

Town of Litchfield, NH
Budget Committee Meeting
September 23, 2021
Litchfield Town Hall

In Attendance:

Members: Andrew Cutter, Chairman; John David Son, Vice Chairman; Keri Douglas; William Hayes (virtual); Kate Stevens; Scott Taylor; Christina Harrison, School Board Rep.; and Robert Leary, Selectmen's Rep.

Absent: Derek Barka

Also in Attendance: Cory Izbicki, Business Administrator

1. Call to Order:

- a. 7:00 pm - Chairman Andrew Cutter called the meeting to order, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Input #1 @ 7:01 pm:

- a. There was no one present for Public Input

Public Input ended at 7:02 pm.

3. Review / Additions of Agenda:

- a. Chairman Andrew Cutter mentioned that there was a remote Committee member, and he knew that the Committee had to vote to allow the member to participate in the meeting.

4. Correspondence:

Chairman Andrew Cutter reviewed the Correspondence Summary.

a. Town Budget Reports:

- i. August 27, 2021
- ii. September 3, 2021
- iii. September 10, 2021
- iv. September 17, 2021

b. August 27 – Confirmation of Ms. Stevens and Mr. Son registration to September 14, 2021, NHMA budget workshop.

c. August 27 – Circulation of bus contract to Budget Committee.

d. August 27 – Minutes from August 26 circulated to the Budget Committee.

e. August 28 – Ms. Stevens submitted a question on fuel savings for bus reduction.

f. September 9 – Meeting agenda for tonight sent.

g. September 9 – Confirmation on when the Budget Committee will receive the draft town budget, expected today, September 23.

h. September 16 – Confirmation by Town Administrator Troy Brown regarding the Budget Committee meeting start times.

i. September 17 – Town Administrator Troy Brown emailed Department Heads on being available for upcoming budget review sessions.

j. September 21 – Remote participation of public bodies email from IT Director John Brunelle .

- k. September 21 – Mr. Barka emailed confirming a work conflict for tonight.
- l. September 23 – Mr. Taylor emailed on potentially running late tonight.
- m. September 23 – Mr. Hayes emailed regarding remote participation for tonight.
- n. September 23 – Town Administrator Troy Brown emailed the draft town budget.

Mr. Cutter presented the New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) guidance for remote meetings.

- a. A public body may but is not required to allow one or more members to participate remotely, only when such attendance is not reasonably practical. Any reason that such attendance is not practical should be stated in the meeting minutes.
- b. There must be a physical quorum of the public body to vote to allow remote participation.
- c. Any member participating remotely shall identify the person or persons present in the location in which the member is participating.
- d. If remote participation is allowed, all voting must be by roll-call.

5. **Virtual Meeting Attendance:**

Chairman Andrew Cutter commented that William Hayes was remote tonight, and the Committee would need to vote to allow Mr. Hayes to participate in the meeting. The Committee discussed if they had to vote case-by-case, meeting-by-meeting, or would the Committee make a blanket vote for the budget season? Selectman Robert Leary and Keri Douglas stated that the vote should be done case-by-case.

Mr. Cutter requested a motion to allow remote participation for the Budget Committee meeting.

Discussion: Mr. Leary commented that his understanding was that the motion was to allow the remote participant to be included in the meeting. Ms. Douglas stated that she thought that the idea was a great way to maximize participation.

Motion: (Mr. Son / Ms. Douglas) So moved.

Roll-Call:

- a. Mr. Cutter - Yes
- b. Mr. Son - Yes
- c. Ms. Douglas - Yes
- d. Mr. Hayes - Abstained
- e. Ms. Stevens - Yes
- f. Mr. Taylor - Yes
- g. Ms. Harrison - Yes
- h. Mr. Leary - Yes

Vote: (7-0-1) The motion carried. (Mr. Hayes abstained)

Mr. Cutter asked Mr. Hayes if there was anyone in the room with him and why was he remote for the meeting? Mr. Hayes stated that he was alone and his reason was that he had not been vaccinated for Covid-19. Mr. Hayes was also concerned with the spread of the Delta variant.

Vice-Chairman John David Son said that he would be remote for a meeting in November and wanted to know if the Committee members should email Mr. Cutter in advance of the meeting if they are going to be remote? Mr. Cutter mentioned that he wanted to be emailed if there was a date a member knew they would be remote.

6. Review / Acceptance of Minutes:

- a. June 24, 2021, Meeting Minutes -

Chairman Andrew Cutter asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from August 26, 2021.

Discussion: None

Motion: (Ms. Douglas / Mr. Leary) So made.

Roll-Call:

- a. Mr. Cutter - Yes
- b. Mr. Son - Yes
- c. Ms. Douglas - Yes
- d. Mr. Hayes - Yes
- e. Ms. Stevens - Yes
- f. Mr. Taylor - Yes
- g. Ms. Harrison - Abstained
- h. Mr. Leary - Yes

Vote: (7-0-1) The motion carried. (Ms. Harrison abstained)

7. Town Business:

a. **General Updates**

Selectman Robert Leary mentioned that the Select Board completed the budget and emailed the Budget Committee a copy of the budget. He noted that the budget is a working budget because the Town still has not received the numbers for insurance, the fuel costs have increased significantly, including the cost of propane.

A few residents, who live by the Transfer Station, complained about the smoke. Mr. Leary commented that the Transfer Station has started to chip brush instead of burning it. Dave Mellen will bring in a company that will chip the brush and allow the Transfer Station employees to do other work.

Mr. Leary mentioned that Affinity would present a presentation to the Select Board about converting the Town's lights to LED. He commented that the initial cost would be around \$17,000 but will save the Town around \$7,500 a year. Mr. Leary noted that the Town could pay off the expense in two-and-a-half years. Chairman Andrew Cutter asked if the conversion would only be for the street lights or if the Town buildings would be part of the plan? Mr. Leary stated that the conversion would only be for the street lights.

Kate Stevens mentioned that the Planning Board, a couple of years ago, researched lighting. The Board found that street lights, 3000 Kelvin or warmer, have less impact on wildlife and people. Mr. Leary asked Ms. Stevens to email him the information, and he would forward the information to Town Administrator Troy Brown.

b. **RSA 32:22: Review of Expenditures**

The Budget Committee had received the Town Budget Reports and did not have any questions.

c. **Budget Review Plan**

Chairman Andrew Cutter commented that the budget review begins on September 30, 2021. He mentioned that the Committee has a plan that was put together in June and they will be meeting weekly for the foreseeable future. Next week the Committee will review the budget similar to how the Select Board reviewed the budget. He noted that there

was a conflict with the Conservation Commission on October 7. The Conservation Commission has a meeting on the same night, and their budget review might be moved to another night.

8. **School Business:**

a. **General Updates**

Christina Harrison stated that she had circulated several documents, and the Litchfield School District reopened for in-school learning. She mentioned that the District still has a staff shortage with respect to the Support Staff, Paraprofessionals, Coaches, and Custodians. She added that the District is also looking for Substitutes and Social-Workers. Ms. Harrison commented that if anyone knows someone looking for work, point them to the Litchfield School District.

There are various positions still open per the Litchfield School District website as of September 23

- i. [School Administrative Unit 27](#)

The Committee discussed how the difficulty finding staff was partly because of salary but had more to do with the shortage of teachers. Business Administrator Cory Izbicki mentioned that retail companies are hiring employees at \$14 to \$15 per hour, and the District is hiring Paraprofessionals at \$13.34 to \$16.23 per hour.

Mr. Izbicki noted that transportation was also having a problem finding staff. The Committee discussed the transportation issue and how this was not a Litchfield issue but a national issue.

Ms. Harrison said that she circulated the first Friday enrollment numbers. She noted that the first day of school numbers and the first Friday enrollment numbers were pretty much the same. Ms. Harrison did not expect a significant change between the first Friday and October 1 enrollment numbers.

Ms. Harrison said that Phase-1A of the construction and energy efficiency project is complete. Mr. Izbicki stated that the roofing at LMS should start in about a week. He noted that Phase 2 begins next summer and consists of retrofitting the lighting fixtures and installing a new HVAC system for ventilation of LMS. Ms. Harrison stated that most of the project would be paid for by ESSER funds and possibly a Warrant Article.

Ms. Harrison stated that she circulated the spending spreadsheet, and each page consisted of the outline for ESSER funds that are expected to be received. She added that the spreadsheet also shows where the funds would be allocated.

Chairman **Andrew Cutter** mentioned that the Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIPC) planned the LMS kitchen expansion for \$300,000 in 2022. He questioned how the kitchen expansion could be removed or shifted from the Town's Master Plan. Mr. Izbicki stated that when the Energy Efficiency Plan was created, the District included the kitchen in the overall plan. A kitchen designer was brought in, and the designer was asked if the kitchen needed to be expanded or if the problem was with the layout. The District was informed that the kitchen at LMS is the right size, and the issue is with the layout. Mr. Izbicki mentioned that the District would likely go with improving the layout instead of a full-scale renovation.

Mr. Izbicki said that he has a meeting with First Student Bus Company regarding the question about fuel savings. The meeting will either occur on Monday or Tuesday.

b. RSA 32:22: Review of Expenditures

The Budget Committee did not have any questions regarding the School District expenses to date.

9. Old Business:

a. Memorandum of Understanding and Handshake Agreements

Chairman Andrew Cutter commented that the Committee started a discussion at the last meeting, August 26, regarding the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Handshake Agreements. The Committee agreed to move the topic to tonight because School Board Chair Christina Harrison was not present on August 26.

Ms. Harrison mentioned that the School Board met and discussed the budgeting process. The Board discussed Keri Douglas' question about using encumbered funds for things the School District needs at the end of the year, but the funds were designated for Special Education Transportation. She noted that the question started a conversation with the School Board members about what the handshake agreement was about, when it was started, and whether or not it is an open and transparent part of the process.

Ms. Harrison stated that the School Board agreed that if it is something that the School Board and the Budget Committee want to agree on, then it should be something that they revisit each year. She added that the agreement should be written down so that the process is open and transparent to the voters. Ms. Harrison commented that nobody on the Board, the Superintendent, and Business Administrator was present when the handshake agreement was made.

Ms. Douglas commented that she did not understand why others thought the handshake agreement was not open and transparent, and she noted that it is challenging to be precise with the Special Education budget. Ms. Douglas mentioned that the handshake agreement was an arrangement that the Committee would budget conservatively, understanding that funds that were overfunded would then be returned to the School District budget.

The Committee discussed how the agreement was made prior to 13 years ago, and the members that made the agreement are no longer serving on either the School Board or the Budget Committee. Vice-Chairman John David Son noted that the agreement should be in writing so that new members are not asking the same question.

Ms. Harrison mentioned that since she has been involved in the process, the Litchfield School District has hired two Superintendents and a new Business Administrator. She added that the previous budgeting discussions have been about how the School District budgets for Special Education based on the current enrollment and the projected need. The District does not include a buffer in its budget.

Ms. Douglas stated that the system has worked for two decades and does not believe they need to change things. Mr. Cutter commented that historically the Committee had not made many reductions because the understanding was that the excess funding would be returned to the taxpayers. Ms. Douglas pointed out that the Budget Committee can put the agreement in writing, but history has shown that excess funding has been encumbered instead of returned to the taxpayers.

Kate Stevens commented that members do better when they know the expectations ahead of time. Ms. Stevens noted that she does not have a problem putting the agreement in writing and that the School Board and the Budget Committee are working towards the same thing.

Scott Taylor stated that he is against handshake agreements. Mr. Taylor commented that he believes this is the School District's budget and should spend it as they wish. He added that it is the job of the Budget Committee to crunch the numbers and make sure the budget is fair to the taxpayers.

Selectman Robert Leary acknowledged that the Select Board encumbers funds when needed, but he prefers giving the excess funds back to the taxpayers. Mr. Hayes agreed with Ms. Leary's comment.

The Committee continued discussing how the School Board annually presents their budget, the benefits of writing the agreement down on paper, and whether the agreement in writing will make a difference. Mr. Cutter said that he would place this topic on the agenda to discuss in a couple of weeks. He then suggested that the agreement be added to the Budget Committee by-laws. The addition of the agreement to the by-laws would allow the Committee to annually review the by-laws and decide if the handshake agreement is still needed.

Mr. Taylor brought up the topic of transportation for a Special Education student. He commented that the cost of transporting one student with a budget of \$22 million is not worth fighting over. Business Administrator Cory Izbicki and the Committee discussed the cost of transportation for Special Education students and how the cost increases significantly when the student is transported out of the District. Mr. Izbicki commented that transportation also includes driving students to and from Alvirne and Pinkerton Academy for CTE.

10. Member Input / New Business:

a. Town Facilities Improvement Update

Chairman Andrew Cutter mentioned that the Capital Improvement Plan Committee (CIPC) has not met, but there have been discussions of meeting sometime in October.

b. School Facilities Improvement Update

Vice-Chairman John David Son commented that the School Board Capital Improvement Plan Committee met yesterday. The meeting was the first time that the Committee was able to sit down with the Architect Kyle Barker. Mr. Barker shared the work that he has been doing from a needs assessment at GMS. The group discussed the water issues at GMS, and he showed what is contributing to the water issues.

Mr. Son stated that they had a conversation over the costs of renovating GMS versus building a school. Mr. Son noted that he believes that the responsible thing to do is to renovate GMS significantly. The renovation would include regrading the property; the groundwork and drainage will need to be done as part of the renovation.

Scott Taylor asked if there were any other land options that a new elementary school could be built upon? Business Administrator Cory Izbicki mentioned that LMS and GMS are technically located on the same property. He described how one option was building the new elementary school up on the hill by LMS. Mr. Izbicki added that site work would need to be done for an entry and egress. Because LMS would build the building on a hill, there would be less chance of having water issues. He added that there are wetlands up on the hill, and they might have to contend with the wetlands.

Mr. Taylor asked if LMS had water issues in the past five years? Mr. Izbicki informed the Committee that LMS has not had water issues in the past five years.

Keri Douglas mentioned that she appreciated the due diligence and liked the idea of exploring the renovation of GMS. Mr. Izbicki commented that he had heard rumors about some Federal infrastructure funds being funneled to the School Districts. He added that the funds would be for new schools and not renovations. Mr. Izbicki stated that historically the School Districts would file for School Building Aid, and the State would pick five projects to fund. The ranking of the projects is based on the health and safety of the school buildings.

Mr. Izbicki commented that many School Districts are looking into building new schools, and Litchfield would not make the top five for receiving State Aid. He noted that the Litchfield School District would apply for Building Aid and go through the process, but it is unlikely that Litchfield would receive State Building Aid.

Chairman Andrew Cutter stated that community outreach is a crucial aspect, and he wanted to know what was involved with the program. Mr. Izbicki mentioned that they are going to be doing full-scale community forums. The forums would consist of parents, students, teachers, administration, and anyone interested in the renovation or construction of a new school building.

Mr. Son noted that the community outreach program should also contact the taxpayers who do not have children in the School District and he provided the example of an age 55+ community. Mr. Taylor commented that his concern is that too many people will want a say on how the school should be built. Ms. Harrison acknowledged Mr. Taylor's concern and commented that the architect had been informed that Litchfield is a small town and does not want anything extravagant. She added that Litchfield is seeing an increase in people moving into Town, likely increasing the number of children attending the schools. The increase in student population has been factored in so that down the road, the School District would not look to add onto the schools.

c. Member Input

Keri Douglas mentioned that there seemed to be much concern with regards to growth in the Town. She asked if the School Board had talked to the Planning Board about Impact Fees and reflected the new students' impact on the building? Ms. Douglas wanted to know if anyone had looked to see that the Impact Fees reflect the impact. She commented that it is an excellent way to offset the new and future costs that the School District might have.

Selectman Robert Leary mentioned that Bruce C. Mayberry from BCM Planning, LLC came up with the Impact Fee methodology report and helped the Town of Litchfield establish the fee schedule.

11. Next Budget Committee Meeting

Chairman Andrew Cutter said that the next three Budget Committee meetings would be:

- a. September 30 - Thursday
- b. October 7 - Thursday
- c. October 14 - Thursday

Vice-Chairman John David Son asked if there was a limit to the number of people who could be in the meeting room at one time? Mr. Cutter mentioned that there is a limit, but he believed the number was 30. Mr. Cutter offered Webex as an option for groups presenting their budget.

12. Public Input #2 @ 8:01 pm

- a. There was no one for Public Input

Public Input ended at 8:01 pm.

13. Adjournment:

Motion: (Ms. Douglas / Mr. Sun) motioned to adjourn the public meeting at 8:02 pm.

Roll-Call:

- a. Mr. Cutter - Yes
- b. Mr. Son - Yes
- c. Mr. Barka - Yes
- d. Ms. Douglas - Yes
- e. Mr. Hayes - Yes
- f. Ms. Stevens - Yes
- g. Mr. Taylor - Yes
- h. Mr. Leary - Yes

Vote: (8-0-0) The motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Matthew Sullivan
Budget Committee Recording Secretary

Approved by the Budget Committee:

Andrew Cutter, Chairman

John David Son, Vice Chairman

Derek Barka

Keri Douglas

William Hayes

Kate Stevens

Scott Taylor

Christina Harrison, School Board Representative

Robert Leary, Selectmen's Representative