

**Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting
Held on December 14, 2017**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, December 14, 2017 at Campbell High School, One Highlander Court, Litchfield, NH 03052.

PRESENT: C Couture (Chair), K Douglas (Vice Chair), J Bourque, J Spotts, J Brunelle (Selectmen's Representative), C Harrison (School Board Representative)

Absent: R Keating, D Miller, vacancy

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Couture called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

- **REVIEW/ADDITIONS TO AGENDA**

Additions to the agenda included an update on the January 4, 2018 meeting for the fire station presentation.

2. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

3. MEMBER INPUT/MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

Mrs. Couture asked members to try to refrain from talking over one another because the microphones pick up the background noise and there are echoes and crackles in the room.

Mrs. Couture commented that she watched the December 6 School Board meeting and did not notice anything out of line. She indicated there will be brainstorming, discussion and comments made in meetings. She noted that discussion of Deliberative Session caught her attention. Mrs. Couture mentioned that she feels very strongly about public attendance at Deliberative Session and has encouraged people to attend for several years as that is the one opportunity people have to actually make changes. She commented people should not feel that they cannot or should not make a motion to change anything. She encouraged the public to attend Deliberative Session to have an opportunity to be heard.

Mrs. Couture indicated another comment made at the School Board meeting was about the 2005 kindergarten vote and that at the time of that meeting she was Chair. She noted it was stated that as Chair she should have had some discussion at the Budget Committee meeting. Mrs. Couture explained her impression of that article was that the money was a placeholder so the district would not lose the grant. She indicated as time passed the purpose of the article became unclear. She asked the district to contact legal counsel for an opinion of the purpose of the article, which

just occurred today. She noted as soon as the response is received they will forward it to the Budget Committee.

4. REVIEW/ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

- November 30, 2017

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to approve the minutes from November 30, 2017

SECOND: by Mr. Spotts

VOTE: 4-0-1, with Mr. Brunelle abstaining

The motion carried.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. Couture announced correspondence was received from Chris Pascucci, 12 Colonial Drive, Litchfield. She added revenue information was received from the district.

Mr. O'Neill reported that a request for legal opinion and data surrounding 2005 kindergarten article was sent to legal counsel. He noted his response will be forwarded to the Chair as soon as it is received.

6. BUDGET REVIEW: TOWN BUDGET

- **Update on January 4 Meeting**

Mr. Brunelle reported that cost information will be available for January 4, the Board of Selectmen went over permit information and resources will be here. He reported that a bookkeeper has been hired who will begin on Monday.

7. BUDGET REVIEW: SCHOOL DISTRICT

- **Review Revenues**

Mr. Izbicki commented that the revised valuation is not included in the default budget and the revenue estimates have a change in state aid.

- **Warrant Article Presentation**

Mrs. Couture indicated that the warrant article cost items information has been updated.

Mr. Izbicki indicated the School Board will vote on warrant article recommendations on December 20. He presented the FY19 Warrant Articles to the Budget Committee:

Article 1: Operating Budget \$22,342,614; Default Budget \$22,806,098

Article 2: Full Day Kindergarten \$519,732

Mrs. Douglas indicated the Budget Committee reduced kindergarten costs of approximately \$494,000 and asked why the amount in the article is different.

Mr. Izbicki indicated there were some things that the Budget Committee did not include in the reduction (i.e. trenching; 10% infrastructure cost), so if the article is approved those costs go back into the budget.

Article 3: Special Education Coordinator position \$93,313

Article 4: Building Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund \$50,000

Mrs. Couture commented on Article 1 the Default budget has a \$1.15 tax impact, which is important to note. She indicated the default budget is supposed to be the safety net in the event the operating budget fails. She noted the default budget is significantly higher. She asked if there is any explanation that reflects what impacted this default budget from last March.

Mr. Izbicki commented last March there were two contracts and a security article (part of that is being held for fencing for the portable at GMS). He indicated the approved contracts from last year will impact this year with increases in salaries.

Mrs. Couture asked how we explain what went into that number and why. Mr. Izbicki commented he can provide an explanation.

Article 1: Operating Budget \$22,342,614

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to recommend Article 1

SECOND: by Mr. Spotts

Mrs. Douglas commented she will vote to recommend the operating budget, but believes it is much too high. She was concerned if she voted in opposition her vote could be construed as support for the default budget.

VOTE: 5-0-0

The motion carried.

Article 1 is recommended by the Budget Committee.

Article 2: Full Day Kindergarten \$519,732

MOTION: by Mrs. Harrison

Move to recommend Article 2

SECOND: by Mr. Brunelle

Mrs. Douglas commented she supports the idea of full day kindergarten, but after speaking with a lot of people, believes we are rushing it. She does not believe there has been enough conversation. She suggested discussion regarding charging a fee. Mrs. Douglas commented the

wide range of private kindergartens provides wide opportunities. She supports investigating other ways to fund full day kindergarten.

Mrs. Couture commented if you have parents pay tuition you still have to appropriate the full amount. She indicated this warrant article does not determine funding.

Mrs. Douglas commented she would not vote in favor of recommending the article unless revenues offset the cost.

Mrs. Harrison reported that legal counsel recommended not charging a fee for full day kindergarten. She indicated that the state is required to provide an adequate education and charging a fee means the district does not feel it is integral or important enough. She noted it also limits the amount of people that can take advantage of the program.

Mrs. Douglas asked how other districts charge a fee. Mrs. Harrison commented if we accept state aid we cannot charge a fee.

Mrs. Douglas commented the fee covers the cost so we do not need state aid.

Mrs. Harrison indicated the School Board believes this is the best way to provide the education the children need. She commented Mrs. Douglas stated in a previous meeting that she would support full day kindergarten if it were a warrant article.

Mrs. Douglas commented she would support the process.

Mr. O'Neill commented if the district considers it is integral to the education of our children and we offer the program as full day, we have to offer it to all children regardless of economic background. He indicated charging a fee would be in opposition to that mentality. He noted there is a legal case. Mr. O'Neill commented by charging a fee we are saying it is not integral to education. He added some parents may be able to afford a fee, but others may not and we would run the risk of discrimination.

Mrs. Douglas asked about a free and reduced lunch waiver. Mr. O'Neill indicated we cannot offer a scholarship because we would be discriminating against other families of economic status. He added we would be discriminating if we instituted a reduced fee for kindergarten as well. He noted we cannot use economic disparity as a waiver.

Mrs. Douglas does not believe the district would be selecting people and asked the Superintendent to provide proof of his statements. Mr. O'Neill responded charging a fee that some cannot afford will create economic discrimination.

Mrs. Couture commented that the School Board discussed charging a fee for athletics some years ago, but it creates a discriminatory situation. She added athletics is offered as part of the educational program and a fee cannot be charged.

Mrs. Douglas commented there are other entities that charge fees and the free/reduced lunch program may be the basis to their argument.

Mr. O'Neill indicated there was a change in legislation this summer that will allow Keno funds to help fund full day kindergarten. He believes the other piece is the fact that we would receive additional aid that would result in full per pupil funding. He noted that legal counsel advised due to the change in the law it changes the way you can handle offering kindergarten.

Mrs. Couture asked what the amount of funding would be for half day kindergarten. Mr. O'Neill indicated that it would be approximately \$1,800. He commented that the Keno bill appropriated an additional \$1,100, which will fund the full \$3,600 for full day kindergarten.

Mrs. Couture was concerned that the district is losing state funding because of the declining enrollment. She commented if we charge a fee we would lose state funding. She indicated that is not a good business plan.

Mrs. Douglas commented we can charge a fee for the second half of the day. Mrs. Couture indicated we will lose all funding if we charge a fee. She commented we are concerned about losing \$295,000 of state aid so why would we cause ourselves to lose more state aid.

Mrs. Bourque commented it comes down to what other classes or programs for which fees can be charged. Mrs. Couture indicated those ideas were discussed by the School Board in the past.

Mrs. Bourque asked if fees can be charged. Mrs. Douglas indicated some districts charge fees for programs, but it is subject to legal counsel opinion. Mrs. Couture commented she would be surprised if districts that do charge for kindergarten will continue that practice with the new state approved option as they will not receive that funding.

Mrs. Douglas commented the half day aid will be eliminated. Mr. O'Neill commented that is not an accurate statement. He explained that districts that offer half day programs would receive funding for half day kindergarten, but if students are enrolled in a full day program the district would receive \$2,900 per pupil.

Mrs. Douglas was concerned that the implementation of full day kindergarten in Litchfield will result in private kindergartens closing and those teachers will lose their jobs.

Mrs. Couture commented that argument occurred when the district implemented the half day program. She indicated there will always be a need for those who prefer private kindergarten.

Mr. O'Neill indicated we will have to hire two teachers and two paraprofessionals if we are fortunate enough to get full day kindergarten.

Mrs. Harrison commented as a School Board member and representative of that board, we were disappointed that full day kindergarten was removed from the budget, but we understood the Budget Committee would support it on the warrant. She indicated we are giving the voters a chance to make a choice. She noted it is not the Budget Committee's job to determine if it is necessary, but to ensure we are fiscally responsible.

Mrs. Douglas commented alternative revenue or funding is a valid concern. Mrs. Harrison commented those avenues have been explored.

