

**Minutes of the  
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting  
Held on January 29 2020**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2020 at Litchfield Town Hall, 2 Liberty Way, Litchfield, NH 03052.

**PRESENT:** K Douglas (Chair), A Cutter (Vice Chair), J Bourque, J Martin, N Fordey, B Hodgkins, W Hayes, R Leary (Selectmen's Representative), C Harrison (School Board Representative)

Absent: R Meyers

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

● **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**2. PUBLIC INPUT**

Dan Harrison, 95 Pinecrest Road, commented that he has been watching the Budget Committee meetings for a while and prepared a budget probability analysis based on the methodology used by the Budget Committee. He indicated it is just an observation. He presented an analysis showing risk factors for the budget the District presented to the Budget Committee. The School Board proposed a budget for FY21 with a growth of 3.31% (which includes the teachers contract) as opposed the the budget recommended by the Budget Committee with a growth of 1.26%. It was noted that even the cost of living increase for social security was higher at 2.8%.

There was a 2% spike in population since 2018 with 50 new houses beginning to be constructed starting in 2019. Probability was converted to risk and the analysis reflected the Budget Committee's recommended budget with the reductions applied has pushed their budget position close to a 50/50 position, which is too risky for a school district. The School Board budget position (approximately 70/30) is a reasonable position on the probability curve making it less risky to the district and the funding of education in the schools. Things will happen and must be paid for.

The actual growth of 3.3% in the school district budget is not unreasonable considering that enrollment has increased 2%. Last year the school district returned very little to the taxpayers in 2019, which was barely enough to cover realized contingencies.

Mrs. Fordey commented that was after the year end encumbrances. Mrs. Harrison clarified that there were a list of items removed from the FY19 budget to keep it lean and it was agreed that we would use some of the unassigned fund balance to pay for some of them.

Mr. Harrison presented information from the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives that reflected the growth rate of Litchfield, which has brown 2% since 2018 with 25 more homes coming in the development off Page Road and 15 homes coming off Hillcrest Road. The school growth will continue.

In conclusion, the School Board proposed growth is in line with inflation and know (including contractual) increases. The Budget Committee position approaches a 50/50 risk position with no margin for contingency. The town and school district is growing and this is not the year for flat budgets. It should be expected that costs are going to rise with the growth in the town.

Mr. Cutter commented that those are fair points and agreed there is continued growth, but we are making assumptions that we think there will be more children with growth in the town. He was not sure if the Budget Committee position should consider that type of growth.

Mrs. Bourque indicated Mr. Harrison's analysis is a very interesting perspective to consider.

The Budget Committee thanked Mr. Harrison for his presentation and feedback.

Mr. Cutter announced that today is National Law Enforcement Day and acknowledged law enforcement staff for their service.

### **3. REVIEW / ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

- **December 19, 2019**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Bourque

*Move to approve the minutes of December 19, 2019 as amended*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Cutter

**VOTE: 8-0-1, with Mrs. Harrison abstaining.**

**The motion carried.**

- **January 2, 2020**

The January 2, 2020 minutes were tabled until the next meeting.

### **4. CORRESPONDENCE**

Mrs. Douglas announced the following items were received: minutes; email to the School District with follow up budget questions; LSSA updated salary schedules; question from citizen regarding why more of the town fund balance is not being used to pay for the communication system, as well as concern that the Select Board decided to extend the lease period on the communication system financing.

### **5. SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET**

- **Default Budget**

Dr. Jette reported that the FY21 Default budget is not yet finalized and will be forwarded to the Budget Committee prior to the budget hearing.

- **Responses to Questions**

Mrs. Douglas commented there were some questions regarding the supplies lines from a Committee member. Dr. Jette indicated the Admin Team is ready to speak about them.

- **Presentation of Warrant Articles**

Dr. Jette presented each warrant article and its cost to the Budget Committee.

**Article 1 - Proposed Operating Budget**

Dr. Jette indicated the School Board has not taken a position on the budget since it has not yet been finalized and the Budget Committee has not completed their budget deliberations.

**Article 2 - LSSA CBA \$67,521**

Dr. Jette indicated the School Board voted 5-0 to recommend the article.

**Article 3 - Class Size Reduction Expendable Trust Fund - \$99,000**

Dr. Jette indicated the article has been reduced to \$99,000 for the kindergarten teaching position only. The School Board voted 5-0 to recommend the article.

**Article 4 - Special Education Capital Reserve Fund - \$50,000**

Dr. Jette indicated the article has been reduced to \$50,000 as that is what is predicted for the Special Education budget shortfall. The account has a current balance of \$104,000, but will need to be replenished when drawn on. The School Board voted 5-0 to recommend the article.

**Article 5 - Feasibility Study - \$70,000**

Dr. Jette indicated the Capital Planning Committee has solid plans to address the needs of some of the buildings in the district. The request in the article is to use the funds to have experts come and determine the costs for our needs and long term planning for our neediest building. He explained that the needs of two of the schools can be addressed with no tax impact. The School Board voted 5-0 to recommend the article.

Mrs. Douglas asked if there was an actual quote for the study. Dr. Jette explained that there is no quote because no one will commit to an estimate until we know we have the funds. He indicated the estimate is based not only on the depth of the study, but on comparison of our most recent studies costs.

Mr. Cutter asked why this is not being made into a trust fund and dedicated for that purpose. Dr. Jette commented that had not been thought of from that lens. He noted that the district would like to have this done next year and if it is not all spent the remaining funds would be used toward the architectural or project fees.

Mr. Leary asked if this is a one time expenditure or will it be included in the budget in following years. Dr. Jette indicated this is a one time expenditure.

Mr. Cutter commented it would be clearer to the voters if it is in a trust fund. He asked if the new entrance to LMS would be included in the project.

Dr. Jette explained that the total cost of the entrance project is \$320,000, toward which we have \$100,000 from the State Security Infrastructure Grant; however, the district does not have enough to fund the project. He commented the district would like to eliminate the portables at LMS, address the mechanical issues in the building and at CHS. He indicated that the Capital Planning Committee met with a consultant yesterday regarding these issues. Dr. Jette noted that addressing these issues with no tax impact is the direction we are headed.

### **Article 6 - Classroom Door Barricade Devices \$35,000**

Dr. Jette explained during the district's training for active shooter situations and lockdowns, we learned about how to secure and barricade classroom doors to keep intruders out. He indicated these devices called "Night Locks" are made to secure a door, either opening inward or outward, so that intruders cannot get in. He noted that emergency responders have a special tool that can disengage the barricade lock. Dr. Jette indicated this has been recommended by the police and fire departments. The School Board voted 5-0 to recommend the article.

### **Article 7 - Recore (cylinders and keys) All Doors at LMS \$25,000**

Dr. Jette explained based on security and safety recommendations from the NH Department of Homeland Security, a three year plan will ensue to recore the doors of each school to a grandmaster key system. He indicated there is a menagerie of keys at each building and there were concerns raised by both the police and fire departments about access during an emergency situation. He noted this will restore control in the district. The School Board did not vote a recommendation because we did not have a solid cost at that time.

Mr. Cutter asked if the Committee would like to vote on Article 2 tonight.

Mr. Hodgkins commented that he would like to have tax impacts on the articles.

Dr. Jette indicated that it was presented at the last meeting that Article 2 would have a tax impact of \$0.08.

Mrs. Douglas indicated updated articles can be sent to the Committee prior to the hearing.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

***Move to recommend Article 2, LSSA Collective Bargaining Agreement, with an associated first year cost of \$67,521***

**SECOND:** Mrs. Fordey

Mrs. Harrison commented the LSSA went without a contract for a year and all parties worked hard and many hours to get to this agreement. She indicated many of those support staff live in Litchfield and will appreciate having a contract.

Mrs. Bourque commented that the wage schedules put a good perspective on the agreement.

Mrs. Douglas thanked support staff for their work and the agreement to switch insurance and work with the district.

**VOTE: 8-0-1, with Mr. Leary abstaining**

**The motion carried.**

### **Default Budget**

Dr. Jette indicated that the default is nearing completion. He noted the district would like it to be accurate when completed.

- **Final Budget Voting**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Harrison

***Move to add \$9,224 to Account 519, Transportation, for vocational education***

**SECOND:** by Mrs. Bourque

Dr. Jette provided a breakdown of allocations of reductions totaling \$30,000 made by the Budget Committee in the Transportation budget. He indicated the most impacted line was Vocational Transportation and Vocational Education is a requirement. He noted that the district provides transportation for students in Vocational Education to Pinkerton Academy in Derry and Alvirne in Hudson. He was concerned that portion is something we cannot easily absorb due to the fact that it is a requirement under the law.

Principal Lonergan testified that Vocational Education is an incredible value for students. We pay \$1,000 per student to take a course. We do not know from year to year how many students will attend. CTE programs are great programs for students who want hands on training and learning and are career minded. Sometimes these types of courses keep students in school who may be struggling and may never go to college. He respectfully requested to keep that money in the FY21 budget.

Director Widman testified there has been a big push across the state for skilled tradesmen. Vocational Education is an area that is a personalized path for children. Our programming is moving toward providing more personalization for them and we do not have the facilities or capacities to run these types of vocational programs at the high school. We have to think about all of our students and the opportunities we have for them.

Dr. Jette indicated these are regional vocational centers and are relatively close by. He commented we are leveraging Pell grants that are funding those centers so why would we not send our students there to get those credits.

Mrs. Bourque commented this is the feedback she was hoping for as she was concerned about these reductions. She expressed her appreciation for Mr. Harrison's perspective on the trending data. She indicated that vocational education is much less expensive than paying for it ourselves as parents.

Mr. Cutter commented his view is that the Budget Committee did not dictate how to apply the reduction. He noted that district-wide and special education transportation are not included in that allocation. He indicated his issue with this specific account has nothing to do with vocational transportation and was actually focused toward athletics transportation because it increased significantly.

Mrs. Bourque reminded the Committee that two sports were added into the budget that are no longer self-funded. Mr. Cutter commented that his reasoning behind part of his motion was athletic transportation and his adjustment would be to increase the reduction in athletics.

Mrs. Bourque commented that it appears that all athletics is being penalized because Lacrosse was added. Mr. Cutter believes it is over budgeted.

Mrs. Bourque commented that a 3 year average cannot be used on a program that was not funded by the district.

Dr. Jette indicated that there is a contractual increase associated with the transportation contract. He noted this was the best way the reductions could be allocated. He commented transportation will most likely run out of funds as we already face that reality. Dr. Jette mentioned that the Administrative Team is zeroing in on the educational component of this and if we have to find alternate ways to fund this, we will, but we cannot absorb the reduction to vocational transportation. He indicated we cannot ask parents to pay for transportation to class.

Mr. Hodgkins commented that he does not see any broken down cars in this town. He believes that people in this town have the money to pay for sports and that parents should be asked to pay for sports for their children. He indicated that the district can move the money wherever they want to move it, but the district does not want to move it elsewhere.

Mrs. Harrison commented if you are recommending to the School Board that we start charging families to pay for sports, please do so at a School Board meeting.

Mr. Cutter reminded the Committee about Mr. Meyers' conversation that athletics participation improves student participation in school.

Mrs. Bourque commented as a coach of a self-funded program, she experienced the inability of some families to pay for play. She indicated it is a real issue and not everyone has the money. She noted what we are talking about is vocational education transportation.

Mrs. Douglas commented the overall transportation budget is \$1.7M and there are many lines in that account.

Mr. Cutter indicated a large portion of that increase is the contract.

Mrs. Fordey encouraged the Committee to keep in mind that the School Board made a large reduction in that account and they are only asking for a portion of the \$30,000 reduction to apply to their identified priority.

**VOTE: 6-3-0**

**The motion carried.**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Harrison

***Move to add \$4,174 to Account 272, Conferences/Workshops***

**SECOND:** by Mr. Cutter

Dr. Jette indicated the Budget Committee reduced Account 272, Conferences/Workshops by \$10,000 and reduced Account 580, Travel by \$10,000. He reported that the reduction was allocated to the appropriate lines after much examination. He noted there is concern over the workshop line for Curriculum, which is what we are requesting to restore.

Director Widman explained when she came on board in July 2018 one of the things she tasked with was to help unify the district in specific areas: in our priorities, where we are moving, in instruction. Over the last two years, all pockets of professional development funds that were spread out across the schools were condensed into one district line, which provides more oversight and assurance that we can be equitable in providing opportunities to an equal number of teachers from each building to attend professional development workshops. We have been able to send all principals to a common leadership workshop; all new teachers are sent to Project Lead the Way training; science professional development focuses on NXGS inquiry based process training; OWL (Opening the World of Learning) training for teachers; competency training through the Design Studio; sent tutors to Dyslexia training; Social-Emotional and Trauma informed training, which trains teachers how to deal with what students bring into the classroom; Math Coaching for our new Math curriculum, which provides consistency in language across the district. Ms. Widman indicated these funds are used to send teams to have that consistency and a cut that deep will impact our ability to provide those types of training to our teachers.

Mrs. Harrison commented if teachers cannot improve their instruction and collaborate across the district, how will we improve our schools. She indicated this is how we stay competitive with other districts.

Ms. Widman commented that Litchfield is an amazing community and we could be one of the top performing districts in the state, but not without providing our teachers with the capacity to know the latest in education. She indicated this reduction is also a major impact to our professional development for Special Education. She noted one of the actions of the School Board was to reduce the workshops and professional development for Special Education and move those funds into this line.

Director Bandurski commented that there was a reduction of \$6,000 in the Special Education workshops line and \$3,000 was added into District-Wide Professional Development. She indicated that there are a variety of needs for students with learning differences and a variety of trainings we can send staff to or bring into the district. She noted that sometimes grant money is available, but it is not predictable. She commented it is important to have some funds to allocate for this training in specific areas and over the years staff have been sent for training for specific learning abilities, a variety of mental health topics, emotional disturbances, technology and other specific training.

Dr. Jette commented we have heard from the Budget Committee there is too much left at the end of the year. He explained we are trying to consolidate it so we are not having those pockets of residual balances in the budget and so we can have more control over a central account.

Mr. Cutter commented there are 13 lines in Account 272 in the budget, but he only sees nine in the allocation.

Dr. Jette indicated some lines are contractual, such as teacher workshops included in the CBA. Ms. Widman noted that the workshop line for non-union staff has been reduced significantly.

**VOTE: 5-4-0****The motion carried.****MOTION:** by Mrs. Harrison***Move to add \$20,056 to Account 610, Supplies*****SECOND:** by Mrs. Bourque

Dr. Jette commented the full was applied by percentage allocation to various lines and our request is full restoration. He indicated principals will speak about what it really takes to run the schools.

Principal Thompson commented at the elementary level we are driven to ensure students have the supplies they need. We do not want to depend on parents to supply these things as there are some students whose families cannot afford it. Elementary is still paper dependent so we use a lot of writing paper in multiple sizes for different grade levels. Some materials have to be copied. Teachers do ask parents if they would like to donate some items for the classroom. The disparities in the community are not often seen, but do exist. Teachers often supply materials for their own classrooms that are sold locally. Elementary is a supply rich environment. The administrative assistants who order the supplies shop around for the lowest prices.

Principal Lecklider commented last year Mrs. Bourque raised a question about agendas. We are conservative at the middle school and we spend all our supply money. We would like to move to a digital agenda for grades 7 and 8. We are trying to be responsible in the area of 1:1 computing, but that does not mean we are paperless or do not need the general supplies.

Mr. Cutter commented this is an area of the budget that totals approximately \$387,000 and is now up to \$420,000. He asked why has it increased \$30,000. He indicated the Budget Committee has nothing to do with how the reduction is allocated.

Principal Lonergan commented 7 of the 20 supply lines in the CHS budget increased this year. Regular education supplies and athletic supplies are two of those lines. Athletic supplies was overspent last year. The reduction will most likely impact athletic supplies. There are more supplies needed at the high school level due to the number of courses. FACS supplies increased significantly since the School Board eliminated student fees.

Director Ross commented the supplies for the portables at the elementary school are driving an increase in custodial supplies. That was not budgeted last year. The district is already using the lowest quality of paper towels and toilet paper, but we do not want to use a lower quality disinfectant within a germ environment. When there is a flu outbreak at GMS custodians come in on the weekend and disinfect every surface in the school. If we are forced to purchase a cheaper product it will affect the health of the students and staff.

Mr. Cutter commented he is hearing compelling discussions across the schools, but the increase is specifically at GMS.

Dr. Jette indicated that 4000 square feet has been added and is attributed to the kindergarten program.



**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

*Move to amend the motion to add \$10,000 to Account 610, Supplies*

**SECOND:** by Mrs. Douglas

**VOTE ON THE AMENDED MOTION TO ADD \$10,000 TO SUPPLIES: 8-0-1**

**The motion carried.**

**VOTE ON THE MAIN MOTION TO ADD \$10,000 TO ACCOUNT 610, SUPPLIES: 6-3-0**

**The motion carried.**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Harrison

*Move to add \$7,435 to Account 641, Textbooks*

**SECOND:** by Mrs. Douglas

Principal Thompson commented there is money contingent on the additional kindergarten class in the budget this year. The positions were moved to a trust fund in a warrant article. This committee voted to retain three of the four other accounts in the operating budget, but voted to reduce the textbooks account. This will place us in an impossible situation if we have to add a fifth classroom as those are instructional materials, which we cannot operate without.

Mrs. Douglas asked why the supplies are not included in the staffing article.

Dr. Jette expressed concern that the request would be so large and non-specific and would not be well received by the voters. He explained the School Board felt keeping it to the personnel would be best as voters want the article to be specific.

Mrs. Douglas asked if we would need the textbooks without that position.

Dr. Jette indicated the books would not be needed if that were the case, but last year we did not hire a fifth kindergarten teacher with 77 students. He commented there were too many students having their first experience in school. This year the School Board responded by reconsidering class sizes in kindergarten and reduced them. Kindergarten enrollment has been over the threshold for two years. We are asking the voters to approve placing the money in a trust fund in the event we need the additional instructor and to put the money in the budget for the textbooks. If the additional class is not needed, the funds will be returned. Dr. Jette indicated that the district honored a similar agreement this year and did not use that money for anything else.

Mrs. Fordey commented that the Budget Committee is asking for consistency, which is the reasoning behind the motions for removing those items. She indicated that the prediction may be valid and there is a probability this will be needed. She noted the consistency was removing all the funds since the instructor was moved to the warrant.

Mr. Cutter commented that the motions that failed regarding the additional classroom items for kindergarten in accounts 733, 734 and 737 total \$18,867. He believes the article will be approved with the additional funds included.

Mrs. Bourque believes it is confusing for the voters. She indicated enrollment is unpredictable and the district would like insurance in having a fund for staffing.

**VOTE: 4-5-0**

**The motion failed.**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Douglas

*Move to reduce Accounts 733 (Additional Furniture), 734 (Additional Equipment) and 737 (Replacement Furniture) by \$18,867 for consistency*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Cutter

**VOTE: 7-2-0**

**The motion carried.**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Harrison

*Move to add \$40,000 to Account 110, Salaries*

**SECOND:** by Mrs. Douglas

Dr. Jette indicated that this account was reduced for attrition and the school district made an argument about inconsistency with three year averages. Mr. Cutter restored some of the funds. Adding back \$40,000 would reduce the attrition number to \$220,000, which was the lowest of the three years. We have a contract with our teachers that will help reduce attrition in the ensuing year. He noted last year many teachers left because they did not know if they would have a contract.

Mr. Cutter commented the total reduction was \$362,000. He noted the kindergarten teacher and paraprofessional were factored into that line.

Director Messenger commented that last year was a big year for employees leaving the district and much of that rationale was due to the contract issue; however, we expect to see less attrition next year with less in benefits.

Mr. Cutter noted that the reduction made by the Budget Committee included salaries and benefits, for which he added \$38,000 back.

Mrs. Douglas believes the additional custodian should be on the warrant.

Mr. Ross indicated that the high school is the busiest school being used not only by staff and students, but for events, set ups and clean ups, elections, which takes the custodians away from cleaning the classrooms. He noted that with 114,000 sf more staff are required. He explained that the staffing at the high school included two full time groundskeepers, a full time day custodian and a half day custodian, with one of the groundskeepers pulled inside in the winter to perform maintenance work; three night custodians. He mentioned when a facilities employee is sick or on vacation, we have to pull an employee from another school to help at the high school.

Mrs. Harrison commented this is restoration of the custodial position we had.

**VOTE: 1-8-0**

**The motion failed.**

Mrs. Douglas suggested putting the additional custodian on the warrant. Dr. Jette indicated he would have to defer to the School Board. He noted the rationale is that this is not an additional person or a new position, but restoration of a position.

He commented the School Board needs the flexibility to staff the buildings as needed.

Mr. Cutter indicated prior to any motions made tonight, our revised Budget Committee Recommended budget total was \$22,319,710, or a 1.52% increase; with the motions made tonight, the budget is \$22,324,241, or a 1.54% increase.

**MOTION:** by Mr. Cutter

***Move to approve a bottom line of \$22,324,241 for the FY21 School District Recommended Budget***

**SECOND:** by Mrs. Douglas

Mr. Cutter mentioned if the Business Administrator reviews the budget and revisions and there is a discrepancy, the Committee can vote on it next week.

Mrs. Douglas commented that there is no default amount in the article. She recommended the vote be tabled.

Mr. Cutter withdrew his vote and Mrs. Douglas withdrew her second.

The vote will be tabled until the article is finalized.

## **6. TOWN BUDGET UPDATES**

Mr. Cutter indicated that he had a question regarding the Capital Improvement Planning Committee and did not receive any details regarding meetings scheduled this month.

Mr. Leary indicated he will reach out to the Town Administrator.

Mr. Cutter indicated there was a question about the unassigned fund balance and where we are with that balance.

Mr. Leary indicated the Town Administrator is working on that.

## **8. MEMBER INPUT**

Mr. Cutter thanked the school district and administrators for their collaboration. He acknowledged that much work and effort goes into budget preparation. He suggested that he attend the School Board one day budget session next year if the Excel spreadsheet of the requested budget is received ahead of that date so he can collaborate with the School Board and with his analysis.

Mrs. Harrison expressed her appreciation for everyone's cooperation during this process.

Mrs. Fordey explained her vote for the reduction in accounts 733, 734 and 737. She indicated that she voted in favor of the restoration of textbooks (Account 641), but she did vote in favor of the removal of the items totaling \$18,867 in accounts 733, 734, and 737 for consistency.

Mrs. Douglas asked Mrs. Fordey for a report on the Capital Plan for the School District.

Mrs. Fordey reported there was much talk about fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers and options to determine how we can do more with what we have. She commented it was very promising and is hopeful plans will come to fruition. She was concerned that the Select Board member was not in attendance.

Mrs. Fordey commented, in reference to tonight's Budget Committee meeting, that people watching the meeting should not take away that we did a lot of work for only a net of \$4,000. She indicated the Committee gave this a lot of discussion and examination.

Mr. Hodgkins commented that he believes it is disrespectful hearing comments such as not wanting to put something on a warrant article because it will not pass.

Mrs. Harrison commented that it is not fear that the article will not be approved, but if it is a true need for the district, our job is to listen to our professionals and provide for our students.

Mr. Hodgkins commented it is the job of the School Board to listen to the people and if they do not want something they are telling the School Board they do not want to pay for it.

## **9. PUBLIC INPUT**

There was no public input.

## **10. ADJOURN**

**MOTION:** by Mrs. Bourque

*Move to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 p.m.*

**SECOND:** by Mr. Leary

**VOTE: 9-0-0**

**The motion carried.**

**Next meeting:            January 16, 2020**

**Recorded by:            Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary**