

**Amended Draft Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting
Held on May 28, 2020**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, May 28, 2020, at Litchfield Town Hall, Two Liberty Way, Litchfield, NH 03052 and remote locations.

In response to COVID- 19 and the resulting need to practice social distancing, the meeting will be held remotely via Webex and be broadcast live via LCTV

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

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Cutter called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

● **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

2. PUBLIC INPUT

Residents were encouraged to submit comments via email to Andrew Cutter, Budget Committee Chair, acutter@litchfieldnh.gov. Messages must include commenter's first and last name & address.

There was no public input.

3. REVIEW / REVISION OF AGENDA

There were no revisions to the agenda.

4. REVIEW / ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

● **April 23, 2020**

MOTION: by Mr. Leary

Move to approve the minutes of April 23, 2020

SECOND: by Mr. Son

VOTE to approve the minutes was taken by roll call vote:

*Mr. Hodgkins, yes; Mrs. Harrison, yes Mr. Leary, yes; Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Hayes, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes. **The motion carried.***

5. REPORTS

● **Town Business**

○ **General Update**

Mr. Leary reported the Select Board met on May 5, 2020 and will not meet again until June 8, 2020. He indicated the AC at the Town Hall was tested and it was discovered that the return lines are severely inadequate. He noted that there is an estimate on repairs, but there has not been a decision to move forward at this time.

Mr. Leary reported that the Select Board discussed hazard pay provided by the State in the amount of \$200,000 for loss of revenue, for which first responders are eligible; also discussed was the highway clearspan building for which there is an estimate of \$46,000 for repairs and we are holding off on that. He indicated that the Select Board is concerned about spending any money unless necessary. Mr. Leary reported the Select Board discussed the flag and seal usage options being reviewed by legal counsel.

o RSA 32:22; Review of Expenditures

Mr. Cutter reported that he received the weekly expenditures report from the Town and distributed the report to Committee members.

• School Business

o General Update

Mrs. Harrison reported that the School Board met on May 20, 2020 and discussed end of year expenditures and spend ahead opportunities for next year, which would address facilities/maintenance and/or equipment for replacement. She explained the School Board discussed replacing those items this year because of unknowns as the district heads into the next school year. She noted the School Board has not taken action on the end of year expenditures. Also discussed was what would be needed to open schools in August, such as an increase in sanitation supplies, PPE for all staff and students, more hand sanitizing stations and hand washing stations, which are all responses to COVID 19.

Mrs. Harrison reported a task force for reopening schools will be convened at the close of this school year to try to determine the best option for the district, its staff and students for next year. She noted that the district is waiting for guidance from the State and it is not known if the method used will be 100% remote learning, a hybrid plan or smaller group attendance.

Mrs. Harrison commented that the Budget Committee had questions heading into this meeting, for which she has responses. She noted there was a question about unpaid salaries and stipends for coaches, which is all included in the projected year end fund balance. There was a question about Cares Act Funding, for which the district anticipates approximately \$75,000, but there has been no guidance from the State on how to spend those funds.

o RSA 32:22; Review of Expenditures

Mr. Cutter asked about the budget expense report. He indicated that historically the Committee has received details on district expenditures.

Mrs. Flynn indicated that she can provide that report on a monthly basis for the Budget Committee.

Mrs. Harrison requested the Committee provide an official position for the School Board to provide a monthly school district expenditures report to the Budget Committee.

MOTION: by Mr. Leary

Move to request the School Board provide a monthly school district budget expenditures report to the Budget Committee

SECOND: by Mrs. Douglas

VOTE to approve the motion was taken by roll call vote:

Mr. Hodgkins, yes; Mrs. Harrison, abstained; Mr. Leary, yes; Mrs. Bourque, yes; Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mr. Son, abstain; Mrs. Douglas, no; Mr. Hayes, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes. The motion carried.

Mr. Hodgkins asked if the School Board is considering returning any year end funds to the taxpayers.

Mrs. Harrison indicated that approximately \$750,000 will be returned to stabilize the tax rate for next year.

Mr. Cutter asked for the projected year end total. Mrs. Harrison indicated it is approximately \$1,308,000.

Mrs. Harrison provided an enrollment update to the Budget Committee. She reported there are 64 students registered for Kindergarten for the upcoming year and 80 students registered for Grade 1. She indicated the enrollment numbers are being monitored closely for Grade 1. She noted the fifth Grade 1 teaching position has not been filled at this time, but it is possible that could occur over the summer.

6. MEMBER INPUT / NEW BUSINESS

● 2020-2021 Meeting Calendar

Mr. Cutter provided some background on the 2020-2021 meeting calendar draft. He indicated that the calendar dates were reviewed with the Town and accepted. He reported that he and Mrs. Fordey met with the school district and collaborated on a schedule that may work. He noted that the meeting times were moved up slightly on presentation nights. He explained the schedule was crafted to streamline the process and have a historical view. Mr. Cutter indicated the School Board practice was to meet on a Saturday in October to review the district budgets in one day; however, if we push that process off a week or so, we will have better data in terms of insurance premiums and other budget items for which some lines are estimated because the actual information may not yet have been released to the school district.

Mr. Cutter provided a draft meeting schedule for the Budget Committee:

- No meeting in July as historically the Budget Committee does not meet in July unless there is a pressing matter
- Meeting on the 4th Thursday of August
- Meeting on 4th Thursday of September
- October meetings October 1, 8, 15 with Town budget presentations at 6:30 pm
- October meetings October 22, 29 with Voting on Town budgets at 7:00 pm
- November 5, 10 Joint School Board/Budget Committee budget presentations with Budget Committee observing School Board budget reviews at 6:30 pm

Mr. Cutter explained that the School Board has invited the Budget Committee to observe the School Board budget review process so Committee members can have a better understanding of the process before beginning their budget reviews of the school district budget.

- November 12, 19 School District budget presentations to the Budget Committee at 6:30 pm
- December 3, 8 Voting on School District budgets at 7:00 pm
- December 10, 15 Capital Plan reviews Town and School District
- December 17 Town and School District Warrant Article presentations
- December 29 tentative meeting
- January 2, 2020 Warrant Article voting
- January 14 or 16 - budget hearings
- February 6, 13 Deliberative Sessions
- March 9 Voting Day

Mr. Cutter commented that new this year is review of the output of the Capital Planning Committees for which we will potentially receive warrant articles on items for March 2021 that the Budget Committee will have to vote on. Those review dates are December 10 for the Town presentation and December 15 for the School District presentation.

Mrs. Bourque commented that it was her understanding that we moved away from the Tuesday meetings. She was concerned about her availability on Tuesdays, professionally speaking. She expressed concern regarding the Town Capital Improvement Plan Committee presentation of warrant articles because they could have an impact on the tax cap, which would result in the Budget Committee to have to go back and revote on the budget if the articles push the total over the tax cap.

Mr. Cutter agreed. He commented in March voters approved an article for the town to purchase communications equipment that will be included in the budget and with a decrease in revenue due to COVID 19, this may have an unknown impact.

Mrs. Douglas expressed her concern with Tuesday meetings. She indicated that two meetings in one week is challenging for her. She mentioned that she will have no availability for a tentative meeting on December 29 and would be more agreeable to early January meeting dates.

Mr. Cutter mentioned that there are a few weeks between the date for the budget hearing and deliberative sessions if additional meetings are needed. He asked other members to weigh in on meeting dates availability.

Mr. Hodgkins commented he does not plan that far out, but feels he should be able to make the meetings.

Mr. Hayes indicated he would be available for the meetings.

Mr. Son commented he does not plan that far ahead and that he has more availability on Thursdays than Tuesdays due to travel.

Mrs. Bourque mentioned we may not know what meetings will look like going forward and may still be required to hold virtual meetings, which could change.

Mr. Son commented if virtual participation is an option it would provide more flexibility with availability.

Mrs. Harrison asked if it was necessary to have two Capital Improvement Planning meeting presentations. She indicated that the school district plan will be included in the town plan and only one meeting would be necessary.

Mr. Cutter commented if the Budget Committee feels we can blend those two meetings then we will do so. He indicated we can move the school voting so that we will not have any voting on a Tuesday.

Mrs. Fordey mentioned it is important to try not to have voting on any Tuesdays. She indicated that we have to make sure we are communicating with LCTV for recordings of meetings and observational meetings and presentations.

- **Social Media**

Mr. Son commented after the last meeting he wanted to be sure the focus of the archivist was around communication and working with the Town. He indicated he met with Mr. Brunelle who provided an overview of the town website and communication platform. He believes that he can communicate updates to the town. He explained high level notes will be published to the town website and subsequently will be published to all social media options.

Mr. Cutter commented he would like to proceed with recommending Mr. Son posts meeting updates for the Budget Committee.

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to authorize John David Son to post meeting updates to the town website

SECOND: by Mr. Hayes

VOTE to approve the motion was taken by roll call vote:

*Mr. Hodgkins, yes; Mrs. Harrison, abstained; Mr. Leary, yes; Mrs. Bourque, yes; Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mr. Son, abstain; Mrs. Douglas, no; Mr. Hayes, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes. **The motion carried.***

- **Bylaws - 1st Review**

Mr. Cutter commented that he asked Mr. Son to think about updating the bylaws to incorporate the Budget Committee's communications plan.

Mr. Son indicated that he has crafted an update for the bylaws regarding the Communication Archivist:

The Communication Archivist shall be appointed by the committee to provide regular updates from scheduled and special meetings to the town via approved communication platforms, including but not limited to, the town website, town social media platforms, and other approved social media groups. The updates shall include high-level information from each meeting, including public and member input, old and new business.

Mr. Cutter supported the language from Mr. Son.

Mrs. Bourque was in support and commented that the Committee will need to wait until the next meeting to adopt the change.

Mr. Cutter offered to send the change to Committee members via email.

Mrs. Bourque asked if other Committee members can share the updates on the What's Up page, What Not Up page and Mom's page.

Mr. Hodgkins wanted to know why we have to post on anything other than the Town webpage. He commented if we are responding on a page that is not a town page, then members would be commenting with their own opinions.

Mrs. Bourque expressed that she believes the Committee said to share the summary on the What's Up page.

Mr. Hodgkins does not believe the Committee should be any part of posting on those pages. He indicated that posting on the town page and regular social media is enough for all town residents to see.

Mrs. Harrison commented the town has its own account so you would be posting to the Town Facebook page.

Mr. Son clarified when something is posted on the town website it goes live immediately and within either minutes or hours it will automatically be pushed out to the Town Facebook page, Twitter and the What's Up page. He indicated this would come from the Town.

Mrs. Bourque felt that there are two other groups that do not necessarily participate in those outlets.

Mr. Cutter indicated that is a discussion for the Select Board and not the purview of the Budget Committee. He noted we do not have control over the different channels this will be pushed out to.

Mrs. Harrison agreed that it makes sense to post to the Town website. She commented if we are merely using the way the town communicated there is no bias apparent in that and other people will share it if they find it interesting.

Mrs. Bourque does not believe we should be directed to share it. She believes we are missing an opportunity to share with a wider audience as there are several people that are not on the town page or the What's Up page.

Mr. Cutter paused the conversation to ask Mr. Leary to take it up with the Select Board to discuss.

Mrs. Douglas suggested asking the administrators on those pages to reach out to Mr. Brunelle to have the communications pushed out to their pages. She commented rather than cut communication for limitations we should just encourage them into the fold.

Mr. Son indicated the update to the bylaws will be generic and should cover the communication to all outlets.

Mr. Leary commented that Mrs. Bourque and Mr. Hodgkins make good points. He indicated some groups are being left out of the information group and it should go out to every group or it should go to just the Town web page and leave it there.

Mr. Hodgkins asked if the social media person will be having discussions or just posting information from the meetings. Mr. Son indicated he will just be posting information from the meetings to the Town web page and the website pushes the information out to the platforms so he would not be having discussions.

Mrs. Douglas mentioned Mr. Cutter used to put wording at the bottom of his posts to limit public interaction. She suggested doing the same or having Mr. Brunelle turn off comments.

- **Capital Improvement Planning Commission - Town/School Updates**

Mr. Cutter reported that he sat in the Town Capital Improvement Planning Committee meeting early in May and the only item presented at that time was the overview of the police department needs by Chief Sargent. He indicated that those needs consisted of a new police station and infrastructure. He believes it is premature to provide any numbers to this committee as there were high level costs, but they are not etched in stone. He noted the Chief will get more information and provide updates.

Mrs. Fordey reported that the District Capital Planning Committee met last night and the high level take-away is that the school district approach is in collaboration with the town. District priorities were listed over the next six years and will be presented Monday night to the Town Capital Improvement Plan Committee. She noted that the district is closely monitoring the economic impact of COVID 19 and any disparity or other aid that the State may provide.

Mrs. Harrison reported that Mr. Izbicki reached out to the State regarding fiscal disparity aid and was informed it will not be impacted [or reduced] because it was signed into law. She noted the State directed the funds should be used for infrastructure and not for salaries or to be returned to the taxpayers.

Mrs. Fordey outlined the priorities listed in the District Capital Plan for 2020-2026:

- New PK-5 School, 90,000 sf, municipal bond funding for \$30,000,000 in 2023 with construction to begin in 2024.. Time is required to apply for building aid. Primary focus is for that school to replace GMS and mitigate the portables and costs related to building/grounds renovations such as HVAC, lighting, parking lot repairs and life safety equipment, which would be necessary if the school is not approved by the voters.

The committee is looking at all requirements set by the State (i.e. square footage required, classroom sizes). GMS population and programming has increased in recent years and it is grossly undersized for that population. The new building would alleviate the need for portable classrooms. If the new school is not approved, plans to add classrooms to LMS will go forward as well as renovations to GMS in areas described in this report.

- HVAC & Lighting, CHS and LMS over the next two years, with GMS planned in year 2025 if the new school proposal is not approved. The cost for CHS and LMS is \$2.6M and will reduce operating costs and outdated, inefficient existing systems. Municipal leasing is planned for funding. This is planned for 2021-2022.
- CHS Paving, parking lot, curbs and walkways. There are cracks, holes, etc. which are a safety hazard. The cost is approximately \$85,000 and is planned for 2021-2022.
- CHS Stadium Field Lighting, to allow for night home games for all sports. The cost is approximately \$300,000 and is planned for 2021-2022.
- LMS Kitchen Renovation, too small for kitchen staff and inadequate to serve the current and/or future population. The cost is approximately \$300,000 and is planned for 2024-2025.
- CHS Stadium Turf Field, to allow for longer sports seasons, safer playing field for student athletes and a potential revenue source if rented to outside groups. The cost is approximately \$770,000 and is slated for 2022-2023.
- CHS Gym Bleachers. The bleachers are at the end of useful life and have failed inspection for the last two years. The cost is approximately \$206,000 and a warrant article is planned in two years.
- Expand/Replace LMS Parking Lot. If a new school is approved this project will be included in that project and will provide more parking and a new configuration due the proximity of LMS with the new building. If the new school is not approved, this project will be required.
- Repair/Replace GMS Parking Lot. The parking lot is inadequate for the amount of people that visit the school. The lot is uneven and does not drain properly. This project will not be needed if a new school is approved.
- District Wide Capital Repairs. This is an annual appropriation for the repair of school roofs and capital assets.

Mrs. Fordey reported the District Capital Planning Committee is working in coordination with town government and the NRPC Planner. She noted they are working toward avoiding competing warrant articles for large cost projects on the ballot.

Mr. Cutter reminded Committee members that it is important to understand what is being discussed, and that this is all informational at this stage.

Mr. Son asked if the district owns the land upon which the new school would be built. Mrs. Harrison indicated the district owns the land between GMS and LMS. She noted the new building would be built on school owned land near LMS with a new driveway going from Route 3a to the new school.

Mr. Cutter asked if there is any preliminary thought to the existing elementary building. Mrs. Harrison indicated the Committee discussed some ideas with many possibilities. She commented GMS is not suitable for education purposes. She noted some of the older wings are unusable, but with some renovations may be able to be of some use to the Town.

Mr. Cutter asked if GMS would remain vacant or transferred to the town should a new school be built.

Mrs. Harrison indicated the Capital Planning Committee has discussed that and is in the early stages of that process.

Mrs. Fordey commented the Committee spent much time and discussion coming to the conclusion that a new school is the first priority. She indicated that renovations and improvements were discussed; however, studies from multiple sources have determined it is not feasible to add onto or build up for a variety of reasons due to issues with the site.

Mrs. Harrison explained that the site is the recurring theme as the school is built on a high water table. She commented it is not a good place for a school now or in 20 years. She noted that the building has exceeded its useful life.

Mr. Leary commented the proposed building is for PK - 5, but there will be 8 classes in one building. He asked if that would result in overcrowding.

Mrs. Harrison indicated the building will be bigger with more square footage that will be able to house grade 5. She commented if we maintain five grades at LMS it will result in space issues.

Mr. Leary asked if any thought was given to a smaller building and keeping PK-3 in GMS.

Mrs. Harrison indicated those avenues were explored. She commented the state of the systems and facility itself result in overpaying to keep the building running. She noted if a smaller building is built and we maintain PK-3 at GMS, we will need to hire an additional administration to man another school. One building will save costs.

Mrs. Fordey agreed and commented that with the age of the infrastructure at GMS consider that the 1930s building is where the heating and water pipes run through and we have to heat that part of the school to keep them from freezing. She indicated the cost of adding classrooms to LMS for grade 5 is more expensive than the cost to add them into the new building.

10. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

11. ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas

Move to adjourn the meeting.

SECOND: by Mrs. Bourque

VOTE to adjourn the meeting was taken by roll call:

Mrs. Bourque, yes; Mr. Hayes, yes; Mr. Hodgkins, yes; Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mrs. Harrison, yes; Mr. Leary, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes.

The motion carried.

Next meeting: June 25, 2020

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: