

**Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Hearing
Held on August 5, 2019**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a budget hearing on Monday, August 5, 2019 at Campbell High School, 1 Highlander Court, Litchfield, NH 03052.

K Douglas (Chair), A Cutter (Vice Chair), J Bourque, J Martin, B Hodgkins, N Fordey, W Hayes, B Lemire (Selectmen’s Representative), R Meyers (School Board Representative)

Mrs. Douglas opened the budget hearing at 7:30 p.m.

1. SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION

Mrs. Douglas welcomed all for attending and the Cable crew for recording the meeting. She thanked everyone that shared comments with the Budget Committee. She introduced the Committee members.

Mrs. Douglas made the following statements:

The Budget Committee reviewed the original proposal for the LEA Tentative Agreement in 2018 and considered the goals of the School Board and the resulting impact to the community. The Budget Committee has in the past and present encouraged the school district and School Board to reduce the long-term costs of the contract. With more increases to health insurance the district is moving to a new health insurance plan with a higher percentage of premiums borne by the district. The Budget Committee would like to see the percentage of premium contributions of 80% district / 20% employee. The Teachers’ Contract warrant article failed in March 2019. A new contract proposal has been presented to the Budget Committee by the School Board and will be presented to the community this evening. The Budget Committee will not be voting a recommendation on the warrant article until after a decision has been made by the Superior Court for the district to hold a Special Meeting.

Mrs. Douglas turned the meeting over to the School Board and Dr. Jette.

Article 1:

Shall the Litchfield School District vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Litchfield School District and the Litchfield Education Association, which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Estimated Increase</i>
2019-2020	\$ 256,587
2020-2021	\$ 294,278
2012-2022	\$ 303,872

and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$256,587 for fiscal year 2020, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels.

Estimated Tax Impact: \$0.28

50
51 Dr. Jette welcomed community members to the meeting. He explained that the LEA Agreement
52 has been renegotiated and is different than the agreement brought before the voters in March. He
53 indicated the School Board spent much time reflecting the factors related to the failed vote, as
54 well as the data that reflected over 100 people that cast votes skipped the contract article. He
55 commented that there was shared concern about the impact on teachers, morale and the students.
56 Dr. Jette noted that the negotiation teams met to see if common ground could be identified and
57 entered into hard negotiations to achieve an agreement that will attract and retain quality staff.
58 The new agreement costs \$260,377 less than the agreement that failed in March.

59
60 Dr. Jette presented information regarding the renegotiated agreement to the community:

61
62 **Contract Overview**

63 Annual Increase:

64 Year 1: \$256,581 - Reduced by \$137,842 from the contract presented in March 2019

65 Year 2: \$294,278 - Reduced by \$80,016 from the contract presented in March 2019

66 Year 3: \$303,872 - Reduced \$42,519 from the contract presented in March 2019

67

68 Total: \$854,737 - Reduced by \$260,377 from the contract presented in March 2019

69

70 Dr. Jette commented that the same negotiating team as the prior agreement was assembled with
71 the addition of Business Administrator, Cory Izbicki. He indicated that the contract is focused
72 on two goals: 1) to attract and retain excellent teachers; 2) to change to a consumer driven health
73 plan.

74

75 Goal 1: we lose more than a teacher when a teacher leaves the district: professional development,
76 mentoring, college credit reimbursement, personal materials for the classroom bought by the
77 teacher, knowledge of the curriculum/programs/materials, organizational knowledge,
78 relationships with students/colleagues/parents/administration. These are losses we cannot make
79 up

80

81 What failed in previous agreement?

82 Higher cost of living increases, restored steps for teachers behind in salary, and the longevity
83 increase.

84

85 Key Areas Renegotiated:

- 86
- 87 • Maintain competitive salary scale
 - 88 • Provide Cost of Living increases to all teachers
 - 89 • Increase longevity payments for most experienced teachers

90

91 By maintaining a competitive salary scale we can ensure we hire new teachers competitively and
92 retain quality teachers. Dr. Jette explained salary steps and how they increased with degrees and
93 experience. A step is typically equivalent to one year, but there are also six different lanes for
94 degrees and credits earned.

