Town of Farmington
Budget Committee Meeting
Saturday, December 5, 2015

**Committee Members Present:**Ann Titus, Chairman
Sylvia Arcouette, Vice Chairman
Neil Johnson, Selectmen’s Rep.
Stan Freeda, School Board Rep.
Jodi Connolly
Sam Cataldo
Stephen Henry

**Committee Members Absent:**Resta Detwiler

**Others Present:**
Steve Welford, Superintendent
Laurie Verville, Business Administrator
Kathy King, School Board Chair
Larry Gordon, Facilities Director
Residents Angie Cardinal, Angela DePalma

**1).Call to Order:**
Chairman Titus called the meeting to order at 9 a.m.

**2). Pledge of Allegiance:**All present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**3). School District Budget Presentation:**Superintendent Steve Welford and Business Administrator Laurie Verville came before the committee and presented the budget breakdown for the school district for fiscal year 2016-2017 and a Power Point presentation overview of reductions, initiatives and priorities for the district. The presentation included:
*Issues Causing the Budget Reduction*- Phase 2 of the Middleton withdrawal of grades K through 6 with accompanying loss of more than $1.4 million in tuition; $100,000 in unemployment costs; short and long term insurance concerns
*Work to be Done*-
finalize SAU budget; complete negotiations with Teachers’ Union on health plans; reach agreement with Para Educators Union; maintain academic program improvements; expand educational opportunities for students; remain on track for NEASC accreditation and continue to reduce non-educational programming costs.
*Program Initiatives-*
Expand to all day kindergarten- use newly available space, use Title I funds to fund five additional ½ day sessions creating five full day sessions, reduce pre-school by one session, reduce ½ teacher and ½ Para positions saving $30,000 and eliminate the mid-day kindergarten bus run saving $10,000, state has approved the plan.
Explore staggered starts- alleviate safety issues during drop-off and pick-up times, encourage bus use
Reconfigure the Title I program in all the schools- provides financial assistance to schools with a high percentage of children from low income families to help improve their academic achievement.
Continue Development of In-house Autism program- saves on out of district placement costs.
*Major Reductions –* Staff ($736,394), health insurance ($324,559), general supplies ($47,510), textbooks ($34,505), contracted services Spec. Ed ($52,527), fuel ($78,289), equipment ($60,531) and dues and fees ($4,500). $1.4 million loss in tuition minus the $1.3 million savings from reductions = $92,925
*Personnel Reductions*- one Assistant Principal, Valley View (four teachers, 3 Para’s), Henry Wilson (three teachers, 1 Para), High School (.5 teacher, one Para) and district-wide (one Sped teacher, two support positions) equals 16.5 positions.  *Health Insurance-*The School Board offered to meet with the teachers’ union to negotiate a change to a different health insurance plan that would save $320,000 and reduce the potential “Cadillac tax” from $125,000 to $10,000. The plan would apply to all school district employees including the SAU and administration. Mr. Welford added two other options would be to cut 10 more teachers which would affect educational programs and risk accreditation or taxpayers could pay the $320,000. If no change is made by Jan. 12, the $320,000 would have to be removed from the above list of major reductions.
*Valley View Community School*- the total budget is down by $353,772- staffing and benefits down $269,014, consumables reduced by $10,627, supplies reduced $3,336 and contracted nursing services has been moved to the Special Ed budget($65,099).
*Henry Wilson Memorial School*- the total budget is down by $254,312- staffing and benefits down $207,063, consumables down $6,749, textbooks down $4,000, supplies down $15,547 and equipment reduced by $1,750.
*Farmington High School*- the total budget is down $139,513- staffing and benefits down by $104,173, supplies down by $8,015, consumables down by $3,000, textbooks reduced by $2,000 and equipment reduced by $1,700.
*Special Education*- the budget is down by $338,004- salaries and benefits down by $333,084, vision and hearing testing budget down by $12,000, ESOL reduced by $3,500, psychologist position reconfigured to save $11,521 and savings partially offset by a $61,440 increase in tuition.
*Facilities-* the budget is down by $211,899- staffing and benefits down by $64,855, Workers’ Comp reduced $12,833, grounds budget down $5,500, repairs reduced $15,500, supplies down $9,000, new/replacement equipment reduced $16,000 and bid pricing on fuel oil potential savings of $79,613.
 *Information Technology*- the total budget is down $64,141- health insurance costs down $9,139, special projects reduced $6,000, hosted technology down $5,000, reduction of computers savings of $30,000 (grant funded).
*Transportation-* the total budget is down $85,921- staffing and benefits reduced $42,521, eliminate mid-day kindergarten bus run saves $10,000, repairs reduced $4,700, eliminated warrant article #5 purchase of van ($25,000).
*District-wide*- the budget is up $89,942- personnel costs reduced $17,563, testing materials down $3,375, reductions offset by a $100,000 increase in unemployment insurance.
*Budget Comparison*- General Fund- Fiscal Year 2014-15 ($15,698,454), F.Y. 2015-16 ($14,553,923), F.Y. 2016-17 ($13,215,108). Total budget reductions in two years = $2,483,346
*Where Are We?* - the district has reduced the budget by approx. $2,500,000 over the last two budget cycles, improved educational offerings, Budget Committee members have supported the district’s initiatives, the budget is $92,925 less than the projected loss of revenue, the SAU apportionment is projected to be $117,592 more than last year(following Middleton’s withdrawal in June Farmington will pay the total apportionment for the SAU), administrators have not asked for help in the last two years but are asking the community for an additional $210,517 this year which equals 48 cents on the tax rate.
Mr. Welford said budget preparation during the last two years has been “brutal” realizing the impact on the staff. The personnel losses are significant on a district this size. He said the administration does not support cutting the Assistant Principal and noted that their first responsibility is to the school district and second to the taxpayers. We can’t have several years of moving ahead and then falling back because that is not progress. We need your help with this budget he said.
Chairman Titus then asked the members for comments or questions for Mr. Welford or Ms. Verville.
***Selectmen’s Rep. Neil Johnson*** said administrators had exceeded his expectations on reducing the budget without impacting the kids. He said taxpayers have “built up anger” over doubling the school’s portion of tax rate from $6.50 to $12.00 in recent years and added that he is trying to see both sides. When will the school district warrant articles be ready for review-The articles will be discussed at the School Board meeting on Monday night. Only three articles are expected - one for a bus purchase, the SAU budget and one to replenish the buildings and grounds funds.
How much space will be freed up following Middleton’s withdrawal from the district- At Valley View, three classrooms will open up in addition to the existing two empty rooms in grades 1-3 and at Henry Wilson the 7th and 8th graders are already gone so two rooms will open up. FHS will have no empty rooms as number of the teachers travel from class to class he said.
Will the Title 1 federal funds go away- This is a fundamental federal program that has been around for decades and it is not likely that the funding would soon be discontinued. The program encourages providing kindergarten so this is an acceptable use for these funds. School Board Rep. Stan Freeda said the state requires the district to provide 1/2 day kindergarten sessions which the district currently provides so this is a supplemental use allowed by the program criteria.
Are the staff reductions mainly through lay-offs or by attrition- The reductions were almost 100% through lay- offs.
What are the reasons for and against removing an Asst. Principal position- Mr. Freeda stated the School Board did not choose a specific Assistant Principal to be let go, but left that decision to the administration. He said the board felt that everybody had to “take some pain”. It was a huge mistake to put the paras on ½ time as it impacts learning. An administrator being cut cuts them but does not impact learning he said.
Mr. Welford said the Assistant Principal is a key person in the operation of schools. He said Valley View will probably end up with 325-330 kids enrolled there plus all the day kindergarten and pre-school Sped program students. He said Assistant Principals don’t just do discipline but have a wide range of duties including teacher observations and evaluations, conferences with parents, grandparents, students, teachers, Police, the courts and emergencies. If the Principal leaves the building, who is left to handle things (if there is no Assistant Principal)? The buildings are running well now. This is significant step back he said.
School Board Chairman Kathy King said we have asked our teachers to do more, the parents to do more, but there have not been any cuts to the administration. She asked how many paraprofessionals could be hired for $71,000. It’s our obligation to spread it out (reductions) she said.
Are most of the staff reductions planned for Valley View and how many teachers are on staff there- Which staff members will be let go has not been decided but will be discussed at the SAU meeting next Tuesday. Ms. Verville said there are currently 20.5 teaching positions and 17 paras at Valley View; 29 teachers and 17 paras at Henry Wilson and 28.7 teaching positions and seven paras at the high school.
***Sylvia Arcouette***- said every organization needs to cut their budgets equally and look for alternative solutions to the cuts made.
What are the hours for the kindergarten sessions- They will be the same as the hours for Valley View School but a later start time at the elementary school is under consideration. The bus drivers are timing the bus runs and assessing stops and where students live so there may be some changes to the runs next year.
***Stephen Henry*** said he had no feeling from the administration presentations that causing pain had crossed their minds. He said to hear the School Board say they intended to cause pain bothered him.
Mrs. King stated it was not the School Board’s intention to inflict pain. She said the administration is one step away from the kids and are not with kids all the time. It’s not the money it’s too much of administration. She added some discipline problems could be eliminated through more support in the classrooms.
Mr. Freeda said even though the board did not vote to make cuts to cause pain, they will cause pain. Every teacher is some kid’s favorite teacher he said.
Were any other positions eliminated when the Asst. Principal position was added- A building coordinator and a Para position were eliminated at that time.
Will the administration consider adding back those positions if the Assistant Principal position is eliminated- Mr. Welford said they will first need to figure out which Assistant Principal will be let go and what responsibilities will need to be picked up by someone else before making that decision.
Are the schools were meeting the guidelines for the number of students per administrator(400)- The only school with more than 400 students is Henry Wilson and the fewest number of students is at the high school (283).
Where will the fourth teacher to be cut from Valley View will come from- One teacher each in Grades 1-3 and one-half teacher in the pre-school program will be cut.
Why isn’t the contracted nurse ($60,000) an employee- Her skill set is different, not the typical school nurse duties and is based on the specific needs of one student. The contract is more cost effective because the district does not pay her benefits, etc.
Will the insurance negotiation include getting the school nurses out of teachers’ contract- Mr. Welford said they plan to focus on the insurance plan at the meeting and suggested the board could consider other issues in one year when the current contract ends.
 What could be done to stop having the heat on and the windows open at the middle school- Facilities Director Larry Gordon said the front of building heats up with the sun while the back portion of the building is cooler and calls for more heat. This causes the rooms in the front to overheat and the windows need to be open to maintain a comfortable temperature. The building has the original heating system that has 19 pumps that run 24/7 in a continuous loop in one heat zone. The current set up can’t shut off heat flow to certain sections of the building and will not allow individual thermostats in each classroom. Mr. Henry then suggested moving the existing thermostats but Mr. Gordon said that would be a major cost to move and rewire them. He said two companies have assessed the system and made recommendations on how to fix the problem. The way to cure it is to overhaul the whole system which is not feasible at this time he said.
When will the solution to high phone bills will be implemented- Mr. Welford said they are bringing in a consultant to look at all phone systems to try to find the most cost effective solution to the problem. He said he did not know why the district is still pay long distance charges when we are using Voice Over IP. He added he did not know when the results of assessment would be received.
How is last year’s decision to cut the paras hours working out- Mr. Welford said they are looking at all three buildings and have found it is working to varying degrees at each building. It has had some negative effects in the buildings and we want the principals to tell us how it impacts kids. It’s not something we wanted to do. It’s not something we enjoy living with he said.
Mr. Henry then added if they are not successful in negotiating the change in insurance coverage more teachers will be cut or the tax rate will go up.
***Jodi Connolly****-* What is the maximum number of kids in each kindergarten class - They prefer to cap the number of students in kindergarten at 15 and the other grades at 20 students but that number is not set in stone by the state. There could be multiple paras in a class depending on the kids’ needs. There are program paras and then the rest are dictated by the students’ Individual Education Plans (IEP’s).
Will the possible staggered starts will affect the number of double bus runs and any possible savings- It depends on configuration of the bus routes and the district may not need as many double runs. The issue is being looked at as addressing safety issues (traffic issues at the schools) and not necessarily as a cost saving measure.
Will there be Middleton students attending FHS next year- Three Middleton juniors will be allowed to complete their senior year in Farmington next year. Middleton will pay the normal tuition rate for those students.
Are the paras currently working under 30 hours a week- Mr. Welford said we are in the first year of that schedule and in better times will look to increase the number of hours. The paras are currently in the buildings for approx. one hour less than the kids are there he said.
Does the $1.4 million budget cuts presented included the SAU budget- The School District budget presentation did not include the SAU budget as they are two separate budgets.
***Sam Cataldo*** thanked Mr. Welford and Ms. Verville for all of their work in developing the presentation and added that we will just have to try to work within our means.
What is the district’s present high school drop-out rate and has it gone down since five years ago when the rate was 23.5 % - Mr. Welford said he thinks the rate is currently down to 12% and credited the GED test preparation program which helps drop-outs to get a GED through the state and then be allowed to receive their diploma with their classmates.
***Chairman Titus*** said she would not like to see the Assistant Principal position cut and asked if administrators had considered a half-time vice-principal position at the Valley View and Henry Wilson schools. Mr. Welford said they considered it but determined that is not a viable option due to the differences in age groups. He said the loss of this one position will not affect the accreditation process and administrators are looking at other alternatives for next year.
She also suggested better use of the “Toby” room and more behavior support in the classrooms are other options that may decrease discipline problems.
Will the budget cuts affect the accreditation process and can it still go forward - Mr. Welford said with this budget as presented it can go forward. The issue is health insurance costs he said.
Are the Autism and BEAM programs being fully used to their potential- There is no cap on emotional handicapped programs but Special Ed is specific to the needs of the student. Using the programs as wide umbrella will not fly with the state Welford said.
If the administration plans to cut a Sped position will two grade levels be combined- It may be considered if there are two grade levels with low numbers of students, but the Special Ed Director will make the proper recommendation for the students involved.
What is the maximum distance that could be required for students that walk to school- Mr. Welford said the district is not required to transport students who live within one mile of their school and could increase the distance to two miles if necessary but recognized that with the geography of the town that would be a significant problem for some families.
Chairman Titus then opened the meeting to public comment.
 Angie Cardinal said the SAU budget needs to be reviewed and urged residents to contact the School Board. She said they need to cut the SAU budget by 20% and not an Assistant Principal. The School Board meeting was a matter of desperation. We have to cut something, so they cut something. She told residents if they can’t come to meetings they should contact their board members.
Mr. Johnson asked Ms. Cardinal how she would suggest 20% be cut from the SAU budget and noted that the Budget Committee did not have the ability to make cuts to that budget. She said the administration didn’t need to spend $100,000 on two bookkeepers as one example.
Angela Depalma said she is an 8th grade Special Ed teacher who has been involved in teaching for 17 years and loves her job at Henry Wilson. She said she decided to address the issue because she is enraged these circumstances. She said what she has to say will anger some and waited to speak for fear of retribution. She cited teachers with periods off not teaching, Special Ed case loads 2/3 of their past size, two psychologists and four guidance counselors even with less kids, Smart Boards mounted in an awkward position, unused furniture, unused textbooks, laptops not used for much more than encyclopedias, no reading specialist, no time for intervention, no school nurse, minimal STEM instruction, little for gifted and talented students, no computer teacher and speech services stretched to the brink of non-existence as areas where positions are poorly managed, can be cut or reallocated at the school. She added the physical therapist often does not show up, the School Resource Officer having to discipline students and the strong arming of union members to change insurance or more teachers will be cut. She said Mr. Welford had stated previously that he didn’t want demoralize the staff but he has demoralized them by leaving them out of process for the most part. She said she did not want to see anyone lose their jobs or property but the burden should not fall only on the taxpayers. Trust your teachers- ask us what is going on she said.
Mr. Welford and the School Board members had no response to the public comments.
Mr. Henry said board meetings are open to the public and the public can speak. Ms. Connolly thanked the residents for having the courage to speak their minds. Mr. Johnson said he didn’t know what can be done differently.
Chairman Titus urged the public go to board meetings and to the School District Deliberative Session where their vote counts. The public can make a difference she said.
**4). Other Business:**December 23, 2015- next regular Budget Committee meeting at the Municipal Building.
January 15, 2016-public hearing on the school budget at the Henry Wilson School library
January 19, 2016 – snow date for public hearing if needed
January 27, 2016- regular Budget Committee meeting.

**5). Adjournment:
Motion:** (Johnson, second Connolly) to adjourn the meeting passed 7-0 at 11:15 a.m.

Respectively submitted
Kathleen Magoon
Recording Secretary