

**BUDGET COMMITTEE
TOWN OF PEMBROKE, NH
MAY 9, 2019 at 6:30 PM**

Karen Yeaton, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm

I. Attendance:

Present:

Michael Connor, Gerry Fleury, Karen Yeaton, Marie Chouinard, Brian Seaworth, Daniel Crean, and Ann Bond

Staff: Recording Secretary Jillian McNeil, Town Administrator David Jodoin

Excused: David Doherty, Tom Serafin, Armand Soucy, Connie Soucy and Tina Courtemanche

II. Approval of Minutes:

Gerry Fleury moved to approve the minutes of February 7, 2019. Michael Connor seconded the motion. Motion approved 7-0

III. Town/School Recap

Karen Yeaton thanked the committee for their service and asked for recommendations on what the committee could do to improve the process going forward. Dan Crean stated that the school has asked in the past what the increase would be that the committee would accept ahead of time. Dan recommends setting an acceptable increase at zero. Gerry Fleury stated that he doesn't like the idea of assigning an arbitrary number because it has nothing to do with the reality of need. Overall, the community is lacking trust in the school district. Dan expressed concerns for an inability to understand the way the school is shifting budget numbers around making them hard to track year to year. Dan suggests if the target number isn't zero, then it should be very low. Dan thinks the school could be more innovative in finding cost saving measures. Using online educational resources that would expand offerings could be an example of a cost saving measure. Dan expressed that his intent is not to cut education but to improve education without enlarging the bottom line of the budget. Gerry Fleury stated concerns for the quality of the online education. There are students who do not need a teacher in front of them but there are students that need it. Dan stated concerns for the amount of curriculum coordinators and development within the budget. Other schools have successfully incorporated online education into the curriculum. He is not suggesting an all or nothing scenario with the online education.

Ann Bond stated that the majority of the current education is being done on computers. There are more schools leaning towards online programs. Ann also shared that in the budget, there was a lot of furniture bought for the Hill School when there was furniture that could have been brought up from Village School. Ann also expressed frustrations that the district will not look at other companies for cost savings in health insurance. Gerry Fleury stated that within the collective bargaining agreement RSA, it is stated that if the Union does not want to discuss insurance changes, which is a bargainable item, with the SAU they do not have to and they could end up at a bargaining impasse. The school may be unable to just change carriers. Dan stated that they can bring different insurance plans to the bargaining table. Gerry agreed but if the Union says they are refusing to change insurance carriers, then that could be the end of the conversation. Gerry shared concerns that the current management may not be up to the task.

Karen Yeaton stated that with the trend of decreased enrollment in the schools and without employing efficiencies in a different way, the current process is unsustainable for the taxpayers. A 10% increase in taxes every year is not sustainable. The underlying idea is that we need to start looking at better ways of doing more for less. When looking at the budgets and expenditures, the committee can ask how are these things moving the district towards greater efficiencies. Dan Crean stated that years ago he would not have advised setting a target. Since then, the current process has not been working and the same budget with increases keeps being presented. Gerry Fleury stated that we do not have the authority to micro manage the school district. All the budget committee can do is say is whether the request is reasonable. Ann Bond agreed and stated that the residents need to go to the School Board and SAU meetings to voice concerns.

Mike Connor stated that he was worked with state budgets for 40+ years and they have always had a target for budget increases and decreases. He would be in favor of giving the district a target but not one that is zero.

Ann Bond would like to discuss the answers to the list of questions given to the school board. Karen Yeaton stated there were times when the school district came back with 5 pages of answers to the questions. Karen asked if the committee would like all the questions reviewed or possibly just pull out a few key questions to discuss. Ann stated that at the beginning of the meeting they could review the answers to see if there are any additional questions. Karen agreed that some discussion was probably left in those notes. Dan Crean stated that there is difficulty in discussing budgets that there are not created with up to date figures. Dan thinks there could be another 3 or 4 meetings regarding the school district so they are not so rushed.

Karen Yeaton stated that she and Gerry had with Patty Sherman prior to the start of the budget season. They discussed expectations and what they would like to see. Patty was open to hearing their suggestions. Karen suggested bringing them better ways to present their budgets so they are a little cleaner and easier to understand. Gerry stated that create their budgets by school and by code. It is constructed in each individual

building and is then it is sent to the school board. Those budgets are sent back to the schools to be looked at again and then they go back to the school board who sends it to the SAU. The SAU looks at the revenues and expenditures and creates the final budget. The revenue numbers are applied using best estimates of future revenues that come to fruition 15-18 months later. A lot can happen in that time. The budgets are very complex and are difficult to compile. Mike Connor stated that they cannot control all lines and those lines should not be given a zero-increase target because it is just not realistic but a target can be given to lines they have control over.

Brian Seaworth agrees that a new approach does need to be taken. Brian suggests asking if they are asked to cut 10% where would they cut it from and get that answer. Brian also suggested getting two budgets. One that meets the target and one that is what they would like so the committee can see where those cuts would be taken.

David Jodoin discussed taking the animosity out of the budget process.

Dan Crean suggested getting more people interested earlier is to have a pre-budget budget hearing with residents able to comment on what they would like to see. Karen Yeaton suggested adding a public comment section to the agenda. Gerry Fleury stated that there would need to be a caveat that the comments could only be on the agenda items of that night. Mike Connor suggested also adding a time limit to the public comment.

IV. Other Business

None

V. Adjourn

Gerry Fleury made a motion to adjourn at 7:31 PM. Dan Crean seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Karen Yeaton, Chairman

For more detailed information, the meetings are now taped and can be seen on www.townhallstreams.com click on Pembroke NH and look for the day of the meeting under the month.