

HOOKSETT SCHOOL BOARD MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, March 5, 2024 6:00 pm.
David R. Cawley Middle School Media Center

Approved

CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE

Wayne Goertel, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Those in attendance were Board members Jillian Godbout, Jason Hyde, Amy Tremblay, Vanessa Gelinias, Lynn Baker and Jim Sullivan; and Superintendent of Schools, William (Bill) Rearick.

The Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Business Administrator, Wayne Goertel led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PROOF OF POSTING

Bill Rearick provided proof of posting.

Wayne Goertel provided an overview of the reason for tonight's meeting, saying that because of the significant cut in the amount of \$750,000 to the proposed operating budget at the Deliberative Session, the Board must now work on finding ways to make those cuts. He said no decisions would be made at tonight's meeting and it is an opportunity for the public to ask questions. Mr. Goertel reviewed a slide presentation showing contractual obligations and increases to those obligations over a period of ten years. He then cited guidelines on public input, and said they will hold people to speak for no longer than three minutes each. There will be two opportunities for public input during this meeting.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Anita Field-Post Road

Cuts to the operating budget will severely impact students and staff in all three schools and cuts to support staff will create a ripple effect. Increases in class size will create limitations on lessons and learning. In addition it will affect those who need to be challenged.

Wayne Goertel explained that the proposed budget is larger than the default budget, and that the default budget is higher than the proposed budget after \$750,000 in cuts.

Mike Dullen-Prescott Heights

Read from a prepared statement and said Hooksett ranked 129th in the state for tax impact, 155 in the state for cost per pupil and was at 3.65% compound growth since 2012, a slower growth rate than other school districts. Mr. Dullen said to say that the Hooksett School District is irresponsible is foolish and encouraged the public to look at the data. He cited education.nh.gov as the basis for his facts.

Jonah Schulte-Autumn Run

Find a better way to make cuts other than reducing those who help the students learn. Keep technology tools which allow access to educational tools for learning on student's own time.

Jim Sullivan said the Board continues to look at ways to make the necessary cuts and will have to make the final decisions. He encouraged members of the public to provide ideas.

Amy Tremblay stated that now is the time for the public to speak. The information the Board has is on the website.

Wayne Goertel explained that the Board asked administration for suggested cuts and now is the time to listen to public input.

Darren Greenberg-Morrill Road

Read from a prepared statement from the PTA regarding their profound frustration with arbitrary budget cuts and strongly urged citizens to vote no on warrant article #2.

Todd Lizotte-Post Road

Would like to see the utilization of a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). There has not been a lot of participation with regards to a CIP. Items in the proposed warrant article regarding improvements was presented as one figure, not spread over a number of years. He asked the Board to reengage in capital improvement planning. In addition, the CIP was presented as a bond, but was on the warrant article as a lease. He asked if the Board does any preplanning of a default budget.

Maryanne Soucy-Mountain View Road

Neither the School Board nor Budget Committee wanted this budget reduction. She trusts the experts who look week after week at budgets and it's crazy to make such a cut. The recent tax increase has nothing to do with schools or classroom teachers. Vote no on the new operating budget.

Jamie Dina-Lindsay Road

Cutting teachers and staff is not the answer. Agrees with not funding Camp MiTeNa. Suggests a 5-year plan for maintenance.

Kate Griffin-Goffstown Road

Grateful for ALPS program and hopes it isn't cut.

OLD BUSINESS

2024/2025 Budget Reductions

Bill Rearick said that the budget put forward at the Deliberative Session had previously been brought to multiple budget meetings and were approved by the budget committee. He said these cuts must be made now because of voter's actions at the Deliberative Session, not because the Board or administration want them. The amount cut will be determined by the final March vote. If warrant article #2 passes, \$750,000 must be cut. If warrant article #2 does not pass, the default budget would be in effect. The default is less than the original proposed budget but higher than the budget if cut by \$750,000. The first set of documents online with proposed cuts were if the warrant article did not pass and it went to default. The second set of documents online with proposed cuts were if the warrant article passed, causing the need to cut even more. He said the Board will have to find a way to get to the cut amount. He said there are a few possible cuts they can consider further, such as less buses, more group bus stops, cutting field trips, and that if the Board approves, allowing administrators a health insurance buy-out. Every cut they are looking at will impact students; everything will look different. Bill said he is very conscious of how the reductions will make the staff and administrator's job more difficult. He said there is a lot of misinformation out there and stressed that cuts to the budget were because of action by voters at the Deliberative Session.

Jim Sullivan liked the buy-out suggestion.

Jason Hyde said busing to high school is not required by law. He also said this type of thing has happened before and nothing will change with a default budget; it is not the time to panic. Jason said that every year there is a hefty fund balance of unanticipated revenue and that things can be pre-bought with those funds.

Amy Tremblay thanked those who showed up at tonight's meeting. She wanted everyone to understand that what happened at the Deliberative Session was solely the purview of those who wanted to cut the budget.

Those at the Deliberative session made this happen. There is only so much that can be cut and that the Board will do everything they can to avoid cutting staff. Nothing in the budget was unimportant. She added that a CIP process was followed and was zeroed out at the Deliberative Session as well.

Jillian Godbout said the cuts presented may or may not happen as the Board continues to brainstorm ways to make the necessary cuts. She said everything is level-funded and that the Board took things out in order to put things in. The CIP for facilities has been brought to consultants, and the Board would have like to have stretched it out over multiple years, but some things shouldn't be put off for another five to seven years. The Board budgets are very tight and has tapped into all the Trust Funds. She said you can't budget for unanticipated revenues. Jillian encouraged the public to continue to email the Board with questions.

Vanessa Gelin said she is not in favor of cutting teachers or any services to students or learning. She disagreed with Mr. Hyde's statement of nothing adverse will happen and she understands the panic. Any cut will be detrimental. A \$750,000 cut will hurt a lot, and the Board will do collectively what they can.

Jim Sullivan said that this is the first time in his many years on the Board that the Superintendent lived in Hooksett. Jim said theirs is a student-driven budget and there have been increases to required items such as special education costs, high school contract, transportation and health insurance. He said surpluses are not unique to Hooksett and is common on the town side. In the past, the default budget passed and there will be an impact if the same happens this year. He encouraged the voters vote for default budget (voting no on the warrant article would result in the default budget). He encouraged the public to ask questions to the Board at hsb@sau15.net and not get their information from social media.

Bill Rearick clarified Mr. Sullivan's statement and said that you don't vote for a default budget. Warrant article #2 must not pass, in order to get the default budget. Bill said they are trying not to impact teaching positions, but to make up \$750,000 it will be positions. Bill also said that Hooksett's fund balance was less than 1% last year. Municipalities with a fund balance of 3-5% are considered good.

Wayne Goertel said the Board has been very attentive to finances in the five years that Mr. Rearick has been Superintendent. Budget materials are presented differently than in the past and much easier to understand. He said in ten years, non-discretionary items such as the number of special education students, contracted services, out of district placements has seen a \$6,000,000 increase. It's the law and must be funded. 75% of

the budget is staff and Hooksett is a high-performing district. Mr. Goertel said the Board decided not to fill retiree positions at Memorial a couple years ago in order to create a full-time kindergarten program. Appreciates Mr. Dullen's reports of school ranking.

NEW BUSINESS

Donations

Bill Rearick stated the SAU office received three anonymous donations to help eliminate student food service debt. One of the checks is over \$5,000 and must be accepted in a public hearing (4/19/24).

The Board thanked the individuals.

Motion by Jillian Godbout, seconded by Amy Tremblay, to approve two donations, in the amount of \$4,522 and \$1,500 to reduce food service debt. A roll call vote was taken. With all in favor, the motion carried.

Board Member – End of Term

Wayne Goertel presented Jason Hyde with a gift for his years of service on the Board. Mr. Hyde is not seeking reelection as School Board Member.

Mr. Hyde said he would like the Board to vote to allow administrator's buy-outs for health insurance, but the consensus of the Board was to not vote on budgetary items at this meeting.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Valerie Welch-Sunburst Lane

Don't eliminate software programs. Raise funds for anything that is not related to education. Keep administrators, teachers and staff. Ms. Welch spoke to the food service donations which were thought to be anonymous. She said some were donated by members of the community and compiled and led by Chet Dupont and a previously anonymous donation of \$20,000 was gifted by Steve Green of Green's Marine.

Adam Gravina-Andrea Ave.

Cuts are awful. The Board should consider the censure of the Board members for their actions at the Deliberative Session.

Chris Gonya-Sophie Circle

Lessons should be learned from Croydon, NH which highlights the importance of community involvement. It is up to the community to make sure this is a one-year thing; make sure it doesn't happen again.

Sarah Mackey-Joanne Drive

Not thrilled about the cuts. You can't pay to play, but you can ask for help. After school activities can be cut for more essential direct support. What impact fees are being collected and how are they being used. Updates from the principals should highlight facility needs in addition to all the good that is being done.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Jason Hyde, seconded by Jillian Godbout, to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m., and the motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca McCarthy
School Board Recorder

The Hooksett School Board will meet on Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the David R. Cawley Middle School Media Center.