

Wakefield Budget Committee
Meeting and Public Hearing
For the School
Thursday, January 24, 2019
Town Hall Opera House
Approved

Budget Committee Members Present: Vice Chairman Priscilla Colbath, Peter Kasprzyk, James Reinert, Dave Mankus, Charlie Shine, Tracey Kolb, Frank Zappala, Denny Miller and Howie Knight

School Board: Sandra Johnson and Bob Ouellette

Administration: Interim Superintendent Jerry Gregoire, Business Administrator Marie D'Agostino

Connie Twombly, Norma Joy, Chris Soule and Clearview Community TV

Mrs. Colbath opened the meeting at 6:30 and she led those present in the Pledge. She explained that the Committee has some unfinished business to take care of and then she will open the Public Hearing.

Mrs. Colbath said, if you'll notice, the recommendations at the bottom of the articles have been changed to reflect a "recommend" and a "do not recommend" vote and we thank the school for changing this to reflect the way it's been stated for over 20 years. The School Board also chose to leave warrant articles that the Budget Committee unwittingly changed, as is, as the Budget Committee had changed them. They also voted to eliminate the Roof article that we had zeroed out. We will be addressing, once again Article #8, adding \$100,000 back into the Educationally Disabled Children's Expendable Trust Fund and Article #12, which we already voted on December 26th. Now, we can choose to address only these two articles, or we can revisit any article and re-vote on any article again. Just remember, the only article where we can change the dollar amount is article #7, the operating budget.

Mrs. Colbath asked if anyone had anything they would like to discuss before going to Article #8. Mr. Miller said he would like to talk about the comparison sheet Mrs. D'Agostino emailed to everyone today. He said if you take a look at the chart you will see the comparison to the Town and the School that impact the citizens of this town. If you look at the Town you will see we're up \$23,000. This is tax impact not budget. The warrant articles are down \$89,000. The impact to the taxpayers is down \$66,000. The Schools budget is up \$1,800,000 and the warrant articles are up \$822,000. You add that up and it's \$2,600,000. In any other case in this Town, if this were a building or anything else we'd be bonding this. We'd never expend 2.6 million without going for a bond. Yet the School is asking this taxpayer group and all the citizens to come up with a \$2,600,000 increase over last year.

Mrs. Kolb said she'd had a lot of time to think about this, basically, last year the difference in spending per student in Wakefield was \$1,000. This year it's \$1,400. We are widening our gap between the state average. We spend \$14,600 per student. The state average is \$15,998. We had

a flat budget this year. It was a disaster for everyone and there are errors in it. A Default Budget, which doesn't allow you to carry any new money is up 6.2% because we are severely under budgeted and it is riddled with errors. They didn't call and get the tuition rate for 187 students in Rochester. It's off by \$305,000. There's no new money for our students in Wakefield and the gap is even bigger next year because it was a flat budget, it didn't go up. So at some point a 1.1 billion dollar town doesn't want to pay the average cost per student in the state of New Hampshire. She said she is tired of this Board being blamed for it. 6.2% because the budget is so underfunded they didn't even add, the one and only thing this School Board has asked you for is money for the academics because it isn't thriving. They asked for windows that are leaking and have asbestos and they asked for buses that are over ten years old with 200,000 miles and that's it. If you want to underfund your school you're going to get caught just like the water is. She asked Mr. Kasprzyk if they were going to fix the water for 3%. Mr. Kasprzyk responded that he didn't know as they haven't figured out the budget but would let her know when they do.

Mr. Kasprzyk said no one is blaming the School Board. He understands Mrs. Kolb's passion. He said the constant theme has been, if you only give us more money we will get above that fifty percentile with education. He said he's not blaming anyone but money isn't the solution. He said he's afraid that the money they are requesting is going to set the taxpayers over the top. He is not going to vote for this budget. And he fears the default budget will be a tough pill to swallow. Mrs. Kolb said the difference between the default and regular budget is only \$290,000. The taxes are going up because the budget was so underfunded last year and the budgets before that have been underfunded. If they've been asking for money, they haven't been getting it. She said, if you don't want to do the windows and buses you don't have to vote for it, but please, don't think that there has been a ton of money thrown at the school. We're going to be \$1,800 below the state average. Mr. Kasprzyk said it's not the Budget Committee's decision to decide where the cuts are. It's our responsibility to present a reasonable budget to the Town. Mrs. Kolb said that for an extra forty dollars a year for a two hundred thousand home to try and improve our academic's in the school because it is going up sixty dollars in the Default Budget because it was so severely underfunded.

Mrs. Colbath said, I need to read this once again because Mrs. Kolb has said you have nothing for the regular ed students and students in general. You have new positions, you've added the other half of the Student Service Coordinator. I understand she has been there but it will cost you another \$50,000 because that grant has ended, a \$ 25,000 Curriculum Coordinator, Regular Ed Aide, Nursing Assistant, a half time, making him full time, Day Custodian, 2 ABA Tutors, a \$68,000 Partners Program, two part time SAU employees, \$65,000 New Math Curriculum, IXL Math Supplemental Program, 75,000 Literacy Program F&P, an increase in sub pay and \$13,000 Sound system. I'm looking at this thinking, this is probably more than we've ever asked for in one year.

Mrs. D'Agostino explained the comparison document. She said if you look at the school side the budget, not including grants and food service is \$10,523,990. If you add all the other warrant articles besides the budget, equates to \$983,411. If you add those two together the total warrant article listed on the sheet is \$11,029,401. She listed anticipated revenues that equal \$3,525,452. If you subtract that from the total of the warrant articles it leaves \$7,515,949 to be raised by

taxes. Last year the amount raised by taxes was \$5,708,315. This year the amount would be \$7,513,949, a difference between last year and this year is \$805,634.

Mrs. Kolb said that the Town, in the last three years, has raised \$2,119,129 where the school has raised \$1,482,063.

Mr. Mankus said he is the largest single tax payer in Wakefield. He said when he hires professional people, as we have here, he tends to do what they tell him to do and he doesn't need to go through all these numbers. If this is what they say they need we should give it to them. He said he is going to vote for everything the School Board wants because they have made study of it. He will vote yes on everything.

Mr. Zappala said he has a comment on the process. Up to this point his questions and comments have been limited to, do you have an estimate for that or is that a wild guess? He has personally grown weary of the mischaracterization of the statements and arguments that the Budget Committee is trying to put an effort into a budget the citizens can accept. Because he doesn't believe it's in the schools best interest to put something forth, that when the whole ship goes down all hands are lost. As a result he does not intend to give a blanket pre-vote approval for every dollar requested because he thinks it is too important, as the Budget Committee has tried to make clear, and had mischaracterized. He said we are trying to help get as much for the School Board that the people can live with. And the suggestion that anyone on the Budget Committee wants to crush the efforts of the School Board, teachers or administration efforts is not fair.

Mr. Reinert said the school department is just one facet of this community. He can guarantee that every single department could stand before us and argue their case for increases in their operating budgets. We have to put forth our opinion, as a committee, to the taxpayers who are going to say, at the polls, a lot of times he believes they go on the Budget Committee's recommendation, the Budget Committee recommends or not. He believes the school will have a hard time come voting day to see a lot of yes votes for all these warrant articles and the operating budget. He thinks it's a difficult situation, everyone wants everything and we want to be able to give the best to the residents, children and taxpayers. But we have to do it in a more fiscally responsible way. He said the 2.1 million is covering every other facet of the town. The school Boards 1.4 is only one department. They all have their importance. He is not going to give a blanket yes either.

Mr. Kasprzyk said he is not here to represent the higher end of this community. He is here to represent every citizen. There are people on fixed incomes having a hard time. He questions someone willing to acquiesce your obligation to the community and not study the matter and just give your vote away when it's already been proven that everything has not been researched thoroughly. Mrs. Colbath said she would take one more comment and then we're going to the warrant articles.

Mrs. Kolb said the default budget is going to raise taxes. She said, our budget has been so underfunded that if we don't add anything, the default budget will bring it up \$605,000 because the previous budget is so poor. What the School Board has asked for is \$277,000 to approve the education and some building repair which amounts to \$25.00 per \$100,000. If you vote down our proposed budget you will still get an increase because the budget prior to this is so poor. She doesn't want anybody to leave thinking that if the budget is voted down that there won't be an increase. The major part of the increase is in the default budget. Voting this budget down will mean you're going to get a \$60.00 per hundred thousand dollar increase. If you vote for the one that actually helps the school your increase will be approximately \$20.00 per \$100,000.

Mr. Miller asked for one more comment. He said if the townspeople were really interested in the details that we're talking about here tonight we'd have two hundred people sitting here. But they're not interested in the detail. They want a good school and they want it to cost them a reasonable amount of money. When they come to vote and they see the school is going up 2.6 million dollars over the last budget, that's all the information they're going to look at.

Mrs. Kolb asked to give one short comment. She said, the State average is \$15,998 and Wakefield is \$14,600 (*spent per student*) She said the gap is growing.

Article #8

Mr. Reinert asked if each individual warrant could say what the tax impact would be. Mrs. Colbath said that would be illegal, Mrs. Colbath read Article #8. Educationally Disabled Children Trust Fund. She said we have gone back and forth with this article, we've zeroed it out and we shouldn't have. We all agree that we shouldn't have. But, to give a little background, for twenty one years we have been changing amounts in Warrant Articles. Nobody from the Town, nobody from the school, nobody ever questioned it. So we were just doing what we've always done. We didn't choose this year to cut money out of warrant articles.

Mr. Knight said that there has been a lot of discussion on this article as it relates to article #6. We heard from the Special Ed Director and she said she needs \$100,000 and we currently have \$1,005,965 in the Trust Fund so his intent would be to use either article #6 or article #8 and we voted in favor of article #6 so probably don't need article #8. Mrs. Kolb said we do know that we are going to use it as we have many extra special ed students this year, this is to replenish it for the 1920 budget.

Mrs. Kolb made a motion, seconded by Mr. Mankus, to approve the article. (Vote 3-6) The Budget Committee does not recommend the article.

Article #16

2.5% year end retention. Mrs. Colbath said we voted on this article on December 26th, (2-8) not to recommend. Mrs. D'Agostino said the article is here for clarification. Mrs. Colbath read the article,

Mr. Zappala asked, in the event that there is retained money, which he would not expect, are the funds returned? Mrs. D'Agostino said we can keep up to 2.5%. Mr. Zappala asked what does 2.5% equate to. Mrs. D'Agostino said in 2017 it was about \$185,000. She said there is a process to access this money and the money gets returned every year and every year you have to figure out if you'll utilize it or not. It does not automatically go back to offset taxes. Mrs. Colbath said she remembers having had these prior and always said no to them.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller to move the article. (Vote 2-7) The Budget Committee does not recommend this article.

Mrs. D'Agostino said the articles have to be posted on Monday and asked that the Budget Committee sign the MS27 at the SAU office either Friday afternoon or Monday morning.

Mrs. Colbath recessed the Budget Committee meeting at 7:10

Mrs. Colbath opened the Public Hearing at 7:15.

Mrs. Colbath asked if anyone had any questions on any of the articles. Mrs. Joy asked if this money in Article #6 is for the current year. Mr. Knight explained that all of it may not be raised, it would be up to \$200,000. Mrs. Colbath said the Board was asking for this money to be set aside so if they need it they can use it. Mrs. D'Agostino said this is one way to address a deficit

so we don't have to have a special meeting. They would have to document the need for the money and let the Budget Committee know what it's needed for.

Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller, to close the Public Hearing at 7:18. (Vote 9-0)

Mrs. Colbath re-opened the Budget Committee meeting at 7:18.

Mr. Mankus made a motion, seconded by Mr. Shine to approve the Budget Committee and Public Hearing minutes of January 15th. (Vote 7-0-2)

At 7:19 Mr. Knight made a motion, seconded by Mr. Miller to adjourn the meeting. (Vote 9-0)

Respectfully submitted for approval at the next Budget Committee meeting

Priscilla Colbath

Secretary Pro Temp