

FREMONT BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Fremont Town Hall
295 Main Street
Fremont, NH 03044
DECEMBER 10, 2014
7:00 PM

I CALL TO ORDER

Chair Mike Nygren called the December 10, 2014 Budget Committee meeting to order at 7:00 PM on the main floor of Fremont Town Hall.

Present were: Budget Committee members Mary Anderson, Gene Cordes, Greg Fraize, Neal Janvrin, Mark Kidd, Pat Martel, Mike Nygren, and Tyra Vargas. Also present were: School Superintendent Betsey Cox-Buteau, School Financial Administrator Susan Penney, and School Principal John Safina.

Members of the public included: Michael Rydeen, Brittany Thompson, Susan Levine, Leon Holmes, Sr., Carla Smith, Susan Pipitone, Aimee Arsenault, and Jennifer Brown.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Neal Janvrin made a motion to approve the minutes of December 3, 2014 as written. Mary Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed 6:0:2 (abstentions from G. Cordes and T. Vargas).

III. REVIEW OF SCHOOL BUDGET/PROCESS

Mr. Safina reviewed his budget process, which began with a staff meeting to discuss goals and fiscal needs of the Town. Mr. Safina put a certain amount of money in the supply line for Student Educational Services supply orders (function 1100) – about \$200 per teacher. This year it totaled \$9,300 in that line (for pens, pencils, etc.) He requested teachers to provide lists of items needed for curriculum materials, etc., based on priority (1 being most important to 3 being least important). Teachers also put what year the items were needed; this helped with long-range planning. Mr. Safina categorized each request and used them as backup when presenting his budget to the Superintendent. The Purchase Orders were organized by priority and category. There were “wish lists” such as: possibility of transportation for homeless students (used to be covered by Title I funds); staff development (Title II Funds were used for summer work and were requested to be put back in); increasing Assistant Principal Bridle’s days; and having one school opening time and one closing time to help with coordinating staff meetings, announcements, early release days, and other work between the elementary and middle schools. This would also increase the school day, where Ellis had one of the shortest days in the State. This would not cut back on the contractual bus cost.

Mr. Safina automatically put the priority 1 and 2 items in the budget and reviewed the priority 3 requests. His part of the budget accounted for \$240,000 this year. All the priority 1 and 2 items and only some of the priority 3 items were in the budget that was presented to the Budget Committee. What was submitted and approved was what the Budget Committee saw for the School Budget.

There was discussion of the Spanish teacher position. Mr. Safina explained that it was a goal to help Ellis students have the same set of skills as other middle schoolers transitioning to Sanborn Regional High School. Currently, there was an after-school Spanish Club with about 20 students. He said that survey results showed that parents wanted to have a foreign language program at Ellis. Ms. Anderson said that, out of the 47 people (of the Town population) who responded to the survey, only 5 or 6 requested having a foreign language teacher at Ellis and she did not think that yielded a Community need. Dr. Cox-Buteau mentioned that before the survey, the Curriculum Committee did research and there was also a request for a foreign language program.

Ms. Anderson felt that it was most important to get the teacher contract passed. She asked Mr. Safina, in light of everything, if he would chose to keep the small classes (of 14) or the Spanish teacher. He said it was his responsibility as building principal to do what was best for the students but if he had to choose, he would forego the Spanish teacher. He would rather maintain the success at Ellis where students were performing well with the small classes and successful RTI. He had tried a Warrant Article for it in the past and it failed the Committee approved on December 17, 2014

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Town vote. He mentioned that most of the increases in the school budget were due to high school tuition, health insurance, and retirement increases.

Foreign Language was recommended as part of State minimum standards but not mandatory in middle school.

Mr. Kidd asked if Mr. Safina was comfortable with the number of teachers. Mr. Safina said that when the two cuts were introduced, there was talk of bringing in other personnel to support some of those cuts (e.g. Math Specialist), so he did not see it as a fiscal impact. It was a program change originally; he was satisfied with keeping the teachers and not bringing in the Math Specialist (who would be at a higher Step too). Mr. Safina said Ellis was fully-inclusional and there were no regular education Para-professionals or other services that different Districts had. He said that the standard deviation for NWEA scores was 20. The larger the deviation, the more differentiation teachers needed to do in teaching. Ms. Anderson said that differentiated instruction in small classes was not that difficult. Mr. Safina saw this as another reason to forego the Spanish Teacher and keep the classes small. He spoke about enrollment going up a little bit (about 9 new students by the middle of this year) and mentioned that the Charter school would be moving to a different location. He said about 40 Fremont students were at the Charter school. Ms. Anderson asked for the Child Find number (for any student not being educated in the home District). Ms. Penney said that this was done in the spring for preschool and kindergarteners. Dr. Cox-Buteau said that since the new homeschool laws came out two years ago, public schools were not required to track children. Ms. Anderson said her experience was that this was done District-wide and she felt that it was important.

Line 52 covered high school out-placement tuition (one at Seacoast Learning Collaborative, one at Monarch, one at Learning Skills and a potential Seacoast Learning Collaborative placement). Line 51 was for the elementary school (one at Monarch, and a potential Monarch placement).

Mr. Kidd referred to the Special Education cost of the Sanborn tuition and asked if a decision was made to not pay the \$7,000/student for non-required services. Dr. Cox-Buteau explained about 504 plans, saying that students were tested and could require services but they were not part of Special Education. In the past, Fremont had paid for services for 504 students at Sanborn (out of extraneous money) but the School Board recently voted not to continue these payments since they were not part of Special Education.

Mr. Fraize mentioned that it was conveyed to the School Board to think of ways to cut back the budget but the Board will meet next Tuesday. Ms. Anderson noted that 64.2% of the school budget was made up of salaries (\$3.5 million) and high school tuition (\$3.8 million). She felt that this year's budget should be equal to last year's, including negotiated salary increases to support the teacher contract (which was unknown as of today). The default budget was about \$55,000 less than the proposed budget. She said there was \$220,000 no longer being paid for debt service plus the \$450,000 in this year's budget that was over-budgeted for high school tuition and she felt it was reasonable to come in with a budget similar to last year's. Ms. Penney noted that last year the tuition was budgeted at a GMR of 15.2% but this year they budgeted at 7%.

Mr. Kidd was concerned that line 2323 SAU went up over \$100,000 in two years and was increasing \$58,000 this year. Ms. Penney noted that \$24,000 of that amount would be dispersed into functions as it was the raise pool for non-CBA staff. Mr. Kidd felt that, while the teachers and Ellis School were doing well by what he has heard, he did not think that the one-school District should have a full-time SAU office (that they were not getting the investment put in the SAU office). Ms. Penney noted that, no matter the District size, the same amount of State paperwork, etc. was necessary to be done at the office to run an efficient District. Mr. Fraize felt that improvements had been made at the SAU office and that the School Board felt that they needed qualified people. Mr. Nygren felt that if everyone in Town did not get a raise, then no one should get a raise - but that there was more accountability with the current SAU staff and that the Town was getting good, quality work out of the SAU now.

Mr. Fraize would forward information that Dr. Cox-Buteau had emailed previously. Hard copies would be available to Committee members at the SAU office. Mr. Fraize noted that there was a school request to add \$252 to the SAU postage line to cover mailings of copied materials to Budget Committee members' homes.

Mr. Nygren encouraged the School District/Board to consider decreasing the budget (about 1.5%) in good faith so that the Budget Committee could get behind the teacher's contract more, which he felt was most important to try to get approved by the Town, plus a new fire truck.

Ms. Martel asked why, in Line 31: 5 FTEs were listed under Special Ed Salary-Teacher, equaling \$206,000 but 4 teachers were proposed. Ms. Penney clarified that they did budget transfers.

Ms. Penney distributed an updated projected revenue reflecting recent DOE information. She reviewed information about supply lines, etc. for Ms. Martel.

Susan Levine asked for clarification of what type of decrease the Budget Committee was looking for in the school budget. Mr. Nygren said they suggested a decrease in the budget of about \$175,000. Ms. Levine said she voted every year and supported fire trucks and police cars but she felt that the student education budget at Ellis that supported learning was getting squeezed by increases in cost of tuition, health care, and retirement. She said the school was trying to sharpen pencils and present a good budget. Mr. Rydeen mentioned that even if voters saw that the School Board and Budget Committee approved the teacher contract, if it was an increase, people would not vote for it. He said whether the budget was decreased or the CBA gets voted down, the students were affected. Mr. Nygren felt that if it was presented to the voters that the School District showed budgetary restraint, there might be more positive attitude towards passing the CBA.

Mr. Janvrin noted that people voted down something for his former Department that had no impact on taxes and that it was important to have collective support. Ms. Anderson noted that in 11 years, the cost to educate an elementary student in Fremont increased 106% whereas Statewide it increased 86%. She said that the Town had financially supported elementary education in Fremont during those years. She felt that everyone should work to support the teacher contract as well as items for the Town like a fire truck. Mr. Fraize said he would bring the message back to the School Board.

Next week's meeting would review the final Town budgets and Warrant Articles.

The Public Hearing was set for January 13 (14), 2015.

III. NEXT MEETING: WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 17, 2014

IV. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:30 PM, Neal Janvrin made a motion to adjourn. Mary Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed 7:0.

Respectfully submitted by, Susan Perry, Budget Committee Secretary