

**Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting
Held on September 26, 2019**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a meeting on Thursday, August 22, 2019, at Litchfield Town Hall, Two Liberty Way, Litchfield, NH 03052.

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

Absent:

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

● **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

2. REVIEW / ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions to the agenda.

3. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

4. REVIEW / ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

- **August 19, 2019**
- **August 22, 2019**

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to approve the minutes of August 19, 2019

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

VOTE: 5-0-3

The motion carried.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to approve the minutes of August 22, 2019

SECOND: by Mrs. Martin

VOTE: 7-0-1

The motion carried.

5. CORRESPONDENCE

Mrs. Douglas reported correspondence received included a budget review schedule from the Town and the 2020 Proposed Town Budget.

6. REPORTS

- **Town Business**
 - **General Update**

Mr. Leary reported the town is working on budget and keeping it tight. He indicated that responses were forwarded to Mr. Cutter regarding the questions received regarding the budget.

- **Review of Facility Tours**

- **Aaron Cutler Memorial Library**

Mr. Cutter indicated that the priorities he noted are carpet replacement as the carpeting is aged, security (cameras) because they are not able to see in back of the building from the main desk, and drainage concerns. He commented the area that the Library staff need to consider is HVAC because of the age.

Mr. Hayes commented that they talked about irrigation in the courtyard for the future.

- **Cable Studio/Old Fire Station**

Mr. Cutter indicated that the interior setup is impressive. He noted there are two levels and a green screen. He commented there were no significant priorities for the studio itself. He added that they are having discussions on how there is less enrollment in cable resulting in less revenue for the town.

- **Talent Hall**

Mr. Cutter commented that the Pickleball League donated grant money to have the floor resurfaced. He indicated that there are concerns about the age of the floor, the infrastructure and the joists that need to be replaced. He noted the interior and exterior need to be painted. He added that the HVAC replacement is being funded by the emergency fund and there were questions about cooling for the summer months as the venue is well utilized.

- **Town Hall/Police Station**

Mr. Cutter indicated that the most significant issue is spacing constraints and storage. He noted that uniforms are being hung in the women's shower stalls; counting and screening of evidence collected is being done on their lunch break table, which is a health concern. Mr. Cutter commented that the storage area for police vehicles is too small for the SUVs.

Mrs. Douglas commented there are also space constraints in the hallway leading to the holding cell.

Mr. Cutter indicated that the station is approximately 3,000 sf and shared by 20 officers, with two primary offices and shared spaces for the remainder of the department. He noted that bullet proof glass is needed as the glass that is currently there is not bullet proof.

Mr. Hayes commented that sound proofing for interrogations is necessary.

Mr. Cutter commented he would like to see a town-wide plan go to the voters for the concerns for the town and school facilities.

Mrs. Douglas commented much hinges on getting the police station addressed. She mentioned that she has been a member of two planning committees where the recommendations have not

been realized because it is not the plan everyone wants. She noted we need to work together as a community.

Mrs. Harrison agreed and commented that she has been advocating to work together with the community to address all infrastructure needs. She shared an invitation from the School Board for the Budget Committee to tour the school facilities so members can see what the district is dealing with.

Mrs. Douglas indicated she reached out to Dr. Jette for dates and times that would work, but has not heard back.

Mrs. Harrison recommended that the Committee suggest the time and date for the tours.

Mr. Cutter challenged a direct call to action for the Board of Selectmen and School Board to put together a plan to be presented in March 2021 with a Town Capital Plan for reallocation of spaces in conjunction with the SAU offices and new police station.

Mrs. Harrison commented that she knew that Dr. Jette, Mr. Bourque, the Town Administrator and Select Board Chair will be meeting tomorrow to discuss these issues.

Mr. Cutter commented there are new developments being built, new families coming into town and the town is growing, but services have not grown.

Mrs. Harrison agreed a long term plan is needed.

Mr. Cutter felt that if the Boards can agree with bringing a plan forward in March there is information and items in the budget than can wait. He explained if there is a plan the money need not be spent on those items now if we outline it all in a plan.

Mrs. Fordey commented she would appreciate the opportunity to tour the schools.

Consensus from the Committee was Tuesday nights for tours of the schools.

