

**TOWN OF PITTSFIELD
SCHOOL DISTRICT DELIBERATIVE SESSION
February 8, 2018**

The Pittsfield School District Deliberative Session was held at the Pittsfield Elementary School on Thursday, February 8, 2018. School District Moderator Gerard LeDuc called the meeting to order at 7:06PM. School Board Chairman Michael Wolfe led the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

Moderator LeDuc asked if everyone had the chance to pick up the “Rules of Procedure” and other information from the back table and asked if there were any questions. 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. He stated that if there were any motions for amendments requesting a secret ballot vote, the request must be submitted in writing and required a minimum of five signatures. Those who signed the petition would be asked to identify themselves to confirm that they are registered voters.

Moderator LeDuc read the introduction to the posted 2018 School District Meeting Warrant:

To the inhabitants of the town of Pittsfield Local School in the County of Merrimack in the state of New Hampshire qualified to vote in school district affairs are hereby notified and warned of the Deliberative Session will be held as follows:

Date: February 8, 2018

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: Pittsfield Elementary School

Moderator LeDuc read Article 01:

ARTICLE 01 To hear reports

To hear the reports of agents, auditors, committees, or officers chosen, and to pass any vote relating therefore. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board Chairman Michael Wolfe to approve Article 01 as read, seconded by School Board member Bea Douglas.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

No discussion.

Moderator LeDuc read Article 02:

ARTICLE 02 School Lunch Program

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$330,000 for the support of the School Lunch Program. This appropriation will be funded by a like amount of revenue from the sale of food and state and federal sources. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$0.) **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (13 yes, 0 no). (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board member Ted Mitchell to approve Article 02 as read, seconded by School Board member Ralph O'Dell.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Louis Houle called for a point of order. He asked why the Body did not vote on Article 01. Moderator LeDuc responded that per RSA 40:13, the Deliberative Session is for discussion purposes and amendments to articles only. Voting on the articles will occur on Election Day in March. The only voting that could occur during this meeting would be to decide whether or not to approve any proposed amendments to an article.

No further discussion.

Moderator LeDuc read Article 03:

ARTICLE 03 Receive and expend grant funds

To see if the Pittsfield School District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$1,100,000 for the support of federal and private foundation grant-funded educational programs of the Pittsfield School District. This appropriation is contingent upon receiving revenue from federal grants and private foundations and will be expended in accordance with federal and state requirements upon approval by the New Hampshire Department of Education or private foundation requirements. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$0.) **Recommended** by the Pittsfield School Board. **Recommended** by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (13 yes, 0 no). (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board member Linda Freese to approve Article 03 as read, seconded by School Board member Bea Douglas.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Clayton Wood called for a point of order. He stated he had been to several deliberative sessions in other towns, and he believed all ballot questions needed to be voted upon to move them to the ballot. School District Attorney Barbara Loughman responded that under Senate Bill 2 the law does not require any vote unless the Body wants to amend a warrant article. She stated that some moderators have the legislative body vote at the end of every article because that is what they are accustomed to, but many moderators do not. It is at the discretion of the moderator. She

confirmed the procedure that Moderator LeDuc was following was correct, and there was no need to vote.

No further discussion.

Moderator LeDuc read Article 04:

ARTICLE 04 Operating Budget

Shall the Pittsfield School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$10,530,724? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$10,202,520, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Pittsfield School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. (Estimated tax impact of this article: (\$1.15/thousand.) Recommended by the Pittsfield School Board. Recommended by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (9 yes, 4 no). (Majority vote required.)

Motion made by School Board member Ralph O'Dell to approve Article 04 as read, seconded by School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Budget Committee Chairman Robert Schiferle gave a brief description of the budget process and stated the Committee was comprised of diverse opinions representing the diverse opinions of the community they represent. He stated there was a lot of research and discussions held with the School District administration. It was the Committee's responsibility to balance the needs of the school and the budget against the needs of the taxpayer and an increase in the tax rate. He stated it was the general consensus that it was a fair budget as presented and that it was difficult to find where to cut. He explained some of the recommended cuts made by the majority of the Committee included administration costs of just under \$50,000, and there was another close vote to cut the guidance budget by approximately \$50,000. Other discussion included cutting media expenses by \$26,000, and a reduction of the technology budget, including iPads, by \$50,000. The Community Liaison position was cut by \$22,000. There was discussion to reduce the SAU administration services budget, and building maintenance was reduced by \$20,000. The Committee could not agree on where further cuts could be made. He stated that there were some close votes and that there would be some Budget Committee members who would speak on both sides of the discussion. He reiterated that the general consensus was that this was a fair and reasonable budget.

Budget Committee member Adam Gauthier disagreed. He did not believe the presented budget was fair. He stated that the cuts made represented less than 1% of the budget originally presented. He made a motion to amend the article as follows: "Shall the Pittsfield School District vote to amend Article IV of the 2018 Pittsfield School District Warrant, not including

appropriations voted in other warrant articles, from \$10,530,724.00 to a level operating fund of \$10,105,763.00, reflecting a decrease to the proposed budget of \$424,961.00. (Majority vote required) (Secret vote requested in accordance with NH RSA 40:4a). The motion was seconded by Linda Small. The petition was signed by Adam Gauthier, Clayton Wood, Rachel Wood, Sharon Genest, Keith Donovan, Jody Cunningham, Jill Gauthier, Tara Ash, Katie Bachelder, Helen Schiff, Linda Small, Paul Richardson, Daren Nielsen and Belinda Nielsen. All were verified as registered voters.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion on the proposed amendment.

Budget Committee member Helen Schoppmeyer stated this amendment would decimate the school and would harm the students. She stated the School Board presented a very lean budget. She urged the voters to support the originally proposed budget.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe agreed with Helen Shoppmeyer, and stated the proposed cuts would destroy the school. The only cuts left include the sports programs, the Concord Technical program, preschool, and cutting kindergarten to half a day. Any further cuts would put the School District at risk of losing accreditation. The School Board is required to notify the accrediting agency of any major changes to the School District's status, and this would qualify as a significant change.

Leonard Smith asked if these cuts were for items already in the budget or for new proposed items. School Board Chairman Wolfe explained the cuts would be to existing programs.

Dawn Calley-Murdough asked about the cost of positions that were previously funded by a grant. School Board Chairman Wolfe responded that the amount funded by the grant was approximately \$196,000.00. Mr. Wolfe confirmed these positions, which included the Extended Learning Coordinator, existed prior to receiving the grant, but were able to be grant funded instead of paid through general taxation as had been the case previously.

Lee Corson asked how much was spent last year. Chairman Wolfe responded the amount approved last year was \$10,105,763.00, but \$9,765,533.00 was spent for the 2016 – 2017 school year. Mr. Corson asked what budget figure the School Board proposed for this year. Chairman Wolfe responded it is \$10,530,724.00. Mr. Corson asked the reason for such a difference in the two figures. Chairman Wolfe explained the difference included an increase of more than \$200,000.00 in special education costs, the loss of the State stabilization grant which totals \$86,000.00 each year and transportation costs have increased, particularly for special education. Chairman Wolfe shared that a more detailed explanation could be found on the tan hand out.

Linda Small asked where the \$196,000.00 for the grant funded positions was found for this year. She stated these positions were not funded by the Nellie Mae grant this year. Chairman Wolfe explained the positions were still currently paid for by the Nellie Mae grant. He stated his belief that the positions to which she was referring was an additional kindergarten teacher due to an unexpected increase in enrollment and the SAP position, which had previously been cut, but the School Board had received strong opinion from the public, and reinstated the SAP position in response to the public's wishes. Linda Small responded that she may have been mistaken on

which two positions were affected, but that the Board still found money that was not in the budget to fund the positions. She asked where they found the additional funds. Chairman Wolfe responded that the funds come from fund balance, if the District is fortunate to have a fund balance, or it is taken away from another department.

Amber Rickey thanked the School Board for all they do. She recognized what a difficult position they have.

Adam Gauthier stated the school returned \$78,000 to the town from surplus. He stated his recommendation would include not reinstating positions that were cut last year, eliminating the pay increase for non-union staff and funds proposed to study the use of Chromebooks or iPads. He also believed there could be a cost savings in the special education budget.

Rick Anthony stated he is a teacher in the School District. School costs increase, just like home budgets. If money is taken out of one budget line item to pay for another, it doesn't mean the original cost disappears. If we put off buying science books, for example to pay for something else, we are still going to have to buy new books at some point. The School Board does move money when necessary, but that means there is a spending freeze in which he or other teachers potentially lose money from their budget to fund another budget. In his case, for example, his equipment continues to get older and eventually not safe to use so money needs to be moved to fund those items. We are moving money from the right pocket to left pocket. Eventually we are going to have to replenish the right pocket. He stated the School District was extremely fortunate to receive the Nellie Mae grant, and it has had a dramatic effect on the school and the students. He stated the positions funded by the grant are not new, and that they are positions that the students use and need. He encouraged people to look at the hand out that shows the recent school district budget history. It shows that we haven't come close to keeping up with inflation over the years. Special education costs are mandated and not a place to cut. For example, one family could move into our district with several children with special needs that could easily absorb our entire special education budget. If there is not enough money in the special education budget the funds must come from the rest of the operating budget which would have a negative impact on the entire student population.

Melissa Babcock asked for confirmation that the some of the positions in question existed and were funded through the operating budget prior to the grant award, but we were able to use the grant funds to help pay for them, knowing we would need to fund them again after the grant expired. Chairman Wolfe confirmed that was correct, the positions did exist and were funded by the operating budget prior to receipt of the grant funds.

Dawn Calley-Murdough stated she had asked some questions regarding technology during the budget hearing. She asked if the School Board had thought about shopping around for better deals. School Board member Bea Douglas stated the Board took her concerns to heart and are making a more intensive effort to search for the best deals and that the technology budget is going through further review. Dawn Calley-Murdough asked if it was an ongoing policy to look for ways to get the most for our money. School Board member Douglas confirmed that was the Board's policy. Dawn Calley-Murdough asked if this policy extended to personnel. Ms. Douglas stated they are always reviewing how personnel are used within the District.

Dan Schroth stated he respected the school professionals and their honesty. He did not support Adam Gauthier's amendment. He felt these cuts would decimate the schools. He believed not taking the advice of the professionals and the School Board would undermine our school long term.

Louis Houle called for a point of order. He asked if the Body could amend the amendment. Moderator LeDuc stated they could not, that the amendment must be voted upon first. It could, however be reconsidered.

Moderator LeDuc re-read the amendment to Article 4 and explained that the Body was now voting by secret ballot on the amendment to Article 4. A "yes" vote was to approve the amendment, and a "no" vote would result in a return to the Article as originally presented.

Moderator LeDuc opened the polls at 7:50pm. Polls closed 8:10pm.

Yes - 54 No - 65 amendment failed.

A motion to restrict reconsideration of Article 4 was made by School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe and seconded by School Board member Bea Douglas.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion on the motion to restrict reconsideration.

There was question to the meaning of restricting reconsideration. Moderator LeDuc explained the defeat of the amendment meant the voters were now considering Article 4 as originally presented, and that if the Body voted in favor of restricting reconsideration of the Article, there would be no further discussion of the Article until the next session, which would be Election Day.

There being no further discussion, Moderator LeDuc called for a card vote.

Moderator LeDuc determined the vote was too close to call visually and asked the Supervisors of the Checklist to count the cards.

Vote to restrict reconsideration – Yes - 64 No - 49, motion passed.

Moderator LeDuc read Article 05:

Article 05: 1 year Collective Bargaining Agreement

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

Fiscal Year 2018-2019

Estimated Increase \$99,885

and further to raise and appropriate \$99,885 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. (Estimated tax impact of this article: \$.38/thousand) Recommended by the Pittsfield School Board. Recommended by the Pittsfield Budget Committee (8 yes 5 no). (Majority vote required)

Motion made by School Board member Bea Douglas to accept Article 05 as read. School Board member Linda Freese seconded the motion.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Adam Gauthier asked what changes were included in the proposed Agreement. School Board member Bea Douglas stated it included a 1.5% teacher salary increase and the teachers have agreed to pay more in health insurance and have moved to a different, lesser insurance.

Fred Hast asked how much more the teachers would pay for their insurance. School Board member Bea Douglas answered they would be paying 3% more. The teachers currently pay 9% and would now pay 12% if the Agreement is approved.

Dan Schroth stated many people have seen raises, including himself. He believed the teachers also deserve a raise.

Adam Gauthier asked if there would be a 3 year contract next year. School Board member Bea Douglas responded both the School Board and the teachers union hoped to negotiate a 3 year contract next year. They negotiated a one year contract hoping it would pass.

Tracy Huyck asked for the details of the new insurance policy. School Board member Bea Douglas stated they are still researching options from two different insurance companies. It will be a HMO plan instead of the BlueChoice plan they have now. The School Board has scheduled presentations from both HealthTrust and SchoolCare. Tracy Huyck asked if the teachers would be receiving a lower policy with higher co-pays and higher contribution to prescriptions, and asked if the overall cost of the policy would be less. School Board member Douglas confirmed that was correct. School Board member Douglas stated the goal was that teachers would not take home less money than they were now.

Dan Schroth stated this just shows the teachers need a raise just to stay even.

No further discussion.

Moderator LeDuc read Article 06:

ARTICLE 06 Transact Other Business

To transact any other business which may legally come before this meeting.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe made a motion to accept Article 06 as read. School Board member Ted Mitchell seconded the motion.

Moderator LeDuc opened the floor for discussion.

Louie Houle thanked Linda Freese for serving on the School Board.

School Board Chairman Mike Wolfe made a motion to adjourn the meeting. School Board member Bea Douglas seconded the motion.

Moderator LeDuc adjourned the meeting at 8:24pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Erica Anthony
School District Clerk