

MINUTES
TOWN OF PEMBROKE
BUDGET COMMITTEE
Thursday, January 15, 2009

Members Present: David Freeman-Woolpert, Chair; Mark LePage, Vice Chair; Gerry Fleury; Ray Foss; Charles Connor; Michael Connor; Stacey Sheldon; Bruce Kurinskas; Tom Serafin, School Board Rep.; Fred Kline, Selectmen Rep.

The meeting began at 7:00 PM.

Documents Distributed: Town of Pembroke Summary of Tax Rate 2005-2009; Pembroke School District Capacity/Enrollment January 15, 2009; Pembroke School District Definitions of Services

A motion to approve the minutes of January 8, 2008 as presented was made by Fred, seconded by Mark, and passed by unanimous vote.

David F-W gave a brief overview on the Summary of Tax Rate spreadsheet.

Tom introduced for the School Budget discussion: Peter Warburton, Superintendent of Schools; Patricia Willis, Director of Special Education; Peter Aubrey, Business Administrator; John Burnham, Facilities Director; Mike Reardon, Headmaster, PA; Deb Bulkley, Principal, TRS; Ryan Quinn, Principal, Hill and Village Schools; School Board Representatives Roy Weisiger, Clint Hanson, and Tammy Boucher.

Deb Bulkley summarized the state of TRS including successes, challenges and initiatives. The population at TRS is currently 366 however the proposed budget incorporates resources should the State School Board's recommended capacity of 400 be realized. One highlight of the current school year is that discipline referrals have decreased to less than 100 from 500-1200 in prior years. Ms. Bulkley gave an overview on TRS' use of Sakai, an on-line learning community. TRS will be initiating a no-cost integration specialist to instruct all teachers on how to implement and utilize Sakai. The goal is to have all core classes in all grades involved which could cause budget increases in the future due keeping technology current. Ms. Bulkley also reviewed the No Child Left Behind and Follow the Child programs as well as the alternative middle school.

Some concerns regarding Sakai were discussed including a formal response from legal pertaining to content and liability, long term financial expense, software/hardware, and monitoring and filtering protocols. The option of acquiring a model liability policy was discussed. Tom agreed to follow up on these concerns and report back to the committee.

The amount of days that substitute teachers are utilized was discussed. Ms. Bulkley clarified that 50 of the 70 teachers on staff would require a substitute due to absence. Additionally, there is one permanent substitute on staff each day. She further explained that substitutes are not only used for absences due to illness and vacation but for professional development and collaborative efforts between teachers as well.

Physical changes to TRS for security purposes were discussed as well as the rehabilitation of the gym floor and current and future field space requirements.

Ryan Quinn presented information regarding Hill and Village Schools. He stated that there are 164 students at Village and 241 at Hill and there are approximately 100 teachers total. They are operating on a zero increase in budget this year, have no new initiatives for the coming year, and their staff has decreased by one teacher. In an effort to implement new and improved programs without further expense, they have made physical changes to allow space for additional classes.

Mr. Quinn reviewed State test scores explaining that Literacy went from below state average to above and Math scores have come down primarily due to heightened requirements and the nature of students as compared to prior years. He stated that the schools are not in the "in need of improvement" category however, this will be a key academic challenge and focus for the coming year. Mr. Quinn reviewed programs including RTI (Response to Intervention), special education, disciplinary tracking, critical thinking, and student support centers. Additionally, Mr. Quinn would like to enhance and expand the music program in the future by adding a second music teacher.

Title 1 grant funding was discussed as it pertains to revenue. Tom agreed to obtain more information and update the committee at the next meeting.

A discussion pertaining to the recent exploration of reconfiguring the schools was addressed. Mr. Quinn stated that since he did not obtain universal support, the decision was made not to continue the effort but to look at other options for improvements regarding safety and education.

The school buildings were briefly discussed. Mr. Quinn stated that the buildings are in good shape primarily due to the Honeywell project. John Burnham updated the committee on the need for a partial new roof at Hill School. The cost of insulation and installation of the insulation for the roof will be covered by Phase 2 of the Honeywell project if it is approved however, the cost of supplies and installation of the roof itself would need to be covered by the district.

There was some question as to the nurse's salary line. The reason for the increase was not clear. Tom will obtain the information and follow up with the committee at the next meeting.

Patricia Willis gave an overview on special education. There has been a substantial decrease in budget which is primarily due to the fluctuating population and the lack of court appointed placements. Ms. Willis stated that the new law requiring students to stay in school until the age of 18 is not an issue at this time. One of the main challenges faced by special education is the No Child Left Behind program. She explained that state standards for educating children often exceed federal standards. Ms. Willis indicated that should a surplus of funds be available, more resources would be beneficial in an effort to provide more one-on-one instruction. Trends and percentages of students with special needs were discussed as well as reserve funding, projected surplus, the disability act versus special education, charter schools, tutoring for hospitalized children and the lack of state funding for incarcerated youths. Tom stated that it is the assumption that our school district will provide all educational, social, and physical needs required by all children in Pembroke.

The option of setting aside funds this coming year will be discussed at the next meeting.

There was a question regarding tuition revenue as two different figures appear in the budget. Tom will confirm the numbers and report back to the committee.

Gerry agreed to distribute, via e-mail to the committee, the trust fund balances reports that were completed for the town report.

Mr. Warburton announced that a tour of the wood burning plant in Merrimack will be scheduled for January 22nd or 23rd from 9 AM to 12 PM. He will confirm the day and time with committee members.

The next budget meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2009.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 PM.