Mrs. Douglas commented that she is struggling with the fact that we often get legal counsel that is contradictory to other views. She indicated she wanted full day kindergarten to go forward as a warrant article, but she is not necessarily going to support it. She believes there has not been enough communication about the implementation of the program.

Mr. O'Neill commented the district is aware of the need to educate the community about full day kindergarten. He indicated forums have been planned and information will be available prior to Deliberative Session. He noted when a community is informed they can make an informed decision. Mr. O'Neill believes the community should be offered the opportunity to make the decision and we hope the Budget Committee will support that.

Mrs. Douglas commented she is voting in favor of the process.

VOTE: 6-0-0

The motion carried.

Article 2 is recommended by the Budget Committee.

Article 3: Special Education Coordinator \$93,313

MOTION: by Mrs. Bourque

Move to recommend Article 3

SECOND: by Mrs. Harrison

Mrs. Douglas commented this article was presented last year and did not do well. She indicated the argument at the time was to expand the elementary assistant principal to full time to help alleviate meeting coverage and special education issues.

Mr. O'Neill explained the request for this position revolves around the significant number of complex exceptionalities in the district. He commented we are thankful to the community for the full time assistant principal, but that does not alleviate the caseload in the district. He indicated this position will facilitate IEP work and other work in the district, and to help manage the caseload in the district.

Mrs. Douglas asked what "exceptionalities" includes.

Mr. O'Neill commented that lies within the range of the IEPs. He indicated public schools today are being overwhelmed by children that have the kind of challenges we have never seen before for which hospitalization is not an option and psychological care is not adequate. He noted that any district special education director will agree. Mr. O'Neill commented that he and Mrs. Bandurski met with attorneys this morning to discuss the changes in special education. He explained now the district has to retain records for certain students until age 60 as it is possible to go back into the student records when they are age 40 or older to see how they were treated in their education. He indicated there are an increasing number of children in our schools until they are 21. He noted the gain in special education used to be educational response to specific needs, but now we are dealing with biological response and social response as well. Mr. O'Neill commented we have to have people that can provide the correct resources. He indicated the article may not have been approved last year, but it received a certain amount of support. He asked that the Budget Committee allow the voters to make the decision.

Mrs. Couture believes that the priority this year needs to be full day kindergarten. She commented positions were added last year and this position can wait another year.

Mrs. Bourque commented the Budget Committee made it well known to place positions on a warrant article. She feels the only chance it may not be approved is because of the cost of full day kindergarten. She believes the position was needed last year and feels it is needed this year.

Mr. O'Neill commented a position like this allows teachers to focus on the children. Mrs. Couture commented it does not impact the teachers.

Mr. O'Neill indicated it does impact the teachers depending on the IEP and what is needed in the classroom. Mrs. Couture commented this is not a position that will be working in the classroom, but will be working with a higher range of special education students.

Mr. O'Neill indicated this person will be doing diagnostic information on students, how students get their services, what they need, managing their services and monitoring IEPs for students in grades K-8. He explained if this position is approved, the current Special Services Administrator can focus more on high school and other needs as received. Mr. O'Neill commented that he understands the Chair's concerns, but he feels this is a very important item to keep on the warrant. He indicated with a vote as close as it was last year, he is asking to allow the voters another chance to decide.

VOTE: 6-0-0

The motion carried.

Article 3 is recommended by the Budget Committee.

Article 4: Building Maintenance Capital Reserve Fund \$50,000

MOTION: by Mrs. Bourque

Move to recommend Article 4

SECOND: by Mr. Harrison

Mrs. Douglas asked for the current balance of the fund. Mr. Izbicki indicated it is approximately \$151,000.

Mrs. Douglas asked about the rationale to bring the fund total to \$200,000. Mr. Izbicki indicated that it is to address some items that the Capital Planning Committee identified on the building assessment matrix.

Mrs. Douglas asked about the items identified for bond next year. Mr. O'Neill commented the Capital Planning Committee has done good work and many items were removed from those identified for a bond. He indicated other items were not in that category. He explained this fund is going to be used as both an emergency fund and to address some of the high priority items removed from the bond situation.

Mrs. Douglas commented that the Buildings and Grounds budget is increased less than \$80,000. She indicated she will support the article because it is a resource for those items.

Mrs. Couture commented old schools are aging every year and there is a potential for major repairs. She views this as a rainy day fund that helps to prepare for emergencies or major items.

VOTE: 6-0-0.

The motion carried.

Article 4 is recommended by the Budget Committee.

- **School Budget Final Votes**

Mrs. Couture asked Committee members if there are any suggestions for final reductions to the FY19 School Board Recommended budget. No additional reductions were suggested.

8. Public Input

There was no public input.

9. Adjourn

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to adjourn

SECOND: by Mrs. Bourque

VOTE: 6-0-0

The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Next meeting: January 4, 2018

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Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: