

**TOWN OF PITTSFIELD
SPECIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT DELIBERATIVE SESSION
AUGUST 17, 2017**

A Special Pittsfield School District deliberative session was held at the Pittsfield Elementary School on Thursday August 17, 2017 in response to the passing of *Article 6: Special meeting of Collective Bargaining Agreement*, on March 16, 2017. School District Moderator Gerard LeDuc called the meeting to order at 7:07PM. He explained his expectations, asking the Body to treat each other with courtesy and to allow first time speakers the opportunity to be heard before coming to the microphone a second time. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe led the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

Moderator LeDuc read the introduction to the posted 2017 Special School District Warrant:

To the inhabitants of the School District of the **Town of Pittsfield** qualified to vote in district affairs. You are hereby notified of a **SPECIAL MEETING**.

First Session of Special Meeting (deliberative).

In accordance with SB2 (RSA 40:13), you are hereby notified to meet at the **Pittsfield Elementary School** in said District. The first session for the transaction of all business other than voting by official ballot shall be held on Thursday, **August 17, 2017**, at **7:00 p.m.** The first session shall consist of explanation, discussion, and debate of Warrant Article I. Warrant articles may be amended, subject to the following limitations:

- a) Warrant articles whose wording is prescribed by law shall not be amended.
- b) Warrant articles that are amended shall be placed on the official ballot for final vote on the main motion, as amended.

Second Session of Special Meeting (voting by official ballot).

Voting on Warrant Article I shall be conducted by official ballot and will occur at the **Pittsfield Town Hall Meeting Room** in said District on **Tuesday, September 19, 2017**. The polls shall be open from **7:00 a.m.** and will not close before **7:00 p.m.** Absentee voting will be allowed.

Moderator LeDuc then read the hand out that further explained Article I and the process of the official ballot referenda form of government (SB2) as approved by ballot vote on March 14, 2017.

Moderator LeDuc read Article I:

ARTICLE I

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Pittsfield School District and the Education Association of Pittsfield which calls for the following increase in salaries and benefits at the current staffing level:

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Estimated Increase</u>
2017-2018	\$66,486

and to further raise and appropriate \$66,486 for the current fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits required by the new agreement over those that would be paid at current staffing levels. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (7 yes, 2 no). (Majority vote required.)

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe made a motion to accept Article I as read, seconded by School Board member Ted Mitchell.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Steve Adams called for a point of order. He asked for clarification as to whether or not the Article could be amended. Moderator LeDuc stated there was debate on that question. Mr. Adams also asked for confirmation that Article I was the only Article up for discussion. Moderator LeDuc confirmed it was.

Noreen Rollins asked what the estimated tax impact would be if this article passed. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded the tax impact would be \$0.25. Ms. Rollins then asked what the expected tax impact was for the Articles voted upon in March. School Board Chairman responded that he did not have that figure readily available. Ms. Rollins stated the tax impact from the March meeting was \$2.49, and that the proposed \$0.25 would be in addition to the \$2.49.

Mary Paradise stated that all the information was on the pink hand out sheet. She expressed her support for the Article. She stated this agreement does not give the teachers an increase in their paycheck. This only covers the increase in retirement and healthcare costs. She did not think it was fair to ask our teachers to carry the burden of the State's tax structure. She believed they deserved more than this step. She urged everyone to support this Article.

Louis Houle asked how many positions were cut. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe confirmed eight positions were cut. Mr. Houle stated it must hurt morale in the school that after eight positions were cut, the teachers also learn they may also not get a raise. He supports the increase.

Adam Gauthier stated that during the March meeting it was stated that the healthcare cost increase would be 17%, but he is under the impression that has changed. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe clarified that it was stated it would be up to 17%. They did not know the exact figure in March. The insurance company gives an estimate of the worst case scenario, which was 17%. The increase is actually 11%. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe confirmed the teacher contribution percentage would stay the same as the previous contract. Superintendent John Freeman clarified that this Article only addresses the step increases, it does not address insurance changes.

Dan Schroth stated his support for this contract. He trusts the School Board members' judgement and believes the school is doing an excellent job.

Clayton Wood asked what would happen if this Article did not pass.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe explained the current contract expired on June 30th. The teachers are currently working without a contract. They will not get any step increases or recognition of their years of service if this Article does not pass. Superintendent John Freeman explained the "Evergreen Clause" (a provision in a contract that automatically renews an existing agreement) no longer exists. The terms of the expired contract hold if this does not pass, but no one would get a step increase.

Paul Nickerson asked if an amendment could be made to pick up the extra insurance cost. Moderator LeDuc responded an amendment could not be made.

Tracy Hyuck asked for confirmation that the average teacher salary in Pittsfield was \$41,000 as stated on the State website. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated he did not have the figures, but if she found the information on the state website, it would be accurate. Ms Hyuck felt the teachers should contribute more toward their insurance costs. She felt that either the teachers are going to be forced out or the citizens are going to be forced out. They need to meet in the middle. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated the goal of negotiations is to find a middle ground. Tracy Hyuck stated she researched the current insurance, and no one has a policy of this caliber.

Merrill Vaughn stated that this is for the betterment of the students. Teachers put in far more time than the set school day. Students are not going to come back after graduation if we don't provide a strong education, and support for the teachers is needed to achieve that.

Louis Houle asked how the difference between the estimated 17% and the current 11% insurance cost increase would affect the budget. He asked if that savings along with any other projected savings would help reduce the tax rate.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated that they do not yet know the figure of the fund balance to be returned, but they plan on one. There is a very good chance the savings could reduce the overall tax rate. The School Board is always looking to save wherever they can. They are changing the way they purchase heating fuel, for example.

Mike Wolfe spoke as a citizen. He stated the School District currently offers the sixth lowest pay in the state overall, and 3rd lowest for starting pay. He agrees he would like to see a better split on the insurance, but last year the District lost 23% of their staff. A big reason for the loss is teachers can drive less than 7 miles away from here and make \$10,000+ more a year. He stated we are hiring teachers, training them, and then losing them. We are paying a huge cost to train teachers to work elsewhere. Teachers are stating in their resignation letters that they wish they could stay, but can't afford to do so. It is a balancing act. He believes strongly that our kids need and deserve a good education.

Kevin Gibson stated he graduated in 2007 and that they lost many teachers while he was a student. Pittsfield was a stepping stone. He has done research since he has been back, and found towns that are successful and have high economic development recognize the importance of a strong school system, and highly qualified teachers are necessary to achieve that goal.

Tracy Huyck asked if a clause could be added to the teacher contract requiring they stay until the town recoups the cost to train them. Superintendent Freeman responded they could not legally require teachers to stay.

Noreen Rollins asked if the School Board would publicize the fund balance figure before the vote in September. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded they would.

Kathleen Beltrami asked for confirmation if this was a one year contract, and voiced her opinion that the current health plan is too extravagant. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe confirmed this would be a one year contract, and negotiations for another contract would start within the next month or so. He reiterated the School Board is shopping for other insurance policy options.

Clayton Wood stated if salaries are the priority, then they need to take money from elsewhere in the school budget. He is amazed at the money spent on the school. The money is not there. He thinks the people in town are saying enough is enough. He is very committed to this town. He feels the School Board needs to start negotiating better and let the townspeople know what they can get back. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe responded the School Board is looking at all options. He stated two studies to tuition our students elsewhere were conducted, and both found there would be no cost savings. The School District is not overspending. The problem is we don't have enough income. He encouraged people to get involved and offer workable solutions. The only way to make a difference is to get involved.

Mary Paradise clarified that the teachers are paying more for their portion of health insurance costs. Their portion is not staying stable. She believed because our teacher salaries are so low, the current insurance plan is our only incentive to get people to come to our district and stay.

Fred Hast asked if the teachers have an insurance buyout. School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe stated the buyout is \$1000.00. Mr. Hast stated the buyout is far more on the town side. He praised the school for keeping a tight budget.

Kevin Gibson encouraged people to get involved with budget process. He believed the school suffers from high teacher turnover, and believed it is very difficult to recover from that loss.

Merrill Vaughn stated the town is lucky to have dedicated teachers. He encouraged people to think about the future of the students and the town.

Jody Cunningham asked if the school board is actively recruiting tuition students from other communities. School Board Chairman Mike stated the Board would like to further study that option, but have had to focus on other issues first.

Louis Houle stated that the School District was part of the Claremont lawsuit and won. The District received some funds, but the legislature has since voted to take that away. It is a loss of \$84,000.00 per year. The problem with our tax rate is in Concord. We need to pay attention to who we vote to represent us at the State level. We need to stop voting for people who do not support us. Our town and our school are suffering.

Gerard LeDuc asked if anyone else wanted to speak.

Steve Adams made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe.

Meeting adjourned at 7:45pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Erica Anthony
School District Clerk