

Litchfield Board of Finance
Special Meeting Minutes
March 19, 2012

Call to Order: Vice Chairman David Wilson called the meeting to order in the Litchfield Intermediate School Art Room at 7:03pm with Brenda Barnes, Mitchell Fishman, Ed Gadomski, Ed Weik, Anne Dranginis (Alt.) and David Pettinicchi (Alt.) present. Chairman David Geiger was absent so Mr. Wilson appointed Anne Dranginis to full status.

Also present were Wayne Shuhi, Don Falcetti, Betsy Fabbri, Lynn Stone, Gary Waugh, John Bongiorno, Gayle Carr, Amy Rosser, Joane Moore, Kristian Kuegler, Cindi Zeller, Melinda Menillo, Stacy Morgan, John McKenna, Jeff Zullo, Deborah Wheeler, Pat Bucatelli and Frank Simone.

Board of Education Budget Presentation

Deborah Wheeler showed a PowerPoint presentation that outlined the Board of Education's Budget for 2012-3 that was adopted March 7, 2012. The proposed budget of \$16,720,401 represents an increase of 1.04%, or \$172,401.

Efficiencies recognized in the budget include the allocation of ARRA/Federal Jobs Funds that supplement, not supplant, the general operating fund; electricity conservation measures; and cooperative purchasing practices such as fuel oil purchases shared by Region 6, CJR and the library for a \$23,404 savings, and shared rides for Special Education transportation.

Programs of Choice enrolment included 16 in the Wamogo Agriscience program, 15 in Oliver Wolcott Tech HS, 5 in magnet schools such as Hartford Academy for Arts, 30 in private schools, 20 homeschooled and 17 out-of-district placements.

In Net Current Expenditures per Pupil, Litchfield ranked 51 among 169 Connecticut towns in ability to pay. Allocation of Resources depicted salaries at 60.78% of the total budget, 16.17% for employee benefits, 3.29% for utilities, 6.74% for transportation, 5.5% for tuition and 7.52% for all other resources.

FTE reductions include eliminating 1 paraprofessional, a supplemental skills teacher who is retiring and will not be replaced, 2 Technology Assistants that will be offset by the addition of one Technology Coordinator, and the world language program at LIS. This will reduce the current FTEs from 170.2 to 166.6 for the coming year.

The new position of Technology Coordinator will have a salary of \$83,000 and will provide support for an expanded technology program, working with school Administration to improve the marriage between technology and curriculum. Phase One of the new Technology Plan involves a \$180,000 cost for infrastructure upgrades to expand wireless access, upgrade network security and increase remote access for faculty and students. The goal is to expand educational capacity and expectations for post-secondary career readiness for students.

School Board members John Bongiorno and Wayne Shuhi, who serve on the facilities and technology committee, said the \$180,000 represents the first of three phases of a much-needed technology upgrade. Cost estimates for the next two phases, which involve Center School as well as LIS, have yet to be determined. Phase Two would begin interacting with curriculum so that students can use laptops and learn simultaneously. This would help prepare students for college and the workplace. Phase Three will result in LIS and Center School having smart boards and LIS becoming wireless as well. Mr. Bongiorno said this phase would involve more efficiency than cost.

Mr. Bongiorno said his committee has a step plan which he can provide to the BOF. He emphasized that LHS is lagging far behind evolving technology and these proposed improvements mean that teachers can excel by adding this technology to their curriculum. He said the wireless system is good for 5-6 years, but that can be drawn out to 10 years since future devices will be better.

Ed Weik asked for clarification whether a line item of \$244,623 in the Budget Summary coupled with the new technology costs would bring the total to \$300,000 and Pat Bucatelli acknowledged that would be the total.

Anne Dranginis asked if there was a correlation between the two added technology items and the elimination of a language arts and supplemental skills teaching position. BOE members Bongiorno and Shuhi responded that the Board doesn't consider these losses a trade-off and stressed that investing in technology would greatly benefit the high and center schools. Ms. Dranginis also inquired if multiple vendors were used to create the costs for the plan and Mr. Bongiorno said 7 bids were received and the plan is not yet finished. The technology committee has been working on the plan for 6 months and the full plan has not been presented to the entire Board since it is incomplete.

David Wilson asked if the state would be mandating that schools improve their technology in this manner and Deborah Wheeler said that is not yet the case.

Brenda Barnes asked what the future annual cost of maintaining the new technology would be and Ms. Wheeler said this will be provided to the BOF.

Ed Gadomski asked about an alternative way of financing the technology initiative rather than adding it to the budget. Ms. Wheeler said this was not in her original budget but it was recommended that the Technology Coordinator and Technology Initiative be added. The Coordinator would be the "point person" for management and implementation of Phase One. There is not a finalized job description but the \$83,000 is the prevailing salary for this position. Her office will develop the job description and take it to the Personnel Committee.

Mitchell Fishman asked the number of Special Education students and Ms. Wheeler said about 10% of the student body is involved in this. What has changed is the way they are serviced by different agencies. Special Education involves behavioral and mental capacity situations and they are seeing a degree of need even in very young children.

Ms. Wheeler said she and Ed Drapp, Wamogo Interim Superintendent, have continuing talks about regionalization and it has been suggested the Wamogo BOE meet with the Litchfield BOE.

Mitchell Fishman asked about health care coverage being paid by the Town for the retiring teachers since the actuarial estimate for future payments to all current and future retirees is \$5,373,000. Ms. Wheeler said this is the last year that benefit will be in teachers' contracts and the BOE has made an effort to have \$50,000 in the yearly budget to cover this expense. Also, whenever they have additional funds, they direct them into funding that liability.

Ed Gadomski asked about OPEB and Mr. Bucatelli explained that teachers pay into the state for their continuing benefits in lieu of Social Security.

David Wilson said that although public comment is not accepted at this meeting, anyone who wishes to make public comment can do so at the April 25 annual town budget hearing.

Adjournment:

Motion: Ed Weik moved to adjourn at 9:30pm and Brenda Barnes seconded the motion. All voted aye and the motion carried. The next regular meeting will be held on Monday, April 9, 2012 at the Litchfield Intermediate School.

Respectfully submitted,

Jo Ann Jaacks
Recording Secretary