95

96 To stay competitive:
97 Increase starting salary in year 1 from \$39,303 to \$39,696
98 Increase starting salary in year 2 from \$39,696 to \$40,291
99 Increase starting salary in year 3 from \$40,291 to \$40,997

100

101 Year 1: Salary step with 1% COLA
102 Year 2: Salary step with 1.5% COLA
103 Year 3: Salary step with 1.75% COLA

104

105 Longevity:

- 106 • 15-19 Years of Experience (last 5 in Litchfield): increase stipend from \$1,500 to \$1,590
- 107 • 20+ Years of Experience: increase stipend from \$2,500 to \$2,590
- 108 • Failed offer added \$1,000 to the total longevity in each range

109 Total 3-year cost: \$55,224

110

111 Health Insurance:

112 If contract is approved by voters in October, the Green and Red plans will remain until June 30,
113 2020, which has no cost increase to the contract in year 1.

114

115 Beginning Year 2:

- 116 • Currently most employees on Green Plan with no deductible
- 117 • Premiums: Employees pay 18%; District pays 82%
- 118 • Cost to District \$8,155 for Individual Plan
- 119 • Yellow (Choice) Plan \$1,000 Deductible
- 120 • Premiums: Employees pay 11%; District pays 88%
- 121 • Cost to District \$8,152 for Individual Plan

122

123 Additional Benefits of Yellow Plan:

- 124 • Lower rates over time
- 125 • No Cadillac tax in 2022
- 126 • Control over healthcare dollars
- 127 • Incentives for healthy lifestyle choices
- 128 • School Care estimates nearly 90% of districts/towns on the Yellow plan

129

130 Insurance Savings:

- 131 • Projecting \$511 in savings in Year 1;
- 132 • Projecting \$2,184 in Year 2;
- 133 • Projecting \$19,162 in Year 3.

134

135 Dr. Jette commented we are not at the 80/20 split in insurance, but are moving in the right
136 direction. He indicated this new plan gives employees a chance to get used to the new health
137 insurance plan and to think more wisely about utilization of their health care dollars.

138

139

140

141 New Contract Language includes:

- 142 • School Opening Date
- 143 • Defined Work Day: controls arrival and departure of employees
- 144 • Review of Co-Curriculars and Stipends: fair and equitable language
- 145 • More flexibility with 186 days in the work year.

146

147 Dr. Jette indicated the estimated tax impact in year 1 is approximately \$0.28. He noted the
148 School Board has not yet voted on the recommendation of the article, but are very supportive of
149 the agreement. He asked community members to consider not only how much we invest in our
150 teachers, but how much our teachers invest in Litchfield. Dr. Jette noted that the School Board
151 will be asking the Superior Court judge to allow us to put this question to the voters. We are
152 providing seven points that classify this as an emergency. If approved by the court, Deliberative
153 Session will occur on or around the September 3 and Voting Day will be Tuesday, October 1.

154

155 *Questions/Comments from the Public*

156

157 Mrs. Douglas thanked Dr. Jette for the informative presentation and opened the floor to questions
158 or comments from the public

159

160 Tara Coakley, 2 Waterview Circle, commented she is relatively new to Litchfield and a teacher
161 from Massachusetts. She indicated that she knows how much time and effort goes into
162 maintaining a classroom. She noted that her children have some special needs and knows how
163 much work goes into that as well. Mrs. Coakley commented that she has had a good experience
164 with Special Services in Litchfield and with the teachers of her children, and there is much
165 communication. She indicated to maintain the standard we have and want for our children we
166 need to keep these teachers in town. She noted she would much rather spend the money now for
167 the education of our children. She urged voters to approve the contract. Mrs. Coakley expressed
168 disappointment for the failure of the contract in March and commented that teachers have
169 families to take care of as well.

170

171 Sue Seabrook, 33 James Way, noted that she works at GMS as the school nurse. She indicated
172 she is proud to be in the union and urged people to look at this new proposal with an open mind.
173 She noted many people are upset and there is much negativity in the information in the public.

174

175 Kathleen Follis, 8 Mike Lane, commented that she is employed by the district and has children in
176 the schools. She indicated one third of her daughter's schedule has changed due to teachers who
177 have left the district. She noted that these are excellent teachers that we want to keep and she is
178 disappointed that they have left. Mrs. Follis commented when the Budget Committee looks at
179 this proposal they will see significant reductions have been made, a shift to a consumer driven
180 insurance plan and that is reasonable for the taxpayers. She asked the Budget Committee to vote
181 their recommendation on the article prior to the court decision. She commented teachers are also
182 thinking about what happens if the Budget Committee does not vote on the article. She noted
183 many teachers are losing ground waiting for a contract to pass in March 2020.

184

185 Rebecca (last name and address inaudible), asked about hard data on how many teachers have
186 left the district.

187
188
189
190
191
192
193
194
195
196
197
198
199
200
201
202
203
204
205
206
207
208
209
210
211
212
213
214
215
216
217
218
219
220
221
222
223
224
225
226
227
228
229
230
231
232

Mrs. Douglas indicated the School Board will have that information.

Dr. Jette indicated the total was no higher than what has been experienced in previous years. He noted that the district will provide the numbers at the August 21 School Board meeting. He mentioned that some teachers are leaving because they are not sure if the contract will pass, some are leaving for positions closer to home and their family situations and some are taking significantly higher offers and positions.

Nicole Fordey, 85 Page Road, commented that she is aware that some people are confused on whether the committee will vote or not tonight. She indicated the reason she did not support voting is because of the merits of the contract and because of the special meeting process. She noted it makes sense not to vote until decision to hold a special meeting is made.

Jen Bourque, 1 Westview Drive, commented on behalf of Budget Committee, that the Committee did not formerly vote together to decide to vote before or after the court decision.

Mrs. Douglas commented that many committee members felt a vote in favor of the contract was a vote for a special election and do not believe emergency situation exists. She indicated that separating the question clears the confusion.

Mrs. Bourque commented that there was no group discussion among the Budget Committee to agree or disagree not to vote and that the feedback was individual.

Mrs. Douglas indicated that Mrs. Bourque is correct. She commented at the last meeting, the discussion was that the Committee would vote on the contract pending the court decision.

Elizabeth MacDonald, 47 Naticook Avenue, School Board member, asked if Mrs. Douglas chose the Committee members that were asked.

Mrs. Douglas indicated she solicited input from everyone on an individual basis. She commented the Committee agreed to hold the public hearing prior to the court date.

Mrs. Bourque clarified that she was never asked for her opinion.

Mrs. Douglas commented the School Board expressed concern to hold the hearing tonight. She indicated the Budget Committee will vote once the court hearing is held. She mentioned that she suggested to hold this hearing on August 12 to allow greater participation. She noted she called the meeting because the Chair has the right to call the meeting.

Rob Meyers, 13 Nesenkeag Drive, commented about the discussion but the context of his comments was inaudible.

Mrs. Douglas commented to Mr. Meyers that if he wishes to call a vote with a quorum he may do so.

233 Mr. Meyers commented that this is a meeting.
234

235 Mrs. Douglas clarified this is a hearing and not a meeting, so there is no quorum. She indicated
236 she discussed whether or not to vote a recommendation prior to the court hearing individually
237 with those that were concerned. She mentioned the Chair has the right to call a meeting, but not
238 to call a vote.

239
240 Rhonda Landrau, 5 Josiah Drive, asked how the information about the hearing tonight was
241 relayed.
242

243 Mrs. Douglas indicated a public notice was posted in two newspapers.
244

245 Mrs. Landrau commented as a taxpayer and mother with graduates from Campbell High, she is
246 concerned about teachers leaving, the proposed contract and the level of teaching at Campbell
247 High. She asked what is being done to encourage the teachers that are staying here to stay?
248 What is the level of teaching going to be like now and in the future?
249

250 Mrs. Douglas commented the District will follow School Board policy. She indicated the Budget
251 Committee has the responsibility to ensure the contract is fiscally responsible.
252

253 Mrs. Landrau commented she has a daughter who graduated from Campbell High and went on to
254 a prestigious job. She indicated she wants to keep those teachers in the district and be confident
255 our good teachers stay and that we attract other good teachers. She asked the Budget Committee
256 to keep that in mind and give them something substantial.
257

258 Olga McSorley, 3 Perry Court, expressed concerns regarding the cost of holding a special
259 election. She commented at this time the LEA is working without a contract and the longer it
260 takes to vote on a contract, the longer the retroactive period will come into play.
261

262 Dr. Jette clarified, as far as retroactive salaries, that depends on what the parties agreed to.
263

264 Mrs. McSorley asked the Budget Committee and School Board to consider the possibility of
265 additional funds in the next budget cycle to make up for any retroactive pay raises. She indicated
266 there is a cost to waiting that may be greater than the cost to run the special meeting.
267

268 Mrs. Douglas explained the process prior to the special meeting. She indicated this hearing is
269 held prior to Deliberative Session in a timely manner to allow the election to move forward. She
270 noted if we did not hold the hearing now it would have impacted the timeline for an election.
271

272 Mrs. McSorley thanked the Budget Committee for holding the hearing in a timely manner. She
273 believes the town should support holding the special election.
274

275 Tara Hershberger, 3 Naticook Avenue, commented the Budget Committee should be asking
276 questions of the School Board.
277

278 Nicole Fordey, 85 Page Road, expressed her appreciation and indicated that the information was
279 provided to the Budget Committee at their last meeting. She noted the Committee is not seeing it
280 for the first time. She mentioned that typically when the hearing is held the Committee is on the
281 stage. She was concerned that people are “firing” at Mrs. Douglas. Mrs. Fordey commented we
282 may have differences of opinions, but we all care about the children. She noted Mrs. Douglas
283 did a good job tonight. She indicated it is difficult to get accurate information to the public.

284
285 Mrs. Douglas commented this is the first special election that she recalls as a Budget Committee
286 member. She apologized for any mistakes along the way, but this is the Committee’s first time
287 with this particular situation.

288
289 Kathleen Follis, 8 Mike Lane, asked if any Committee members are attending the court hearing.

290
291 Mrs. Douglas indicated she is considering attending.

292
293 Dr. Jette indicated that he will be in attendance, School Board members will attend, the LEA
294 attorney, the District’s legal counsel and some staff members. He mentioned the public can sign
295 in and indicate if they are in support or opposition. He commented this is a hearing on the
296 information that was summarized. The Budget Committee and School Board will vote their
297 recommendations on the article only and not if they support or oppose holding a special meeting
298 and election, as that is for the Superior Court judge to decide. Dr. Jette commented we do not
299 know if the judge will issue a ruling on the day of the hearing, but we want to make sure this is
300 included in the tax bill for the townspeople and not have the taxpayers receive a supplemental tax
301 bill. He indicated the Budget Committee vote is not about whether there will be a special
302 election or not, but simply about the contract, for which we can vote at any time prior to
303 Deliberative Session.

304
305 Brion Hodgkins, Grouse Lane, commented that the tax impact of \$0.28 is for Year 1. He asked
306 what the impact will be for the next two years.

307
308 Mrs. Douglas indicated it will increase each year.

309
310 Dr. Jette indicated the impact is approximately \$85 per year, but it is hard to project depending
311 on the overall budget. He noted there are also incoming revenues that are not etched in stone,
312 but it is wise to be aware there are several moving parts when projecting the impact.

313
314 Andrew Cutter, 6 Moose Hollow Road, asked about the seven points to clarify the emergency.

315
316 Dr. Jette indicated one point is the impact of the loss of staff; another point is that this is not the
317 only year teachers have gone without step increases. He mentioned that the information on the
318 classification of an emergency are in his office and he will provide them to the Budget
319 Committee.

320
321 Rhonda Landrau, 5 Josiah Drive, asked if a synopsis can be published in the HLN so residents
322 who do not get information from other sources can have the right information.

323

324 Mrs. Douglas agreed that is an excellent point. She suggested the Superintendent’s Corner in the
325 HLN is a great source of information.

326
327 Mrs. Landrau encouraged the Budget Committee to do everything possible to maintain the
328 excellence of our school system and to attract excellent teachers. She urged committee members
329 and board members to work with the teachers and make the best decision possible.

330
331 Mrs. Douglas indicated the hearing is Monday, August 12, 2019 at 1:30 p.m. in Nashua Superior
332 Court. She urged the community to make their voices heard. She thanked everyone for
333 attending the hearing this evening and asked them to share their opinions with the Budget
334 Committee by reaching out to all members. She expressed appreciation to the LEA and School
335 Board for working together and for all the work that has been done.

336
337 Hearing no further comments or questions, Mrs. Douglas closed the hearing on the school district
338 budget at 8:40 p.m.

339
340 **Minutes by:** *Michele E. Flynn (Recording Secretary)*