

Selectmen's minutes of Work Session held with the Finance Committee on February 1, 2021

Members present: Brian O'Rourke, George Riley, Mark Newman, Joanne Grybosh, Finance Comm. Chair Roger Brown, Dolores Harasyko, Admin. Asst.

Called to order at 6:15 p.m.

Remote participation information provided for the public.

Brian opened the meeting reminding all that this was a work session open to the public but with no comments taken.

Roger has looked at the first preliminary budget for the school. He has not had time to review it thoroughly, he has just received it on Friday. He reviewed that he participated in the January 4 school budget meeting to review the first draft of the school budget. He was the only Sandisfield representative to participate. The document from that meeting was basically the same as the one previously reviewed. Rogers thoughts are that there is some areas of the budget that are squishy and could be adjusted. It's showing no changes from the initial process that has been the model for many years. The expense base is extensive. The expenses have been going up but the student population reduces. It is more and more expensive every year. The average class size is 11 per class. George asked for a definition of model, Roger responded that expense is done without regard to the amount of students attending. The K-6 classes required a teacher in each classroom and straight up para professionals, he finds that surprising. There should be more expense for more students, cost should be lower with lower amounts of students. The same principal as when there was a third less students.

Brian asked that for Wednesday's meeting would Roger be prepared to ask these questions regarding the per pupil expenses. During the school budget meeting the school's administrator responded that there is no response from the school committee regarding the union contract.

Per Roger the Otis school committee members are disruptive. He has found that the school committee does not question the expenses. Roger feels they are not concerned about salary expenses either. Per Roger we have a school committee that is not concerned about the salaries. Brian explained that a decrease for Sandisfield would mean a decrease for Otis also. There is a sense of hostility, we are looking for a reasonable budget.

Roger explained that there has been detailed dialogue between fincom and the school administrator. This year Chapter 70 has increased due to covid issues. There is a suggestion to pull in \$100,000 from ED&D but there is no change to the model. It is a temporary arrangement per Mr. Jesner.

Brian asked about the reserve school choice account. Roger has not found the answer to that, he has many issues that he will follow up on Wednesday.

Brian requested that Roger find out how they can take \$150,000 from the school choice fund. Roger confirmed that he will follow up on this. Roger stated that Wednesday's meeting is to review the budget, not a final vote. The school committee is going into executive session immediately following the open meeting.

George finds it very helpful that Roger has discovered that the expense is not by student population. He feels that since the school was closed for a third of the year due to Covid there should be funds left over. Brian stated per Smitty Pignatelli that the school has plenty of money, that they have Covid funds to cover a lot of costs.

It is the school committee's job to bring back a budget that is acceptable, it is not the job of the selectmen. It doesn't make sense that enrollment drops and expenses continue to go up.

Mark would like to see a breakout for preK through 6th grade. Also how much time does the School Superintendent and Business Manager spend broken out by pre school through middle and high school.

Roger will ask for more information on Wednesday.

Meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

Brian O'Rourke

George Riley

Mark Newman