains unchanged.

- **Vote on Math Tutor Warrant**

Mrs. Couture indicated that this was part of the budget presentation.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Pascucci to recommend Article 5 for the purpose of funding a part time math tutor at GMS for a total of \$22,800

**SECOND:** by Mr. Peeples

Mrs. Douglas commented we have been talking about this for years and it is coming to the Committee now. She asked if we have considered other options for curriculum.

Mr. Bourque commented GMS uses the Envisions math curriculum.

**VOTE: 8-0-0**  
**The motion passed.**

Article 5 was recommended by the Budget Committee 8-0-0.

Mrs. Couture commented that she has submitted the MS-27 to the school district and the MS-7 to the town. She asked Budget Committee members to sign the signature sheets. She noted she had to correct some of the district's numbers.

- **Tax Cap Discussion**

Mr. Spencer acknowledged the Budget Committee does not have to make a recommendation on the warrant article. He was concerned someone is going to ask the Budget Committee for their opinion at Deliberative Session. He commented the Committee can have an opinion or we as individuals can have our own opinion. Mr. Spencer was thinking the Committee would make a decision tonight or each member can opt to give their opinion at Deliberative Session.

Mr. Byron indicated the warrant article is simply a request to voters that they are agreeable to the Board of Selectmen having a tax cap. He noted this article does not establish a tax cap and is not binding one way or the other. He commented a tax cap would establish a percentage amount above the budgeted amount to limit an increase.

Mr. Spencer commented the article states that the Board of Selectmen have to calculate the amount raised by taxes and compare it to the voters' opinion. He indicated the Board of Selectmen would assign a number if the article is approved.

Mr. Byron indicated the percentage in the article can be amended.

Mr. Spencer commented it appears that we need to have a revenue forecast and valuation, then the number is determined. Mr. Byron indicated the number can also be less.

Mr. Spencer commented if what is proposed is significantly over the what the tax cap would be we do not have a way to be consistent with the tax cap. Mr. Byron indicated it has to be a decision of the citizens.

Mr. Cutter asked why the Board of Selectmen chose to include this as an article. Mr. Byron indicated that it has been discussed for a few years. He commented it is the means of trying to control the growth of the budgets. He noted if citizens vote in favor of the article and the Board of Selectmen bring back an article with a number there will be much debate. Mr. Byron commented it will most likely be a heatedly discussed number, but decided by those who attend Deliberative Session.

- **Lease Discussion**

Mrs. Couture commented that this is a discussion of the article wording. She indicated that Town Article 17 is an advisory article that is asking if the voters would like the Budget Committee to be directed to calculate leases into the budgets.

Mr. Pascucci commented that RSA 33:7-a states all multi-year leases have to be approved by the legislative body. He indicated if the article is approved the Board of Selectmen can lease cruisers. He noted that the Board of Selectmen have the power to do that now and there is no need for the warrant article. Mr. Pascucci encouraged Committee members to read the article. He commented that even if the Board of Selectmen include lease payments in the budget and the operating budget fails, they cannot include lease payments in the default budget

Mrs. Couture asked if approval of this article does approve the inclusion of leases in the budget can voters give future approval for leases to be in the budget.

Mr. Pascucci commented if the proposed budget is approved the lease is approved, but if the proposed budget fails, the lease fails.

Mr. Spencer commented what is voted on is a bottom line budget.

Mr. Peeples commented we always rotated our cruiser purchases and never had an issue.

Mr. Pascucci commented that it was mentioned that a lease payment saves money in the budget. He indicated it does not provide savings in the long term as there are interest charges. He prefers that the budget include a purchase and not a lease.

Mrs. Couture indicated she wanted the Budget Committee to be aware. She announced that she forwarded the MS-27 and MS-7 to Committee members.

Mr. Cutter thanked Mrs. Couture for her work and leadership. Mr. Spencer agreed.

#### 4. ADJOURN

- **Upcoming meetings**

The next meeting of the Budget Committee will be January 31, 2015 following Town Deliberative Session and February 7, 2015 following School Deliberative Session.

**MOTION:** BY Mr. Cutter

*Move to adjourn*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Peeples

**VOTE: 8-0-0**

**The motion carried unanimously.**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

**Minutes by:** *Michele E. Flynn (Recording Secretary)*

**Date approved:** **January 31, 2015**