

FINANCE COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
November 16, 2010

Meeting called to order at 6:30 P.M.

All members present.

Motion made, seconded and approved unanimously to approve the minutes of the October 4, 18 and 27, 2010 meetings.

Discussed budget and salary guidelines to be utilized in preparing the initial submission of budgets. We concluded that two budgets should be submitted to the Administrator, one with a 10% decrease and the other with level funding. We also concluded that the non-contract personnel would be entitled to a step increase, if merited. but that no COLA should be granted.

Discussed with Beth Pare the accreditation issues raised during public discussion of the school building project. The following was prepared by Jim Hartley who led the discussion for the Fincom on this issue:

“We met with Beth Pare to discuss questions about accreditation. A number of people in town were worried that the failure of the override vote to finance borrowing for the high school project would result in a loss of accreditation for the schools. The Finance Committee noted that there was nothing in the accreditation report which indicated any need for concern. The Accreditation report submitted to the school on March 3, 2006 is quite positive regarding the status of the Jr/Sr high school. As always in these reports there is a list of suggested changes which should be made; in total this accreditation report lists 52 recommendations. Of those 52 recommendations, only 4 of them would in any way be affected by a new school building. The four items are:

1. ‘Install networked telephone system throughout classrooms in the building’  
Presumably a new building would include a new phone system, but according to the Skanska report on the cost of renovating the high school, the expense to add such a phone system to the existing building is relatively low.

2. ‘Provide an appropriate educational facility for special education’  
The details on this recommendation are important. First, the report specifically says that “The special education department does an excellent job of identifying and responding to the special needs of students.” But, the report notes: “The present junior high special education program has inadequate facilities, however.” The problem that the special education rooms “are above the band room and the boy’s locker room, and the noise level below is detrimental to the learning environment.” It is important to note that the special education rooms have *already* been relocated. In other words, this recommendation has *already* been met.

3. and 4. 'Renovate and upgrade the current heating system' and "Renovate and upgrade the school ventilation system'

The HVAC system in the school needs to be fixed. Again, the details on why the Accreditation report recommends this are important. First, the report explicitly notes 'Boilers in the high school are old but in good working condition and heat the building adequately during the school day.' However, there is a problem with cold winter nights: 'Custodians are assigned overnight shifts to maintain space heaters along the outside walls of the building to prevent pipes from freezing.' As many will recall, the pipes did in fact freeze in the high school several years ago. Clearly, there is a need to provide better insulation for the pipes. A new building would obviously have helped in this regard. But, nothing in the accreditation report requires a new building to solve this problem.

This accreditation report is a public document and the town is required to make it easily available to all citizens of the town. (Unfortunately, it is not available on the school website.) We would highly recommend that anyone who is concerned about accreditation read it. There is no way to read the document provided by the accreditation committee to say that the schools are in danger of losing accreditation if there is not a new building.

However, to confirm our reading of this document, one member of the committee called several members of the accrediting committee and of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (the accrediting agency). Everyone with whom he talked agreed that there was no danger of losing accreditation because of the lack of a new school building.

It is important the School committee take action to meet all 52 of the recommendations in the Accreditation Report, and the Finance Committee has no doubt that the School Committee and Superintendent will do so.

So, while there were many good arguments in favor of a new Jr/Sr high school building, there is no reason for concern that the high school will lose its accreditation status."

Motion made, seconded and approved unanimously to adjourn at 9:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Glesmann, Clerk