Mrs. Douglas will inform Dr. Jette and see if cable can record the tours.

- **Fire Station**

Mr. Cutter commented that personnel is still getting settled in the new station. He indicated that Engine 2 is 30+ years old and parts can no longer be found. He expects to see a warrant article for new fire apparatus this year.

Mrs. Douglas indicated that should be part of the long term capital plan.

- **Old Town Hall**

Mr. Leary mentioned that we also toured the old town hall.

Mr. Cutter indicated it needs to be painted, carpeting needs to be replaced and the basement is very moldy. He noted next to the old town hall is a residential house that was once the old town tavern. He mused it would be nice to resurrect the tavern.

Mr. Leary reported that the Town Administrator will be at the October 3 meeting to begin budget presentations.

Mrs. Douglas informed the Committee that the Town Administrator mentioned the budget does not include an increase for health insurance because of the wide range of variables.

- **School Business**

- **General Update**

Mrs. Harrison reported GMS playground is open. She explained because the equipment was professionally installed we were able to open prior to inspection by Primex. All new buses have been delivered and are equipped with external cameras to catch vehicles that may pass the buses while they are stopped and the lights are flashing. The police department has been notified and will be able to access the pictures. FY19 Food Services had a \$40,000 shortfall due to replacing aging equipment, unpaid meal accounts and staff changes. New equipment has been ordered for GMS and the kitchen will be reorganized. Revenues in lunch counts were up this year significantly.

- **Financial Update**

Mrs. Harrison reported the DOE 25 deadline was extended due to finance software upgrade glitches. There will be changes in Medicaid billing due to changes in the law, which may result in the district having to prepay bills and be reimbursed by Medicaid. The NHSBA has filed an appeal with the Legislature.

- **Enrollment**

Mrs. Harrison reported that Kindergarten enrollment is at 76 and there will be 19 students in each class. She indicated the district is closely monitoring the enrollment.

Mrs. Douglas was concerned with adding another classroom because of the impact to the rest of the school.

Mrs. Harrison commented that she is not sure if there is a chance that would happen.

- **Special Election Update**

Mrs. Harrison reported that the district is on track for Deliberative Session on October 1 and the Voting on October 29. She noted that George Lambert made a motion to intervene and filed an appeal with the judge, who denied that request. He will appeal to the State Supreme Court and district legal counsel indicated we will proceed unless there is an injunction.

Mrs. Douglas commented that there is still a question of costs for the Special Meeting that have gone unanswered.

Mrs. Harrison indicated that until all the bills are received we are not sure of those costs. She noted those numbers have not been gathered at this time.

Mrs. Douglas commented that she understand there is a process, but this Committee has been asking about the costs for months. She indicated that even costs to date would be helpful.

Mrs. Harrison commented that the School Board feels any investment in the election is worth the costs.

Mrs. Douglas commented she understands, but it still needs to be quantified. She indicated that it does not look good when the Budget Committee, who is responsible for overseeing expenditures, cannot get those numbers.

Mrs. Harrison commented the Budget Committee's role is to advise and review the budget, not to tell the School Board how to spend their budget.

Mrs. Douglas asked why the School Board does not want to provide that information. She indicated that perception is reality.

Mrs. Harrison indicated she will forward the request to Dr. Jette.

Mr. Hodgkins asked where the money for the Special Meeting comes from.

Mrs. Harrison indicated it comes from the General Fund.

Mr. Hodgkins commented the fund the School Board recommended was approved and has not been spent, but you are spending it now on legal items. He indicated the Town did not approve the Warrant Article for the teachers' contract and you did not like that answer so now you are going back to get another answer. He added that is town money being spent – his tax money and everyone's tax money is being spent by the purview of the School Board because they did not like the answer they received.

Mrs. Harrison clarified that is not true and the School Board did hear the Town. She indicated that the Budget Committee was polled and the School Board got feedback. The contract was renegotiated and the court decision provided that an emergency exists to be granted a special meeting. Mrs. Harrison pointed out that the School Board's job is to run the schools and do what is best for the schools. She indicated that the School Board feels the best thing we can do is to have a teachers' contract and to hold a special meeting.

Mrs. Douglas commented those who have those concerns also have the right to know what is being invested.

Mr. Hayes asked how quickly he could get that information if he requested it as a taxpayer.

Mrs. Harrison commented that she was not sure how long it would take to pull those numbers together.

Mrs. Douglas commented the question of costs was raised at the Budget Hearing. Mr. Hayes commented the residents have the right to know.

Mrs. Fordey commented that absentee ballots are ready.

Mrs. Douglas suggested signs be placed on Albuquerque Avenue for people who do not get information from Facebook. She indicated she would like to see more of an effort out there.

Mrs. Harrison commented that the negotiating team has met with the LEA and they are prepared to do that.

Mr. Cutter asked what the impact would be to the next tax cycle with the special election held on October 29.

Mrs. Harrison indicated that a meeting will be scheduled for October 30 with the DRA to get this into this tax cycle so that there will not be a supplemental tax bill.

Mrs. Harrison mentioned that Representative Ralph Boehm posted on Facebook yesterday that the NH State budget passed and schools will be receiving more funding. She noted it is expected that Litchfield will get \$425,000 in unanticipated revenue this year and the following year will receive \$500,000+. She indicated that the State is fully funding kindergarten, the reduction in the Stabilization grant has been eliminated and infrastructure grants will be available. She noted that the intent is to use the revenue for infrastructure.

Mrs. Douglas commented this is not extra money to spend, but to return to the taxpayers for relief.

Mrs. Harrison indicated that the State cautioned not to return all the revenue because there will be decrease for two years and then a tax spike in the year that follows.

Mrs. Douglas commented that the School Board needs to recognize the taxpayers are the ones that are shouldering the larger portion of the budget and this revenue would be a return on the money that was stolen from them.

Mrs. Harrison indicated that it should be recognized that there are infrastructure needs in the district.

Mrs. Douglas commented that is a separate issue.

7. MEMBER INPUT / NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Bourque commented to Mr. Leary that at the Select Board meeting held after the Budget Committee voted on the special meeting warrant article, that he stated publicly that Mrs. Bourque should have abstained from the vote because she is the wife of the School Board Chair.

Mr. Leary commented that he personally feels anytime there is a connection to a member who is voting they should step away from that.

Mrs. Bourque commented, by that rationale, she should not vote on anything in relation to the school district.

Mr. Leary commented this was a big ticket item.

Mrs. Bourque asked when the Budget Committee is approving a \$25M budget for the school district should she be abstaining from that because the School Board Chair is her husband.

Mr. Leary commented he thought it was the thing to do. He it was mentioned in a letter that his wife has a possible contract coming up and that he should abstain from voting. Mr. Leary indicated that he intends to do that. He commented it is all right to disagree.

Mrs. Bourque commented it is important for us to discuss. She indicated members should abstain from voting if it is for personal benefit, but she does not benefit from the contract. She noted that she has been on the Committee for four years and has made reductions to the district budget. She indicated she is a separate person from him and found Mr. Leary's comment to be highly offensive.

Mr. Leary commented this is not personal.

Mr. Cutter commented that Mrs. Bourque is an elected and valued member of the Budget Committee. He mentioned years ago we had a similar debate. He indicated that Mrs. Bourque has shown nothing but objectivity to the budget in her voting and is a welcome and appreciated member of the Committee. He added he fully supports her vote for the school budget.

Mr. Leary commented there is no legal reason for Mrs. Bourque to step back. He noted it is an issue of appearance in his opinion. He indicated that in Mrs. Bourque's letter, some of her points were not professional. He added he has nothing personal against Mrs. Bourque or her husband.

Mr. Cutter referred to the agenda posted on the Facebook page this afternoon that reflects our next meeting is October 3, but it is actually Monday, September 30 for the continued review of town facilities.

Mrs. Douglas asked Committee members if they would agree to move the time from 6:30 pm to 6:00 pm because it is getting darker earlier. Committee members agreed.

Mrs. Fordey believes it makes a difference to see the facilities and issues as opposed to just hearing about them.

8. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

9. ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to adjourn the meeting.

SECOND: by Mrs. Bourque

VOTE: 0-0-0

The motion carried.

Next meeting: October 3, 2019

The meeting was adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: