

**BUDGET COMMITTEE
TOWN OF PEMBROKE, NH
JANUARY 2, 2020 at 6:30 PM**

Karen Yeaton, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm

I. Attendance:

Present:

Daniel Crean, Peter Gagy, Michael Connor, Marie Chouinard, Brian Seaworth, Gerry Fleury, Karen Yeaton, Armand Soucy, Sandy Goulet, Paul Hanson, Andy Camidge

Staff: Recording Secretary Jillian McNeil

II. Approval of Minutes: December 19, 2019:

Sandy Goulet moved to approve the minutes of December 19, 2019 as presented.
Armand Soucy seconded the motion.

III. 2020 School District Budget Presentation

Patty Sherman, Superintendent SAU 53, and Andy Camidge, Pembroke School Board, continued with the discussions surrounding the 2020 School District budget. Patty stated that there was a question last meeting wondering what the Transition Lab Coordinator position was. Patty explained that it is a tutor or paraprofessional that instructs a lab for freshmen that offers specialized academic support in the form of a study hall. The students rotate through during their freshmen year. Marie Chouinard asked if there was a position for someone who went out to the sending schools for the transition from 8th grade to the high school. Patty stated that there is a lot of 8th grade outreach that happens but the Curriculum Coordinator is the one that handles it.

Andy Camidge shared that the Governor sent out a press release regarding the Medicaid Emergency Rule that was put into place. While the letter offers some clarification, it does not appear to say that a solution will be coming. He will forward it to the Budget Committee. Patty stated that there will be a partial resolution for some schools but it will not affect Pembroke Schools. The press release states that people certified by the Department of Education can be certified by their Health Board which allows them to be Practitioners of the Healing Arts but people in the school are already certified by the medical board so that provision is not going to help. Services will need to be ordered by a physician and there is not a medical doctor on staff.

Mike Connor stated that in trying to figure out the total impact of the seven new positions the school would like to add, he was unable to find the budget lines affected

by the benefits and was wondering if the positions were full-time with benefits and if so, where is it in the budget. Patty stated that they are full-time positions with benefits and she can ask Amber to provide a breakdown of where they were adding into the budget and the projected totals.

Mike Connor asked what is being replaced in the replacement furnishings and fixtures lines. Patty stated that Josh has a replacement cycle for furniture and furnishings in the schools. He puts funds in each year to replace and refresh the oldest and most dilapidated furniture.

Mike Connor asked about the replacement cycle for computer equipment. Patty stated that the District is on a 4-year replacement cycle with the Chromebooks because they are no longer supported after four years. Andy shared that the cycle was changed from 5-years to 4-years because the school will not get the same useful life out of a Chromebook that they would form a traditional laptop. Even though Chromebooks are a cheaper device and need to be replaced more frequently, they are \$100-200 apiece compared to an \$800 laptop. Andy shared that Josh Coughlin keeps old computers to take parts from to fix any computer that may break. He also keeps broken chairs and tables to replace legs that may break.

Dan Crean asked what the status of the old computers in the basement of the Village School is. Andy stated that the computers were kept down there because they were used to fix other computers. There are also certain times of year that they can get a better deal for recycling computers so they are stored until they can be recycled. The basement was cleared out when the Village School was sold.

Mike Connor asked what the new equipment on row 356, New Equipment – Science was. Patty stated that at least \$15,000 is to start the STEM (Science Technology Engineering Math) course. There is a detailed breakdown that can be sent to the Committee.

Brian Seaworth asked if there is a reason the replacement costs for Chromebooks is significantly higher than last year. Patty stated that they are giving every Freshmen a Chromebook and that line encompasses both replacement costs and the costs for additional Chromebooks.

Mike Connor asked if Innovation Academy is the same as the STEM program. Patty answered that the two programs are not the same. The Innovation Academy has a science component but it is about project based and inquiry-based education.

Karen Yeaton asked for further clarification about the need for additional aides at Hill School. Patty stated that there were always aides in each Kindergarten classroom but with one of the more recent big budget cuts, those positions were eliminated. There has been an increase in students and those positions need to be added back in so a teacher is not left by themselves and unable to leave the classroom. If a student has a medical need, emotional outburst, or has to go to the bathroom there is no one to

assist the teacher in order to help or remove the student. Karen stated that when looking at the rosters for the Hill School, it would appear to have a 1/7 adult to student ratio. Patty stated that it is not as simple adding adults and dividing by pupils because the Special Education Paras are legally bound to one student. They are in the classroom to assist the one student and only that one student. They are not legally allowed to leave that student so they cannot assist the teacher with other students and are not allowed to act as an assistant to the teacher.

Sandy Goulet asked if it was possible to get a listing of Teachers, Aides, and Special Ed Paras that are 1-on-1. Patty stated that all Special Ed Paraprofessionals are assigned based on IEP needs and due to legal reasons, they would not be able to give a specific breakdown. The Special Ed Aids listed are legally assigned to a certain child. However, other Paras are able to work with other students.

Gerry Fleury noted the increases in the Special Placement lines and asked if the School Board has considered using the Special Education Capital Reserve to mitigate the expense. Patty stated that they did talk with the School Board about using the capital reserves to cut the budget, however, there have been significant increases in costs year over year. Patty explained that if a high needs student moves into town, there is a risk to depleting all savings. Andy stated that Special Ed is the most volatile piece of the budget. A student can have \$500,000 in needs and there is no way to predict if one of the students will move in or move out mid-year. Gerry shared frustrations with the Special Ed lines and the veil of secrecy surrounding those budget lines. Gerry explained that there is a 10% proposed budget increase and the dilemma for the Budget Committee is if they approve numbers that are too high they lose credibility and if budget lines are held too tightly, the public can show up and vote in the budget they want and the committee still loses credibility. Gerry hopes they can meet at a number that is less than what is proposed. Patty shared that the required Special Ed team is comprised of 5 or 6 professionals. That team decides on the services and helps create the Special Education budget. There is no one person making these decisions. Gerry expressed that if they were able to know the details of what is happening in those lines it would be easier to justify and rationalize but they are not allowed to know. Patty stated that they cannot give any identifying remarks about any child in order to protect the rights of the children with disabilities.

Sandy Goulet asked if they were able to give an overall number of children who require extra funding and a rough dollar figure per child. Patty stated that she can give the number of students receiving help but the committee would not be able to get an average dollar figure because there could be a student who gets reading support 30 minutes a week up to a high cost out of district placement student. Patty is able to give the overall number of students receiving services.

Karen Yeaton expressed concerns for 10% proposed increase in the tax rate and the lack of sustainability of an increase like that. Karen stated that what she is missing from all the departments within the school and the town is the lack of discussion regarding where efficiencies have been made within operating functions. Patty

offered to have the Principals of each school come to the Committee to discuss the efficiencies in their processes. Andy stated they have discussed digital textbooks rather than replacing outdated or destroyed physical textbooks. That cannot happen until the 1-1 Chromebook initiative is completed because they cannot have digital textbooks if they cannot guarantee access to every student. Andy shared that selling Village School is one of the biggest efficiencies that they accomplished this year. The building would have cost millions of dollars in the next five years to keep up to code and in ADA compliance. Instead, it is back on the tax rolls. Andy also discussed the dual-credit classes that could save students up to year of college which is an efficiency that ultimately saves tax payers thousands of dollars.

Sandy Goulet stated that the Town Hall and David Jodoin always work on a skeleton crew and everyone is cross trained to do each other's jobs. There are efficiencies throughout the town budget that may not be easily seen as David has gone many years with a minimum increase or no increase to save the Town money.

Gerry Fleury agreed that getting rid of the Village School did get rid of multi-million-dollar liabilities but there has to be other items at other schools that need to be completed. Andy stated that there is a lot of items in the CIP. They are able to invite Josh Coughlin to talk with the Committee about each of those projects. There has been a committee formed to look at the possibility and costs of renovating Hill School. Andy explained that every year they do different sections of flooring but they try to do an entire room rather than tile by tile because when the buildings were built, they used asbestos and that needs to be abated which involves sealing off an entire room. It is better to do that all at once and he has a schedule. Patty shared that the draft warrant articles will be at the meeting next week and several of those CIP items are on the warrant. Andy shared that an unexpected high cost item that came up this year was a tractor that died and that tractor takes care of the snow removal so it was not optional whether or not they replaced that out of cycle. Gerry shared concerns for what the CBA will cost when it is time to re-negotiate and the costs of the bond for renovations for the Hill School. Andy stated that the new owner of the Village School wants to turn the school into a senior living facility which will bring the assessed value up which will help the Town in the long run.

Armand Soucy asked if fundraising is actively pursued. Patty answered that there is so much fundraising that parents are requesting less. All club and extra co-curriculars fundraise. Andy explained that almost all of the 6th and 8th grade field trips are paid for by fundraising.

Gerry Fleury shared that Pembroke used to own buses until there came a point when it was no longer feasible and they then decided to contract it out. It appears as though there is only one supplier who has a monopoly on the busing. Patty stated that she can have Amber look into the possibility when they go out to bid again in two years. Andy stated there would be large startup costs but if there is a possibility of savings in the future, it may be worth it. The vendors that are out there do not bid on each other's territory allowing bus companies to charge whatever they want.

Brian Seaworth commented that when looking at the salary spreadsheet, it appears that the roster is heavily weighted toward the high end of experience with employees maxed out at the top step and not as much spread out over the lower tiers. Patty stated that just like everywhere else, there is an aging workforce. They predict they will see at least one or two retirements a year for a little while. Andy stated that teachers contracts generally work so that at some point in the contract they will hit a point where if they leave they will have to take a significant pay cut so they stay where they are.

Karen Yeaton asked the Board if they feel they need any more information from the School District or if they would be comfortable moving into deliberations. Gerry Fleury stated that they should start looking at warrant articles next week. Armand Soucy stated that he would like to hear from the Principals regarding efficiencies. Dan Crean expressed concerns for the Principals coming in to discuss the things they are doing in the schools that are positive rather than what they are doing to control and reduce the budget. Brian Seaworth expressed concerns that it may not be worth the Principals time to come in for a quick presentation given the short notice they will have to put something together. If they have something meaningful, they could give it to Patty and she could share it. Mike Connor agreed that it may not be their charge to do that and because it is not, the presentations would be very quick. Mike also stated that he doesn't believe it is their charge.

Gerry Fleury shared that the Pembroke Educational Endowment Fund raised money for the School District and when they decide to disband, the funds went to the NH Charitable Foundation. In an agreement between the Trustee of Trust Funds and the School Board, the trust receives funds every year from that endowment for education program opportunities. Gerry stated that no one has ever come and asked for the money to start an innovative program. Patty stated that those funds may be a good to use for the STEM program. Gerry stated that the request has to come through PALS because it would have been inappropriate for the School Board to be agents to expend since the money came from a non-profit. It was decided that PALS would be a lasting organization that can act as agents to expend. Andy asked how long ago that was disbanded. Gerry stated that it may be close to 20 years ago.

Dan Crean stated that the budget as is is not passable and there is a credibility issue with going to Town Meeting with a budget of this size. There needs to be new ways of doing things that do not cost as much, eliminate expenses, and possibly eliminate positions.

Karen Yeaton stated that in the last meeting of the last session, they had discussed asking the departments to put forth budgets they would deem acceptable. Some people were ok with putting forward what an acceptable increase and some were not. Dan Crean stated that he is not in favor of giving a target but charging everyone with putting forward a budget with less of an increase and then they can decide if that is acceptable. Mike Connor shared that at the State he has to give two budgets. One that

is what they feel they need and one that is 97% or so of last year. The other part of the budget presentation is what the department will do to achieve what they need to achieve with less.

Karen Yeaton highlighted that in the past few years the School District and the Budget Committee have worked together and hopes that even though they will be suggesting reductions, things will not get political and the two bodies will continue to work as partners.

IV. Other Business

The next meeting will be held January 9, 2020.

V. Adjourn

Dan Crean made a motion to adjourn at 7:56 PM. Sandy Goulet 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.