

**Draft Minutes of the
Litchfield Budget Committee Meeting
Held on January 14, 2021**

The Litchfield Budget Committee held a virtual meeting on Thursday, January 14, 2021, 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, B Hodgkins, W Hayes, J Son, S Taylor, B Bourque (School Board Representative), R Leary (Selectmen Representative)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Cutter called the meeting to order at 8:07 p.m.

2. REVIEW / ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

Mr. Cutter indicated that an addition to the agenda is requested.

Mr. Son requested adding “Review of School District Warrant Articles 2 and 3.

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. CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Cutter indicated the following correspondence was received: School District MS 27, weekly budget reports from the Town, changes to Town Warrant Articles, Zoning Board request for budget increase, Town Meeting planning information, email from public members, letter from D Leary, NH Bond Bank rates.

4. REPORTS

• Town Final Voting

Article 4 Operating Budget

Mr. Cutter reported that Mr. Riley, Zoning Board Chair, requested an increase for the public notice line in the Zoning budget.

Mr. Brown indicated any excess cost in that line can be absorbed by the Town. He noted the line will be monitored throughout the year.

Mr. Leary commented the Budget Committee did a great job reducing this budget.

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to recommend Article 4

SECOND: by Mrs. Douglas

The motion carried by roll call vote: *Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mr. Hayes, no; Mr. Taylor, yes; Mr. Bourque, yes; Mr. Leary, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes.*

Article 10 Pennichuck

MOTION: by Mr. Cutter

Move to recommend Article 10

SECOND: by Mr. Leary

Mr. Brown explained Pennichuck Water has come forward with a petition to increase the water rates, which is proposed at 21.5%. He noted many residents that were affected by the well water contamination from St. Gobain were required to hook up to town water and rates continue to increase. He indicated that Litchfield was asked if they would like to join the coalition and contribute legal funds to see what is driving the increase. Mr. Brown commented this special warrant article is non-lapsing and can be used for 3 years or until December 31, 2023, whichever is sooner. He noted we are proposing to use the unassigned fund balance so there will be no new taxation in 2021. He mentioned that Londonderry, Windham and Pelham are part of the coalition.

The motion carried by roll call vote: *Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mr. Hayes, yes; Mr. Taylor, yes; Mr. Bourque, yes; Mr. Leary, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes.*

- **School Final Voting**

Article 2 and 3 Tech Integrators

MOTION: by Mr. Son

Move to reopen Article 2 and Article 3

SECOND: by Mr. Bourque

Mr. Son commented throughout the budget review process, the Budget Committee reduced the school district budget nearly \$600,000 overall, including raises for administrators. He noted that the Committee was frustrated with the School Board budget process this year and the School Board has pledged to improve the process. He indicated that when this Committee asked the School Board to put the technology integrator positions on the warrant, they complied and we said we would support them. Mr. Son does not agree with the staffing changes at GMS, but indicated that is not the purview of this Committee. He noted that the School Board found the funding for these positions. He spoke to Mr. Taylor's request regarding a study to show measurable data that rates districts with technology integrators. He testified that he has spent over a decade in districts where these positions are very effective and provide resources and assistance to teachers.

Mr. Cutter commented that he was one of the Committee members that voted in favor of the articles and was disappointed in the voting on those articles. He indicated given the need with

increased focus on 1:1 learning, value can be seen in funding these positions. He believes it is not a new or unreasonable request and is a true identified need, which is part of the goals and objectives of the District.

Mr. Leary asked if the School Board is prepared to fund the technology integrator positions differently instead of cutting positions at GMS. He commented that Mr. Bourque stated the principals are in the trenches in the schools. He noted that Mr. Thompson advocated for increased hours for the front office staff and Mr. Mitchell has stated he is not in favor of a position being cut.

Mr. Bourque believes that Mr. Leary has a conflict of interest on this vote and is holding the School Board hostage by trying to tell us how to spend the District's money. He indicated that is not the responsibility of Budget Committee members and the Committee cannot direct the School Board on how to spend those funds. He pointed out that it is not appropriate for Mr. Leary to acknowledge that the positions are needed, but will not support them because of how we are funding them.

Mr. Leary commented that he has to have a conscience. He stated 'you have done this to people and I have not'.

Mr. Cutter pointed out that Committee members are representing the Board and not an individual position.

Dr. Jette commented that this is a goal of what we are trying to accomplish. He indicated it was suggested that the District has not been forthcoming. He noted it is true that Mr. Thompson requested additional funding for administrative assistants, but we also found that GMS has 550 hours more than the other schools and there were more staffing hours in the GMS office than in the other schools. [GMS: 3 Administrative Assistants @ 7.5 hours each; LMS 2 Administrative Assistants @ 8 hours each, 1 Receptionist @ 6.5 hours; CHS 2 Administrative Assistants @ 8 hours each, 1 Receptionist @ 6.5 hours] He explained we were trying to equalize staffing between the schools.

Dr. Jette commented that it is not true that Mr. Mitchell was not consulted on this issue. He indicated that in speaking with Mr. Mitchell about it, he asked Mr. Mitchell what staffing was like at Peter Woodbury school and was told there was 1 Administrative Assistant and 1 Receptionist, which he had to work with. Dr. Jette noted Mr. Mitchell recognized that staffing levels at GMS was more than the level he had in Bedford. Dr. Jette commented that he personally went to GMS and met with the Administrative Assistants and answered their questions. He indicated Mr. Mitchell pledged that he would ensure tasks are met going forward. He noted it is a transparent plan and is not outrageous. He reported that the District consulted with the legal team and the LSSA and the District was informed that we have the right to make that change now, but we preferred to make it effective July 1, 2021.

Dr. Jette indicated this is about a position and not about a person and we believe through attrition and other staffing we can make this happen. He observed what is remarkable is that 2 technology integrators are being held up around a person we never talked about and it is frustrating to listen to rationale as to why votes are the way they are. He indicated to state publicly ‘if you do this, we will do that’ is blackmail. He believes everyone should stay focused on the rationale for the warrant article.

The motion carried by roll call vote: *Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mr. Hayes, no; Mr. Taylor, no; Mr. Bourque, yes; Mr. Leary, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes.*

Articles 2 and 3 are reopened.

MOTION: by Mr. Son

Move to recommend Article 2

SECOND: by Mr. Bourque

Mr. Taylor commented in reference to funding for the two technology integrator positions, consistent that the growth cannot happen during a time of the state reporting a 9.2% decrease in funding, which translates into in 2020 \$125M to 2021 \$400M. He indicated the argument has been made that two teacher positions were eliminated because they are not needed as there is a drop of nearly 100 students. The reduction of those two teachers should be related to the drop in students and the two integrators are seen as a growth position.

Mrs. Douglas agreed with Mr. Taylor’s comments. She commented that we keep hearing about the savings for these integrator positions, but the two teacher positions should have been eliminated whether or not these two integrator positions were proposed. She indicated that while it is good these reductions were made based on student enrollment, saying that the two integrator positions could have been placed in the budget, but put it on the warrant in deference to the Budget Committee is problematic. Mrs. Douglas commented that we have come a long way over 20 years from School Boards that implemented policies of putting things in the budget when the voters say no to warrant articles. She mentioned there are still people who remember why the State has a no means no law; they still think that the football program was a less than kind thought. She indicated that the positions should have been placed on the warrant from the beginning and the Budget Committee should not have to be asked. She noted when we created the position Mr. Pelletier has that was originally touted to support 1:1 technology and now they are saying we need another one. Mrs. Douglas commented she is having a hard time with supporting positions for 1:1 technology during this time when students should be back in the classroom. She asked if the position will still be needed after the pandemic is over.

Mr. Bourque clarified that we had a Technology Director position prior to hiring Mr. Pelletier and it was not to support 1:1 technology. He indicated we were very clear with the intent for the technology integrator positions and did not hide them in our budget. He noted we were very clear that we would fund these positions through other means when we brought them to the

Budget Committee. Mr. Bourque asked to cease raising the football issue since that is not a fair comparison to this situation.

Mrs. Douglas commented making statements such as ‘we could put it in our budget, but didn’t’ is not creating progress. She indicated a warrant article was approved several years ago to bring new positions to warrant.

Mr. Son commented that he stated why he believes these positions are important because they are valuable and provide resources in and out of the pandemic. He pointed out we are asking voters to add back in \$170,000, which would still be a reduction of \$400,000 in the school district budget. He indicated the District came forward with their needs and we have made difficult reductions. He noted this is a way to support the District and do what is right for the town.

Mr. Cutter pointed out this will level fund the budget from this year to the next year.

Mr. Son indicated Mr. Boehm commented earlier about federal funds and we know the District will have a second wave of federal funds to support them.

Mr. Mitchell commented that Mr. Taylor was asking about data on the effectiveness of the tech integrator positions. He testified that the previous district he served in had tech integrators and the return on investment shows up in many lines in the budget. He indicated these positions will increase the return on investment in staff professional development, technology investments, curricular supplies (as many components will be technology based). He noted the State has moved to digital student portfolios; teachers taking professional development have a technology component and having someone usher them through them is the value in these positions. Mr. Mitchell commented that he worked with a tech integrator for eight years and the value is high, immediate and real.

Mr. Taylor commented this really highlights the role of the Budget Committee as being the CFO for the town. He indicated that he understands that many can passionately speak to certain items that are dear to their hearts, but at some point the CFO has to decide what can and cannot be taken care of. He noted this is a great way for voters to see the diversity across the Budget Committee and who they align with based on their beliefs. The voters should understand where we stand as a Committee and it is up to them to decide what the next Budget Committee looks like.

Mrs. Fordey commented that she appreciates Mr. Taylor’s comments. She indicated that she does not have children and is not impacted by this, and as a resident and taxpayer this is not personal. She believes this can be funded responsibly. She noted the salary and benefit lines make sense with the positions applied.

The motion carried by roll call vote: *Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, yes; Mr. Son, yes; Mr. Hayes, no; Mr. Taylor, no; Mr. Bourque, yes; Mr. Leary, yes; Mr. Cutter, yes.*

MOTION: by Mr. Son
Move to recommend Article 3
SECOND: by Mr. Bourque

Mr. Bourque commented that there is an identified need for more than one technology integrator. He indicated the District requested three and the School Board voted for two. He noted one is not enough.

The motion failed by roll call vote: *Mrs. Fordey, yes; Mrs. Douglas, no; Mr. Son, yes; Mr. Hayes, no; Mr. Taylor, no; Mr. Bourque, yes; Mr. Leary, no; Mr. Cutter, yes.*

5. MEMBER INPUT / NEW BUSINESS

Mrs. Fordey commented that Deliberative Session is February 6 and this is her third year. She expressed her pleasure in serving on the Budget Committee and how much she has enjoyed learning so much about Litchfield.

6. PUBLIC INPUT

Dr. Jette thanked the Budget Committee for reconsidering the votes on Articles 2 and 3. He believes we can work together on these things. He indicated he takes the responsibility of bringing in a responsible budget seriously. He commented that the District will continue looking for what we can trim as we are responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars and conscientious of the same.

Mr. Cutter indicated that an email was submitted online by Christina Harrison, Pinecrest Road:

Mrs. Harrison expressed concern with the conflict of interest present in Mr. Leary’s opinion of reallocation of funds for the tech integrator warrant articles. She indicated the fact that he and his wife, as an employee of the district, have now stated in a public hearing the reasons they do not support these warrant articles should result in Mr. Leary’s abstention from voting on these articles.

7. ADJOURN

MOTION: by Mrs. Douglas
Move to adjourn the meeting.
SECOND: by Mr. Son
VOTE to adjourn the meeting carried by roll call:

Next meeting: February 6, 2021 (potential following Deliberative Session)

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Recorded by: Michele E. Flynn, Recording Secretary

Approved: