

FREMONT BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING

Fremont Town Hall

295 Main Street

Fremont, NH 03044

December 12, 2012

7:00 PM

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Gene Cordes called the December 12, 2012 meeting to order at 7:02 pm on the main floor of Fremont Town Hall.

Present were: Budget Committee Members Gene Cordes, Griffin Cordes, Greg Fraize, Charles Kimball, Patricia Martel, Joe Miccile, Mike Nygren, Annmarie Scribner (sitting in for Greta St. Germain) and Recording Secretary Susan Perry.

Members of the public included: School Superintendent Michelle Langa, School Business Administrator Laurie Verville, Ellis School Director of Facilities Scott Brown, Technology Director Jason Carey, School Board Chair Ida Keane and School Board member Sharon Girardi, and citizen Margie Diggins.

II. SCHOOL OFFICIALS: CONTINUED PRESENTATION OF NEW BUDGET: FOCUS ON NON-ACADEMIC EXPENSES

Ms. Verville spoke about gross budgeting. There was a need to properly appropriate all positions that the District currently had in 2012-2013. Four positions were supported by grant/entitlement money. Through the budget process, these were put in the general fund. There was an estimated \$210,300 in Federal appropriations that could be spent; anything not related to these funds would be returned at the end of FY2014 (raise and appropriate positions twice). Districts usually want to preserve critical positions (instructional classroom staff). An alternative given by Plodzick & Sanders was to raise and appropriate \$1.00 under Federal funds when revenues were certain in August to support those positions in the general fund (do transfer). \$210,300 was the best estimate for Federal funds – there would be a definite number in August 2013 to prepare for setting the tax rate.

The School District communicated with Ms. Sands at the DOE. Auditor Cheryl Pratt looked at the information and suggested raising and appropriating \$1.00 under Federal grants and do a transfer to the general fund.

The School Board approved the second pass of the budget at last night's meeting (\$11,093,863 – which was an increase of \$34,142 over last year's appropriation. The MS 27 would show \$210,300 and the revenue sources would be on the back page.

There was a discussion about how the Federal government determined what was available for funding. The State monitored how money was allocated. For example, Title I was based on a formula for allocation based on the number of students on free/reduced lunch and poverty level. It was noted that, as the fiscal cliff might happen, the District might not receive the \$210,300. There would be no carryover money. Title II A was for professional development (non-staff); Title I was for salaries. The term "critical positions" was used for practical purposes; the Fremont District's goal was to be the best in the state.

In answer to a previous question about wages increasing with fewer positions, a worksheet listing employee names and salaries was reviewed. There was a mis-categorization of perfect attendance/sick time buyback. There were 16 salaried Step increases and 4 track changes. There was discussion. Ms.

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Martel found an increase of \$122,000 in wages (including retirement, RIFs, track changes etc.) Some Federal grant positions were moved into the general fund. Examples were given.

Ms. Scribner (speaking for Ms. St. Germain who was absent) referred to ED 306.15 Provision of Staff and Staff Qualifications. She said, because Ellis was K-8 and under 500 students, the District was only required to have one guidance counselor, also since there was an Assistant Principal to help with discipline issues. She suggested having one guidance counselor: 50% for elementary and 50% for middle school. Ms. Langa understood but explained why it was necessary to have two counselors: to teach Health, as required by the State, and to manage the students (36) with Section 504 Plans (each counselor case manages 18 of these students through the year). Ms. Scribner suggested that one counselor could teach Health full time (e.g. 80%) and a part-time counselor could teach Health (20%) to try to bring the counselor number down. Section 504 covered students with disabilities (physical limitations). A majority of the Section 504 students were in grades K-3.

There was discussion about class size and Ms. Scribner's question if another position could be RIFd and then it could be determined if the position would be necessary due to enrollment/actual class sizes next year. Ms. Keane spoke about the increased achievement of Fremont students and effort to make Ellis one of the best schools in the State. She said that class sizes decreased from families leaving the District, so concentration was put on achievement and keeping class sizes while reducing staff as best they could while maintaining good education. The District tried to control a tight budget each year and return to the Town what it could and keep the tax rate down. She said that the Administration did a good job to be where they should be with class sizes and she noted that some classrooms (space) were quite small. Mr. Cordes noted that professional educators felt that the best practice for class sizes varied by age group and that Fremont was within the NH reported class size limits. He mentioned the effort to contain all children in school and retain students who need extra. Ms. Girardi asked to consider the difficulty of large class sizes when teachers wrote plans to accommodate students who were having trouble.

Mr. Nygren spoke about class sizes in surrounding towns such as Sanborn Regional and Chester, which averaged 18 – 19 students/class (Fremont averaged 13-14/class). Ms. Keane said that Sanborn was a larger District with classes including students from different towns. Mr. Nygren said that grades 1-4 stayed in their own towns. Ms. Keane spoke about the possible drop in achievement levels with Overcrowded classrooms. She mentioned that proficiency levels had gone from 50% to 76% over the last 5 – 6 years and that things were going in the right direction, noting there were not big increases like years ago.

Ms. Scribner felt that the \$1,800,000 State education grant money should reflect the projection of 10 less students next year (\$4,000 each x 10 students = \$40,000). She said auditors would say not to project that way and to go with what was known. Ms. Keane said that the revenue number was an estimate. Ms. Verville said she had seen municipal documents that projected the District would be giving money back. She said they were tracking well on Medicaid collections (which was already ahead and would contribute to the residual balance).

Scott Brown spoke about the school facilities budget. Over the past few years, effort was put in the energy audit to try to “seal the building envelope” as best as possible. He has done insulation and HVAC work himself rather than hiring out and he has made considerable gains. Some increases included: replacement of vertical blinds on the south side (to reduce heat and glare), asbestos inspection, and fuel oil. He replaced one burner so there should be savings in heat cost.

Jason Carey reviewed the technology budget that was about maintaining and replacing existing equipment. There were about 250 workstations to be kept up to date. The District was in the first year of the three-year technology plan. The plan helped forecast what expenses would be to budget accordingly. Replacement of equipment cost about \$37,400. This cost included new thin clients, staff

laptops, network switching, desktop pcs, and 8 new workstations in the library. Mr. Carey said he could provide a list.

A third of the computer lab (desktop PCs) would be replaced this year, a third the next year and the remaining third the third year. The replacement of LCD monitors with LED monitors would be done over the next three years as well. This coincided with the energy audit. The card catalog in the library would be replaced as a digital database of books to be hosted offsite (the current system was no longer supported). Overhead projectors were being replaced with 5-year warranties. 64 staff laptops would have a 3-year warranty. Other items to be worked on included access points for wireless, cabling, network ports, data back up solution, scan/virus firewall, SAU office projector, and network switches. Items under "new computer equipment" included 112 workstations in classrooms that needed to be replaced to be in a more reliable working condition. In the future the Website needed to be replaced.

Ms. Verville said that she would email an expenditure report to Ms. Martel.

Griffin Cordes asked about the idea of using tablets to replace book costs. Mr. Carey responded that it would come down to what the Administration and teachers wanted. Cost was a factor too. Warranties would not cover vandalism if the tablets were damaged. Mr. Carey noted that 3 bids were necessary if over \$5,000 and he said that GovConnection worked well with schools. Ms. Langa noted that computers must meet the necessary qualifications so students could take the new national assessments.

There was discussion about staffing. Mr. Nygren brought in information at the last meeting that concluded that the staffing level had not decreased although student enrollment had. The Administration drew up an updated spreadsheet of staffing history and proposed staffing that showed staff numbers decreased from 81.8 in 2009-10 to 73.1 in 2013-14. These numbers excluded SAU staff. Mr. Miccile mentioned that he had seen different numbers on the DOE Website. Paras were not counted in the student: teacher ratios. Mr. Nygren said he was not questioning the integrity of the budget but noted that the staff number was similar to that of 3 years ago. Ms. Martel questioned the number of Special Education staff under "Staffing/Salaries" in the budget book. Ms. Langa explained that one staff member was listed as a Special Education teacher but should have been listed as a social worker – was an input error.

There would be a transportation pre-bid tomorrow where 4-6 bus companies were planned to come and ask questions based on bid specifications. A goal is to reduce one bus. Ms. Verville had received ridership counts and they would discuss how to economize and have efficient bus runs. Escalators about fuel cost must be identified. The document was an RFP vs. a bid.

Mr. Nygren mentioned the increase in the number of case managers (from 3 to 5) although the enrollment had decreased. Ms. Scribner suggested putting a note in where the case managers were listed so people could track this.

There was review of the budget as re-adopted by the School Board last night. The \$210,300 was no longer added. Ms. Scribner suggested reconsidering the revenue numbers/budget what was known and looking at the \$50,000 fund balance. Ms. Keane noted that the School Board took a position last night and was comfortable with the \$50,000 there, noting that historically the District had returned \$100,000 - \$150,000. The enrollment reporting was different this year (using exact numbers). Ms. Martel asked to see the expenditure report and the CBA cost/values that would be a Warrant Article. Ms. Girardi noted that teachers were still in negotiations and that CBA information might not be available before the Budget Committee voted. Ms. Verville would email an updated default budget and a balance sheet (as of November 30, 2012) tomorrow morning. The Budget Committee would wait to vote on the School Board budget next week as well as review Warrant Articles (Teachers CBA, W.A. to reinstate 198-20 (ability of SB to expend unanticipated revenue (over \$5,000); re-open Support Staff CBA (approve what

the District agreed to fund in healthcare because of Affordable Health Act); and to get RSA fund balance retention (law allows retention of up to 2.5% for emergencies and spend it in one year or it goes back to offset taxes – but the Town could lessen the percentage); to put \$10,000 into the expendable trust from fund balance (need to vote on this every year – there was about \$34,000 in the fund currently and there was a question of there being a threshold or not).

Outstanding budget items included: Police Department budget, Gov. buildings, Warrant Articles.

III. APPROVE MINUTES FOR NOVEMBER 28, 2012 and DECEMBER 5, 2012

Charles Kimball motioned to approve the minutes as written of November 28, 2012. Joe Miccile seconded the motion. Motion passed 7:0:1 (abstention from A. Scribner).

Pat Martel made a motion to table until the next meeting the minutes of December 5, 2012 (for lack of quorum). Griffin Cordes seconded the motion. Motion passed 7:0:1 (abstention from A. Scribner).

IV. NEXT MEETING DATE: WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 19, 2012

V. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:21 pm, Greg Fraize made a motion to adjourn. Pat Martel seconded the motion. Motion passed 5:0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Perry,
Recording Secretary