

**Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting
Held on August 19, 2019**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Monday, August 19, 2019, at Litchfield Town Hall, Two Liberty Way, Litchfield, NH 03052.

PRESENT: K Douglas (Chair); A Cutter (Vice Chair); J Bourque, B Hodgkins, N Fordey, W Hayes, R Meyers (School Board Representative), R Leary (Selectmen Representatives)

Absent: J Martin

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

● **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

2. PUBLIC INPUT

Mrs. Douglas opened the meeting to public input.

Marsha Finnegan, 147 Talent Road, asked the Budget Committee to support the teachers. She commented there are a number of teachers leaving the high school because there is no contract, among other reasons.

Kathy Follis, 8 Mike Lane, asked the Budget Committee to support the teachers' contract. She commented that the contract is reasonable. She expressed awareness for the Budget Committee's responsibilities and indicated that the contract meets all of the Budget Committee's criteria. Mrs. Follis commented that the Budget Committee's vote is only for the warrant article and not whether you support holding a special meeting. She stated some teachers need to make up steps and approving the contract prevents that fall back and cascade event if it goes to a March vote. She noted if this contract is approved the district is saving money because there will be less negotiation and better tax-wise.

Tara Hershberger, Naticook Avenue, commented that she read a post on Facebook from former Chair, Cindy Couture. She indicated that Mrs. Couture's comment was that the negotiation of this contract had addressed the criteria of the Budget Committee in the past. She hopes the Budget Committee will support the new contract. Mrs. Hershberger indicated that is a strong endorsement.

Rhonda Landrau, 5 Josiah Drive, expressed her support for the teachers' contract and all the work that has been done to renegotiate the terms. She encourage Budget Committee to vote to recommend the contract.

Sue Seabrook, 33 Jamesway Drive, commented when people move into the town the first thing they look at is the school system. She indicated real estate values are dependent on schools, for example, the crime rate is low with good schools. She stated this is a fair contract and many hours of negotiation was spent to meet the Budget Committee requests.

3. DISCUSSION of / SUBSEQUENT VOTE on the PROPOSED TEACHERS' CONTRACT

Mrs. Douglas opened up discussion for Committee members. She indicated some members had questions for the School Board and district. She noted there are some new members on the Committee that were not involved with the initial contract.

Dr. Jette explained that the salary scale consists of 15 steps with 1 step generally equal to one year. In the past there have been missed steps. Once a teacher gets to the top step of the scale their salary is frozen. Longevity is added to the salary if the teacher on the top step has been in Litchfield for five years. Longevity is added to the base salary and calculated as part of the base, distributed in either 21 or 26 payments over the year. There is no lump sum longevity payment and no interest bearing account where the money is held. The renegotiated contract is a quarter million dollars less than the original contract. There is no adjustment to longevity until Year 3 when it will increase \$90.

Mr. Hayes referred to the 2017-2019 contract and commented that the salary schedule was adjusted to move step 2 to step 1 and add a new top step. He indicated Step 2 became Step 1 because we were behind as a district compared to other district.

Mrs. Messenger indicated that is correct. She explained we did that so people who did not move up would still get an increase in salary.

Mr. Hayes commented it appears there are two jumps in the scale.

Nate Cooper, CHS teacher and former LEA President, explained that there were some years where some members were stuck at the same salary.

Mr. Hayes commented there would be a two step increase.

Mr. Cooper commented that there was some disagreement on the use of the term "step". He indicated we were much more narrow in how we talked about it. He explained even if the salary schedule moved the teacher stayed on the same step.

Mr. Hayes commented that Step 1 went away and Step 2 became Step 1.

Mrs. Messenger commented in 17-18 we changed the numbers on the grid and teachers did not move up a step.

Dr. Jette indicated people were frozen on that step, but did not move up another step.

Mr. Cooper commented that there was concern when we heard from our members that they were losing a step. He noted the school district's response was that they were not losing a step because they were getting an increase.

Mr. Hayes commented that if they did not "double dip", the previous contract was \$575,662 and the proposed contract is \$854,737. He noted the average cost of the new contract per year is essentially lower than the previous contract.

Dr. Jette commented that longevity is not compounded. He indicated that it is not added each year.

Mr. Hayes asked when the teachers are capped out do they get a cost of living adjustment?

Dr. Jette indicated only if it is negotiated.

Mrs. Fordey commented some members of the public were confused as to why the Budget Committee is voting tonight. She asked Dr. Jette to state the reason in public.

Dr. Jette commented that we have never done this before. He explained when we went to court the judge said he would expedite the decision from 60 days to 30 days. He pointed out we do not have 30 days. He noted when we regrouped after the hearing, we discussed that we have to proceed as if we are having the special meeting. Dr. Jette indicated we back dated from the proposed voting date to determine the dates for Deliberative Session and the budget hearing. Legal counsel indicated that the Budget Committee can only vote at Deliberative Session if the article changes and this is a collective bargaining agreement, which cannot change. It was determined that the Budget Committee has to vote prior to the posting deadline for the warrant on August 20. Dr. Jette mentioned the School Board voted in an emergency meeting today to recommend the article 5-0. He noted the decision is in the judge's hands, but we will move forward.

Mrs. Fordey commented it is difficult for people to understand why we are taking this approach. She noted all sides are trying to do this transparently.

MOTION: by Mr. Meyers

Move to recommend Article 1

SECOND: by Mr. Cutter

Mrs. Fordey wanted to make it clear that the Budget Committee is only voting on the warrant article.

Mrs. Douglas confirmed that the Committee is only voting on the article. She commented many people thought that a vote to recommend the article is a vote to recommend the special meeting. She indicated that she does not appreciate the process as it has been laid out and many others feel the same way. She noted we will only be voting on the article this evening. She expressed her

appreciation for the effort and work put into the negotiations by the district and the staff. She noted there was a lot of compromise. She expressed appreciation to the staff and supporters who attended the meeting.

Mr. Cutter echoed the sentiments in the public hearing. He believes it is a reasonable contract. He indicated we are here to decide if this is a good value or not.

VOTE: 6-2-0, with Mr. Hodgkins and Mr. Leary opposing
The motion carried.

4. PUBLIC INPUT

Jen Bourque, 1 Westview Drive, expressed disappointment that the Board of Selectmen did not support this article.

Sue Seabrook, 33 Jamesway Drive, asked why members did not vote to recommend the article.

Mr. Hodgkins indicated that he does not agree with the amount it will cost taxpayers.

Mr. Leary agreed. He indicated that the people he has spoken with do not support the article in light of the \$4M spent on the fire station. He noted the older population simply cannot afford it.

Christina Harrison, 95 Pinecrest Road, commented as one of the negotiators it is disappointing that we did not get a 9-0 vote after all hours spent on renegotiation. She asked if there is a dollar amount that would have been acceptable to the members that did not support the article.

Mr. Hodgkins noted we are not supposed to put our feelings into our decision. He commented teachers have expressed that if we do not vote for the contract we are voting against them. The town said no in March. Year over year the cost to this town is putting us out of the town. Mr. Hodgkins commented that it was stated if we do not have good teachers we do not have good property values. He indicated most of the people he knows want to stay in this town and be able to afford to stay in this town. He noted we are looking at a \$300,000 increase each year and he does not believe it is fair to raise people's taxes each year. He mentioned most people live paycheck to paycheck.

Mrs. Harrison commented that many teachers live paycheck to paycheck. She indicated it is worth it to pay them the money for the education of our children.

Margaret Norton, 24 Woodhawk Way, felt it is sad all members could not agree to support the contract. She commented that we are forgetting the children who are just as important as the teachers. She shared that she has heard from children who are devastated that teachers are leaving the high school.

Mr. Hodgkins asked what those children are going to do in college when they have different teachers all the time.

Mrs. Norton commented when we take away teachers who have the experience to teach our children the more advanced courses that many colleges require we are losing that type of instruction. She noted we also lose the recommendations from teachers for our children for college. She indicated we lose that advanced instruction with newer teachers.

Mr. Hodgkins asked if they discussed how the increase would impact the taxpayers.

Mrs. Norton indicated she would be willing to pay the increase in taxes.

Mr. Hodgkins commented most people will not be willing to pay the increase in their taxes.

Kathy Follis, 8 Mike Lane, commented she was disappointed in the two members did not support the article. She indicated it is financially responsible. She shared that she lives in Litchfield and has also spoken on the side of moderation. She understands many live on their social security; however, voters supported a \$5,000 increase for the Fire Chief and a \$4M fire station. Mrs. Follis commented at some point there is moderation, but also the point of maintenance and in order to maintain a valuable school system raises are necessary. She indicated this contract is one that the Budget Committee wanted for years and the union negotiated under good faith regarding what the Budget Committee wanted. She commented the union met that goal and it is unfortunate the Budget Committee could not unanimously support it.

Kaitlyn Follis, 8 Mike Lane, commented as a student she has lost a few good teachers. She believe they deserve to have their contract. She indicated we need good teachers to help the students and she is concern that more teachers may leave.

Mrs. Harrison clarified that in her earlier statements she did not mean to imply that she was disappointed at the way Budget Committee voted. She indicated she is very appreciative of the Committee's time and the votes to recommend the article.

5. ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to adjourn the meeting.

SECOND: by Mrs. Bourque

VOTE: 8-0-0

The motion carried.

Next meeting: August 22, 2019

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 p.m.

Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: